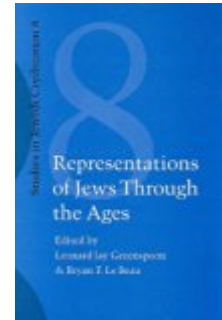


**Leonard Jay Greenspoon, Bryan F. Le Beau, eds..** *Representations of Jews Through the Ages*. Omaha, Nebraska: Creighton University Press, 1996. xxi + 243 pp. \$25.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-881871-22-4.



**Reviewed by** Martin E. Vann

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Leonard Jay Greenspoon and Bryan F. Le Beau have performed a great service not only to scholars of Judaica, but also to readers with an interest in the study of representations in general. The book is a collection of fifteen papers delivered at a symposium in Jewish civilization at Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska in 1995.

The editors' introduction attempts to provide a framework for the book, explaining that the study of Jewish identity as an academic discipline often includes varying viewpoints. These depend on whether the researchers come from inside or outside the particular identity. Correctly, the editors point out that objectivity is not the exclusive preserve of those within the identity-construct, and therefore reliance on insider, outsider, and a combination of the two perspectives, contributes to a balanced view. However, the papers presented do not so easily fall into such neat categories as these. Also problematic is that the editors purport to gather the three types of essays in a certain order, but the actual contributions from the "outsiders" appear last in the book, rather than second, as described in the introduction.

The book comes into its own in an essay by S. Lillian Kremer about Jewish representations in twentieth-century American literature. This topic, in which Christian writers have created Jewish characters based on anti-Semitic paradigms inherited from British literature, has proved a fecund source for other authors. Some of the best of these include Andrea Freud Loewenstein's *Loathsome Jews and Engulfing Women*, Harold Firsch's *The Dual Image*, and *Shakespeare and the Jews* by James Shapiro. It is disturbing to read Kremer's essay, as it details the image of Jews as usurers, social pariahs, and evil incarnate, themes which run through much of the great American literature. The editors include another paper on the related subject of the ambivalent depiction of the Wandering Jew in nineteenth-century American literature. This accursed figure in history was derived from a tale which arose around 600 C.E. about a man who derided Jesus carrying his cross to Calvary and thus was cursed by Jesus with everlasting wandering on earth. The recent entries into the ranks of anti-Semitic literati are African-American writers. This subject is covered by Davida Alperin in *Images of Jews in Black-Jewish Dis-*

*course*, which lacks the pointedness of other forays into the field.

The most amusing, though hardly the most lofty, inclusion in the book is an essay entitled *Jews Don't Hitch* which deals with the now defunct TV series *Northern Exposure* and its New York Jewish doctor who finds himself an indentured servant of sorts in a small town in Alaska. In the final footnote, the author mentions that the stereotype of the American Jew as a person who never hitchhikes is incomprehensible to Israeli Jews, to whom the neurotic "Woody Allen" type of New York Jew would seem weak, alien, and repugnant.

Perhaps the essay which most clearly presents the developing image of Jews is the one which describes, decade by decade, the history in this century of the Oberammergau Passion Play. This play reassigns the typical role of "suffering" Jews to the Christians, mainly due to the actions of the "wicked" Jews. Longtime efforts to reform the play's negative representation of Jews, which go beyond the excesses of the Gospels, were half-hearted even after the Roman Catholic Church underwent a major interpretive shift in its view of Judaism in the 1960s. Not until the 1990 production were the most egregious depictions of Jews as vicious schemers modified or deleted. Probably neither purists nor reformers are satisfied with the results.

The book concludes with two essays having somewhat related issues: the conflict between present day radical Islam and the Jews and the continuing dissemination of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (the bogus text accusing Jews of conspiring to enslave the Christian world through capitalism and communism and to erect a Jewish world state). Reading these two brief tracts leaves one with a feeling of resignation. It appears that not much has changed throughout the centuries, and being a Jew in today's world can be just as perilous in these supposedly enlightened days as it ever was. If nothing else, *Representations* can

serve as a springboard to many various texts that give a much fuller explanation of the subjects which are temptingly examined in the present book.

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