Matthew H. Brittingham

Book Review
Joshua Louis Moss, Why Harry Met Sally: Subversive Jewishness, Anglo-Christian Power, and the Rhetoric of Modern Love

Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017, 360 pages,
ISBN 978-1-4773-1283-4

Joshua Louis Moss's new book *Why Harry Met Sally* analyzes representations of romantic couplings between Jews and non-Jews in popular culture. In terms of scope, Moss is less interested in how Jews have depicted Anglo-Christian-Jewish coupling on their own terms, as in Yiddish or Hebrew literature. Rather, examining broader trends in European and American popular culture, Moss shows how Jewish/non-Jewish couplings offer "a visceral, easily graspable template for understanding the rapid transformations of an increasingly globalized, modern world" (4). That is to say, in European and American popular culture, Jewish/non-Jewish couples were commonly marshaled to play out the paradoxes and struggles of the modern mass media age.

Moss situates his discussion around three periods, or waves, of Anglo-Christian-Jewish couplings – 1905–1934, 1967–1980 and 1993–2007 – all of which push back against conservative cultural and political trends. His central methodological contribution is "coupling theory", whereby a couple should be read "as a single, entangled construction oscillating between holistic and fragmentary perspectives" (7). Further, he basically establishes the reasons for his "waves" in his coupling theory: "The coupling binary was flexible and adaptable. The couplings emerged at key historical moments to navigate the legacy of the Victorian era and champion the pluralism of an increasingly visible, libertine, modern world" (10). Jewish/non-Jewish coupling allows for subversive and taboo discussions to be negotiated, though not necessarily resolved, in various historical moments.

Interestingly, in Part One, "The First Wave: The Mouse-Mountains of Modernity (1905–1934)", Moss begins his analysis with the baptized Jewish politician and romance novelist Benjamin Disraeli, who married Mary Anne Lewis (non-Jewish and British elite). According to Moss, Disraeli's marriage to Lewis

DOI: 10.25364/05.4:2019.1.8

and performance of "Anglo-Christian-Jewish entanglement" spoke to the conditions and tensions of the modern age and provided Disraeli with access to political power (33). Moss then examines Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish captain in the French army famously convicted of treason in 1894 on false charges. French newspapers and the French cinema used Dreyfus's Jewish wife, Lucie, as the face of the Dreyfus Affair, and images of her proliferated. Though both Dreyfus and his wife were Jewish, the mass media, French intellectuals, and Lucie herself drew heavily on Christian imagery of martyrdom and crucifixion to publically frame the Affair. This was a kind of baptizing, as Moss calls it, of Alfred and Lucie in response to antisemitic, Christianized rhetoric. Still, akin to Alfred's public image, Lucie's Jewishness *as threat* came back into the conversation, exemplifying the failure of this mass media baptism: "she found herself tarred by the same suspicions of dual loyalty that stuck to her husband" (39). According to Moss, the Dreyfus Affair raises a key question in relation to coupling, à la Disraeli, one that has no clear answer in light of different European contexts: would the Affair and its mediation have been different if Alfred married a Christian? While there is no simple answer, Moss uses Dreyfus and Disraeli as examples of "the link among marriage, coupling, Jewishness, and modern identity at the beginning of the screen media age" (40). Connected to press and screen, the trial and its fallout influenced a number of European intellectuals as they wrestled with the potential limits and paradoxes of Jewishness, coupling and social acceptance in a rapidly changing modern Europe. Novelists noticed "the potency of Christian-Jewish intersubjectivity" (50) for transgressive experimentation; Moss effectively connects writers such as Kafka, Proust and Joyce to Disraeli and Dreyfus.

American cinema had a more utopian vision of Jewish/non-Jewish couplings than that which emerged in Europe. Moss's best analysis of this vision centers on prominent films in the late 1920s, such as The Jazz Singer (Alan Crosland, US 1927) and Abie's Irish Rose (Victor Fleming, US 1928), which "featured a variation of either intermarriage or a thematic Anglo-Christian-Jewish coupling" as "the marker of final ascension into American life" (71). On screen cross-couplings like these could be a fairly safe form of transgression and experimentation. Regardless of their usefulness and popularity, first-wave films had their critics and decline. Moss robustly accounts for the dwindling representations of the first wave as anti-Semitism and discrimination grew in the United States.

