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Dean J. Franco. *Race, Rights, and Recognition: Jewish American Literature Since 1969.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012. xi + 239 pp. $49.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8014-5087-7.

Reviewed by Rachel Rubinstein (Hampshire College)
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Reconsidering Jews and Multiculturalism

Dean Franco, in his second book-length critical examination of Jewish American literature in comparative context, offers original and frequently brilliant readings of a cluster of contemporary works against an ongoing discussion of race, rights, and liberalism in postwar America. This study shifts the by-now familiar discourse of immigration, identity, ethnicity, and the "whitening" of the Jews, to focus on the political, social, and ethical dimensions of a Jewish commitment to pluralism, multiculturalism, civil and human rights. By recalibrating the terms with which we consider the contributions of such familiar Jewish authors as Saul Bellow, Philip Roth, Cynthia Ozick, and Allegra Goodman, Franco re-energizes their critical study as he places them in proximity to less familiar names in this context, such as Lore Segal, Gary Shteyngart, Tony Kushner, and Harriet Rochlin. As Franco demonstrates to his readers, Enlightenment liberal discourse concerning human rights and freedoms, particularly vis-à-vis Jews, offers an important context for thinking about rights discourse in a postwar U.S. moment where Jews were negotiating their newfound "white" social and political identities. But from the 1960s on, the operating paradox for these Jewish writers is how a liberal commitment to individual rights rubs up against multiculturalism, which (in its noncommodified, nondomesticated mode) is a radical call for group-based recognition.

As Jewish writers caught between identifications with liberalism and radical multiculturalism test the premises of both, they ultimately come down, Franco writes, "between sympathy for an ethical basis for human recognition and criticism of recognition's expedient circuit into normative politics–the politics of naming groups, claiming rights, and shaming the perceived antagonists of social equality" (p. 4). Franco divides his study into two parts: "Pluralism, Race and Religion," which includes chapters on Philip Roth, Cynthia Ozick, and Allegra Goodman, and "Recognition, Rights, and Responsibility," which consists of chapters on Lore Segal, Tony Kushner, and Gary Shteyngart. In Franco's own words, two other major themes animate the book: literary accounts of diversity and multiculturalism and theorizations of civil and human rights. Along the way, he presses on such terms as rights, recognition, pluralism, and proximity, finally landing on this last term as a model for intergroup relations, as proximity both depends on and exposes group affiliations and individual allegiances.

Franco's discussions of Philip Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint* (1969) and Lore Segal's *Her First American* (1985) demonstrate these convergences most compellingly, as Franco contextualizes both in vigorous contemporary debates concerning race, domestic civil rights, and global human rights. Franco's fresh rereading of *Portnoy's Complaint* is a highlight of the book, as Franco resists the critical consensus (that is, the novel as a sexual satire about Jewish masculine anxieties vis-à-vis the overbearing Jewish mother and the *shiksa*) and offers an original and convincing reassessment of the novel as primarily engaging with a postwar discourse of race and rights, reading the novel up against its contemporary, Eldridge Cleaver's confessional autobiography *Soul On Ice* (1968), a chronicle of "sex, shame and race," in which Cleaver likewise collapses sexual and racial violence.

As in the Roth chapter, Franco's highly productive approach is to unpack his central texts by way of juxtaposing them, or placing them in proximity to, other contemporaneous cultural texts, in order to reveal submerged commentaries not simply about other ethnicities or groups but about the possibilities and pitfalls of multiculturalism itself. Franco's discussion of Allegra Goodman's *Kaaterskill Falls* (1998) is a welcome consideration of an underdiscussed novel, and here Franco similarly juxtaposes this story of a Hasidic community in upstate

New York with Frederic Church's house Olana, now a museum, which in Goodman's novel operates as a figure for the pluralism that both allows this Hasidic community its religious autonomy but also threatens it from within. Where Roth, Segal, Kushner, and Shteyngart test the limits of liberalism and pluralism through encounters with radical otherness, Ozick, Goodman, and Rochlin, in Franco's readings, do the same by turning inward, suggesting the multiculturalist possibilities extended by a diverse, dynamic, but nevertheless coherent Jewish culture in America.

Franco is at his most compelling and authoritative discussing the 1960s and 70s and the emergence of a modern American politics of multiculturalism. With his examination of Tony Kushner's *Homebody/Kabul* (2001) Franco deploys such philosophers as Jacques Levinas, Judith Butler, and Kenneth Reinhard, who for Franco speak to the individual and national moral responsibilities of Jews on the global stage. However, it is here, as Franco looks toward Iraq and Afghanistan, that his arguments falter somewhat, and his desire to read *Homebody/Kabul* as a redemptive fable of responsibility for the other is less convincing. This is partly because Franco relies overmuch on a theoretical lexicon he has borrowed from these philosophers instead of his own sharp historical analyses, but also because the play's more troubling, sinister aspects remain unexamined. Franco is on firmer footing with Gary Shteyngart's *Absurdistan* (2006) and its invocation of Malcolm X, revisiting the terms of Roth's novel as Franco describes Shteyngart as the "latest, best Jewish American writer to link sex and race in a critique of rights and opportunism" (p. 192)–but in the later novel played out on an internationalized, post-September 11 stage.

Franco ends his book with an account of Harriet Rochlin–a wonderful discovery here–and her hometown of Boyle Heights, a diverse Los Angeles neighborhood that in the 1940s and 50s exemplified a commitment to left-leaning social causes, labor, and multicultural, multiracial cooperation. Franco laments the impossibility of such a community in our present moment, but wonders if "academia itself" (p. 205) could take Boyle Heights' place. Franco concludes by affirming his commitment to a globalized approach to ethnic studies that moves beyond celebrations of identity and takes on "the core questions of "recognition, citizenship, and human rights" (p. 207). While Franco generally resists treating his key terms as self-evident, here I might suggest that the overuse of "globalization" as a mobilizing idea in literary studies could use some more of Franco's characteristic critical parsing. Nevertheless, I can only applaud Franco as he ends this important study by enjoining critics of Jewish American literature to seek out interethnic community, and in turn earn recognition for Jewish American literature's dynamic interventions into the politics of race and racial formation.

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