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“This bibliography … is but a way station.” So begins the last paragraph of the introduction of this work, and it is a fitting description. Published in 2000, it is already out of date, especially now that major research libraries have their catalogs online. Yet, a book like this can be useful as a kind of handlist for any libraries in Canada that are just beginning to build a Judaica collection, or libraries elsewhere that want to build strength in Jewish Canadiana. How useful is this book?

To begin with, its scope is limited. The series title page calls it “A working paper focusing on history and the social sciences.” The editors say they have “… drawn a distinction between analytical studies and products of the imagination.” This is a sensible division. The social sciences and the arts are broad enough fields to warrant their own bibliographies, especially when dealing with such a vast subject as Canadian Jewry. This book does go farther than many bibliographies by including book chapters and reference book entries.

The bibliography has a distinct time frame—1965 to 2000. Does this period correspond with significant changes in Canadian Jewish life? Perhaps unintentionally it does, insofar as it parallels changes and movements in Jewish communities, especially out of Montreal, as well as changes in Israel-Diaspora relations. Also, as noted in the foreword, Jewish communal structures in Canada have changed significantly. Mainly though, it seems the date 1965 was chosen because earlier works were already included elsewhere. Attempting to exclude works that have already been noted is a worthy goal for a bibliography. In fact, this book explicitly builds on the 1993 work Contemporary Jewish life in Canada, which is not widely available, making this a responsible and admirable endeavor. The problem is with the later date—2000. Along with virtually every other field of knowledge, Jewish Canadiana is thoroughly represented on the Internet. University students have easy access to journal articles and primary sources are steadily being digitized. Very few scholars will need to consult a work this old.

Lack of annotation, which “… proved beyond the scope of the compilers”, is another problem. Without critical and informational annotation, the researcher who is confronted by this list of works doesn’t know where to start. What is the content of an article entitled “Klein, Montreal and Mankind”? What is meant by “Continuity and Canadian Jewry”? Women in Judaism: A Multidisciplinary Journal Fall 2007 Volume 4 Number 2 ISSN 1209-9392 © 2007 Women in Judaism, Inc.
The biggest problem though, is with the organization. The bibliography is topical. There are 58 topics, listed alphabetically. The source of the topic list is not given, but it seems to be a list that the editors developed themselves, without consulting any thesaurus of Jewish topics already in use. Everything is together in one list—provinces, cities, history, social sciences, international affairs. The user will need to know exactly what topic she’s looking for, since there are no broad groupings. In addition, she’ll have to know exactly what term these editors decided to use, whether it’s logical to her or not.

Will she know to look under Socialism, Communism and the Left, rather than Political Issues and Activities? Will she question the topic, Psychology and Physical Health? Will she wonder whether she should look under Orthodox Judaism, or Religion? Is it sensible to have divisions for Intercultural Relations, Interfaith Relations, Multiculturalism and Language, and Cross-Cultural Comparisons? How about Demography and Social Studies in one place, and Social Science: Collected Essays in another? Will she be able to differentiate Israel from Middle East Politics? In the introduction, the editors specifically mention the scarcity of research on the important topic of internal migration of Canadian Jewry, but there is no topic for it in the list. Did they find nothing? Other topics mentioned as needing more research are in the list.

Within the topics, citations are listed alphabetically by author. There is also an index of authors, but no other index. Finding material on a particular Canadian Jew is thus extremely tricky. To take an example, there is a citation on Leonard Cohen in the Biography section, which the user will find only after reading all the citations that come before it. There are also entries on Cohen in the Literature section, but none under music! Whatever the logic behind this, a name index would lead the user immediately to all the citations on Cohen.

Of course, this topic scheme is not that opaque. The topics are cross-referenced, and perhaps the user can make sense of the headings if she knows about Canadian Jewry, or Judaica in general, and if she takes the time to ponder this scheme. Unfortunately, these qualifications may exclude the average undergraduate or acquisitions librarian. A bibliography with such a focused subject needs to be broadly useful.

The section on Women is emblematic of the confusion that plagues this work. There’s an entry for an article by Paula Draper entitled “The role of Canadian Jewish women in historical perspective” in the book, Canadian Jewish women in historical perspective. Further down in the section on Women, the book itself is listed under the name of its editor, Edmond Y. Lipsitz. If the whole book is about Canadian Jewish women, why bring out one article and list it separately? Another example: there’s an article entitled: “The sandwich generation: the Jewish woman in the middle: stresses and satisfactions” in the Journal of psychology and Judaism. What is the Canadian content of this article? The journal is not Canadian. Without an annotation, there’s no way to know why this article is singled out from this journal. It’s critical to maintain focus in a bibliography of this type.
One final problem: the introduction appears in English and French and there are a handful of citations in French in the Montreal and Quebec sections, but overall there is scant material in French. Given the centrality of Montreal to the Canadian Jewish experience, it might have been good to have one collaborator whose job was to collect relevant French citations.

This valiant effort would benefit greatly from the expertise of a qualified librarian. Ideally, the next edition will be online, annotated, updated, and interactive, with critical contributions from scholars in the field and management by an information professional, so that the work will have a logical organization that will assist its editors and users.

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