

American Hebrew Literature: Writing Jewish National Identity in US (Judaic Traditions in Literature, Music, and Art)

Michael Weingrad

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Over the last one hundred years, the story of Jews in the United States has been, by and large, one of successful and enthusiastic Americanization. Hundreds of thousands of Jews began the twentieth century as new arrivals to a foreign land yet soon became shapers and definers of American culture itself. One of the clearest expressions of this transformation has been the quick linguistic march of those immigrant Jews and their children from Yiddish to English. In this book, Weingrad presents a counter-history of American Jewish culture, one that tells the story of literature written by a group whose core identity was neither American nor Jewish American. These writers were ardently and nationalistically Jewish and, despite their adopting a new country, their linguistic and cultural allegiance was to the Hebrew language. Producing poetry, short fiction, novels, essays, and journals, writers such as Mordecai Manuel Noah, Shimon Halkin, and Gabriel Preil sought to express a Jewish cultural nationalism through literature. Weingrad explores Hebrew literature in the United States from the emergence of a group of writers connected with the Hebraist movement in the early twentieth century to the present. Radically expanding and challenging our conceptions of American and Jewish identities in literature, the author offers wide-ranging cultural analysis and thoughtful readings of key works. American Hebrew Literature restores a lost piece of the canvas of Hebrew literature in the twentieth century and invites readers to reimagine Jewish-American writers of our own time.

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