

inclusivity (275-78). In her very last sentence she draws on a quotation from Bessie Head: “largeness of heart,” Head wrote, “is what we need for a civilisation and big, big eyes, wide enough to drink in all the knowledge of the heavens and earth” (278). This, certainly, is the challenge, and Head’s words restore what is best in Gagiano’s project — the chapters which focus on the texts themselves. I have suggested that these, too, suffer on occasion from an overly narrow definition of the relationship between writing and politics. Anxious to set up the writers as theorists-in-fiction, she nevertheless sometimes limits where the writing leads or where she as reader might be taken. Notwithstanding the above, this is a detailed, well researched and competent work which deserves to be consulted by all scholars in the field.

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Rachel Rubin. *Jewish Gangsters of Modern Literature*. Chicago: U of Illinois P, 2000. Pp. 189. \$29.95.

Some of the most indelible screen images of what might be called America’s ethnic heroes are portraits of gangsters. The mafiosi of Francis Ford Coppola’s *Godfather* sagas, the Jewish no-goodniks of *Bugsy* and *Miller’s Crossing*, convey the transgressive power of criminality, along with the possibilities presented by a life of crime for assimilating into the American mainstream. This paradox — the gangster as a rebel who longs to fit in — is at the core of Rachel Rubin’s *Jewish Gangsters of Modern Literature*. The book’s title over-reaches, since the authors under discussion are three American novelists of the 1920s and ’30s, along with Isaac Babel, whose life and work Rubin uses as touchstones in essays on Samuel Ornitz, Mike Gold, and Daniel Fuchs.

Rubin argues that Babel’s tales of Odessa, starring the indefatigable gangster Benya Krik, are archetypal texts that help us examine “how the figure of the Jewish gangster has functioned as a metaliterary tool for experimental Jewish writers concerned with finding their artistic place in an era characterized by artistic and social experimentation” (119.) Like many other aspects of this study, the relationship between Babel and the Americans could be clearer: we’re never sure if Babel was a direct influence, or if Rubin simply seeks to find similarities between him and the trio of Ornitz, Gold, and Fuchs. Another problem she must overcome is the rather glaring difference in quality and staying power between Babel’s work and that of the others under discussion. Because the Americans — as Rubin admits — are little read today, readers may find the comparisons drawn in *Jewish Gangsters* difficult to credit. Unfortunately, the excerpted material from Fuchs, Ornitz, and Gold will not likely send readers back to their novels.

The question then, is, who will find this study useful? Rubin's reading of Babel is worthwhile, and it is undoubtedly the strongest part of *Jewish Gangsters*. Specialists in American Jewish writing may want to reconsider the work of Gold, Fuchs, and Ornitz, but Rubin does not succeed in placing them in a broader context, which might have linked this reconsideration to better known criticism and fiction. Missed opportunities abound: Rubin fails to set her authors' work alongside a tradition of American experimental writing; she fails to give a truly enlightening sense of the role of crime in American daily life; she does not examine in depth the fascinating link between Jewish screen gangsters and those on the page; and she does not complete her portrait of the revolutionary imagination that motivated leftist novelists of the 1920s and '30s. In *Jewish Gangsters* Rubin insists too strongly on focusing on the details of the novels of Fuchs, Gold, and Ornitz, which do not generally reward the reader.

More fascinating undeveloped material lurks between the lines of Rubin's study. Samuel Ornitz is remembered today not for his fiction, but for his principled stand as one of the Hollywood Ten before the House Committee on Un-American Activities. With the recent death of Ring Lardner Jr., this generation of leftist culture heroes has passed more or less into the mists of the past, and Rubin might have made more of Ornitz's decision to draw jail time rather than name names in 1950.

The other undeveloped motif in *Jewish Gangsters* — possibly the most glaring one — is the lack of careful consideration of the grotesque figure of Meyer Wolfsheim in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. For Americans, this fictionalized version of the Jewish gangster Arnold Rothstein, who was said to have fixed the 1919 World Series, is a far likelier archetypal figure than Babel's Benya Krik. In the 1920s and '30s, hardly an American knew of Babel, while minions must have worked at their own portraits of gangsters — in film and on the page — with Fitzgerald's haunting lines in the back of their minds:

The idea staggered me. I remembered, of course, that the World's Series had been fixed in 1919, but if I had thought of it at all I would have thought of it as a thing that merely happened, the end of some inevitable chain. It never occurred to me that one man could start to play with the faith of fifty million people — "with the single-mindedness of a burglar blowing a safe" (qtd. in Rubin 7).

NORMAN RAVVIN

Helen Vendler. *Seamus Heaney*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2000. Pp. xvi, 188. \$12.95.

First published in 1998, this systematic exploration of the poetry of Seamus Heaney remains the most readable, informative, and authoritative introduction to the work of this Nobel Laureate. Following a brief chronology of Heaney's life and work up to the publication of *The Spirit*