The primary dates associated with Part Two, "The Second Wave: Erotic Schlemiels of the Counterculture", are 1967–1980, but Moss starts with interesting background for this second wave. Key writers, most notably Philip Roth, and boundary-pushing comedians like Lenny Bruce critiqued 1950s' conservatism and the de-ethnicization of the immediate post-war period. They ultimately had an impact on the sexualized coupling themes of American New Hollywood

cinema in the late 1960s. Generally speaking, two rhetorical trends emerged from the second wave. The first trend took on the absence of Jews during the 1930s and 1950s and tackled the association of Jews with Communism. The Front (Martin Ritt, US 1976), starring Woody Allen, is an excellent example of a second-wave film on 1950s blacklisting and is an example Moss wields well. The second trend of this New Hollywood was a "new Jewish visibility [that] signified the rhetorical entrance of explicit sexuality" (151). Moss marshals a litany of filmic Jewish/non-Jewish couplings to show the sexual experimentations of the youthful counterculture. Also in Part Two, he tracks the rare television cross-couplings of the second wave and the pornographic cinema of the 1970s.

Despite some holdovers, the second wave of clear cinematic cross-couplings largely declined in the late 1970s and early 1980s, as Reagan-style conservatism took hold in American culture and politics. (The Holocaust in popular culture was an exception.) If the second wave was defined by cinema, the third wave, discussed in Part Three, "The Third Wave: Global Fockers at the Millennium (1993–2007)", began heavily invested in television. To highlight just a few examples of his sweeping survey in Part Three, we can note that the radical female Jew returned in popular culture in the form of Roseanne Connor (Roseanne Barr) in Roseanne (ABC, US 1988–1997) and Moss's most potent analysis is centered on The Nanny (CBS, US 1993–1999). This period is particularly defined by the adaptation of Christian-Jewish couplings for global, transnational audiences. American television companies were expanding their markets overseas and thus required the "familiar, translatable material" that they found in the "nostalgic tone of the couplings of the third wave" (234). Moss moves beyond TV sitcoms to highlight Broadway musicals and the gross-out comedies of the 1990s and 2000s, such as American Pie (Paul Weitz / Chris Weitz, US 1999). Part Three includes a variety of examples of which full account cannot be given here. By the late 2000s, the third wave was coming to a close as "scripted entertainment began to look elsewhere for visualizing societal fracture" (260).

Moss's book is particularly intriguing when he connects media formats in popular culture, especially when he joins newspaper accounts, stand-up comedians and novels to experimental Jewish/non-Jewish couplings in cinema and television. His command of media formats, major theorists and secondary literature is impressive and expansive. However, the book seeks to account for too much, and as a result Moss sometimes misses the opportunity to make his analysis all the more persuasive. For example, Moss's analysis of the comedy revolution – stand-up comedians in the 1950s and 1960s – is fascinating, but a more detailed engagement with this revolution might have offered other convincing examples beyond Jerry Stiller and Lenny Bruce. Similarly, aspects of the theoretical material on the comedy revolution needed to be worked out more to be persuasive. It is unclear to this reviewer, for instance, that "the anti-hu-

mor origins of European Christendom", translated to the middle of the twentieth century, was a factor in making it "no surprise that Christian audiences turned so often to Jews to make them laugh" (141). A book exclusively on the post-war era or with less wide ranging examples could have expanded this discussion and focused further on the comedians' own voices. More detail would have been helpful at other points as well. A good example is Moss's account of Woody Allen's Annie Hall (US 1977) and Manhattan (US 1979), which for Moss are "the peak of Anglo-Christian-Jewish coupling visibility in second-wave cinema" (168–169). Yet, Annie Hall and Manhattan occupy only a little over a page of discussion. Despite these issues, Moss has accomplished a tour de force, and his coupling theory is worth the extended consideration he hopes it will receive (e.g. 264). His work will be of interest to media studies, Jewish studies and American studies, to name just a few relevant areas.

FILMOGRAPHY

Abie's Irish Rose (Victor Fleming, US 1928).
American Pie (Paul Weitz and Chris Weitz, US 1999).
Annie Hall (Woody Allen, US 1977).
Manhattan (Woody Allen, US 1979).
Roseanne (ABC, US 1988–1997).
The Front (Martin Ritt, US 1976).
The Jazz Singer (Alan Crosland, US 1927).
The Nanny (CBS, US 1993–1999).