

Carol Zemel, *Looking Jewish: Visual Culture and Modern Diaspora* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2015)

Carol Zemel's *Looking Jewish: Visual Culture and Modern Diaspora* deals largely in passing with the costume(s) of Jews in the context of the majority cultures of which they were and are a part. For instance, she describes "little boys in caps" in the much-copied 1924 photograph of Alter Kacyzne, *Giving a Hint*, Lublin [Poland] Kheder [religious school for younger boys]. The diversity of the condition and styles of caps in this relatively homogenous group, however, could be grist for further analysis.

(19) Zemel is interested primarily in images that capture a moment or idea of "transformation" embodying an 'awareness of cultural challenge' (6) and especially the "ambivalence" of such encounters (17), often expressed as "a confrontation of tradition and modernity." (20) This theme, unsurprisingly, often coincides with images in which costume is complex and significant.

Zemel generally assumes that her audience is equipped with a sophisticated and comparative understanding of historical Jewish dress. Among the few instances in which clothing and styles are foregrounded, the discussion is fascinating and points to larger issues. In Moshe Verobeichic's 1931 photo, *The Day is Short*, from *The Ghetto Lane in Vilna*, one finds "A white-bearded old man" walking, with his two canes in the air and his bag over his shoulder holding a bag for his tallis (prayer shawl), wearing a "fur hat and flapping overcoat." (20-21) Both the hat and collar of the coat seem to be fur, which is an increasingly popular topic in Jewish cultural studies, such as in the work of Kerry Wallach. Concerning the only (known) extant oil painting of Bruno Schultz, *Encounter: A Young Jew and Two Women in an Alley*, 1920 (Warsaw, Muzeum Litereatury), Zemel writes (in a footnote): "The young man's hat and caftan also resembles of the garb of Catholic clergy. The similarity may remind us that

ironically, in Poland at least, the orthodox Hasid and Catholic priest seemed not so different on sight." (167)

A prime purpose this book may serve, therefore, is for students and curators of costume in search of research and exhibition subjects—for which *Looking Jewish* is a treasure-trove. One could employ television and film to elaborate on her discussion of "gender stereotypes as markers of modern Jewish identity" (chapter 4). One of Zemel's chief subjects, photographer-turned-painter Vorobeichic, "a Bauhaus-trained photographer," employed "different stylistic formats—documentary images and avant-garde montage" to "represent the concerns of East European Jews in the first decades of the twentieth century: how to extend and consolidate the shift in Jewish society away from small-town or shtetl culture with its provincialism and its orthodoxies through the secular concerns of modernity." (14) Nearly all of his images containing people reveal clothing that can be culturally unpacked. Zemel's fine book should be read and appreciated appreciated by those concerned with Jews, the wider issue of diaspora and minority cultures, and costume.

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