DEAR FRIENDS,

I am delighted to have accepted the directorship of the Program in Jewish Culture and Society. I will try to follow in the footsteps of my wonderful predecessor, Matti Bunzl, who decided to return to Vienna to direct the Wien Museum. The missions of our program are to foster scholarly debate and dialogue, educate our students about Jewish history, culture, literature, philosophy, music and more, and provide a space for discussion of issues at the cutting edge of global concerns. I hope that the exciting program of events we have concocted meets these missions. Please see inside for the full schedule, mark your calendars, and join us!

Among the concrete goals for the program in the next five years are:

expanding our Israeli Studies presence,
expanding our events in Chicago and outreach to the Chicago-land area,
expanding our community outreach locally, and developing our undergraduate curriculum and enrollments.

To begin reaching the first of these goals we are delighted with two developments: first, Sayed Kashua, the esteemed author of Dancing Arabs, Second Person Singular, and many other literary, journalistic, televsional, and cinematographic works, has agreed to continue on at the U of I! Sayed has been an active member of our program during his first year here. Sayed’s initial appointment was generously supported by the Israel Studies project, a collaboration between the U of I and the Jewish United Fund/Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago. We began his stay with a highly lauded kick-off event during which he discussed his move to the U.S. and his childhood in Israel. In addition to teaching much-beloved courses Sayed also graced us with a wonderful discussion hosted by one of our program’s founders—Gary Porton and his wife Fraeda Porton. The other founder of the program, Michael Shapiro, was there along with about 30 other Chicago-based Advisory Council members and friends of the program. It was a wonderful, highly engaging event! This coming year we are screening the film based on Sayed’s book, Dancing Arabs at the Art Theater in Downtown Champaign. In addition to retaining Sayed for three years (an initiative begun by Michael Rothberg and supported by Liya Kaganovsky, Dean Barb Wilson, Associate Dean Martin Camargo, and Provost Adesida), we are bringing on board a new JUF supported postdoc, Vered Weiss. Vered, who recently completed her doctorate at the University of Kent, Canterbury, UK, works on Hebrew literature and Israeli Culture.

I am also delighted to announce that we have a new Yiddish and Hebrew language instructor, Sara Feldman, who will also be at the U of I for three years.

In order to connect more often with our Chicago-based friends, in addition to Sayed’s event at Gary and Fraeda’s, one of our core faculty, Dov Weiss, offered a showcase of his forthcoming book, Pious Irreverence: Confronting God in Rabbinic
Judaism. Over dinner with a lovely view of the city, about 20 friends of the program joined us and everyone appreciated Dov’s engaging explanation of his fascinating text. We are working on planning future events in Chicago this coming year, and are hoping to have an event at North Shore Congregation Israel.

To reach our goal of expanding our local community outreach, we have scheduled three film screenings in diverse local venues, arranged talks at Sinai Temple, and collaborated with the Urbana Public library a tie-in event. The first screening will be of Woman in Gold (the recent film that tells the story of the Nazi-looted, transcendent painting of Adele Bloch-Bauer by Gustav Klimt); this was a brilliant idea of our core faculty member Virginia Dominguez. This event will be held at the Krannert Art Museum and will feature a pre-screening talk by Professor Lisa Silverman, author of Becoming Austrians and Interwar Vienna. The second is a screening of Inheritance at Hillel with a Q&A by Chris Benson of the journalism school. Chris is working on a play based on this narrative about the meeting of a daughter of a Nazi commandant and a survivor who had the misfortune to know him during the Holocaust. The third is the screening of Borrowed Identity based on Sayed’s novel Dancing Arabs, and the Urbana library to produce a tie-in event will feature a discussion of his novel. Sara Feldman, Chris Benson, and I will also talk at Sinai Temple this coming year and we look forward to discussing ideas with the community there.

I am delighted to announce that Dana Rabin has agreed to serve as the Associate Director of the program and she plans to outreach to undergraduates in order to increase enthusiasm for our program. Please see our listing of courses to get a sense of the diverse range of learning available on campus this year. Dana is also working on a new course on Jewish Chicago that is in development now. We hope that the course will bring students to Chicago for the Summer I session to trawl the city and learn experientially about the history and present of Jewish Chicago.

It has been a pleasure to plan all of this with our stellar core faculty, to work with our Chicago-based Advisory Council, and to meet new friends of the program. None of our events would be possible without the help of Craig Alexander and I am immensely grateful to him for all of his hard work.

Please see inside for more information about Sayed, Vered, and Sara and for more details about our past and future events and our courses!

Please do not hesitate to get in touch with me if you have questions about our program or if you are interested in supporting any of our initiatives!

Brett Ashley Kaplan

Director, Professor and Conrad Humanities Scholar, Comparative Literature
LECTURES & OTHER PUBLIC EVENTS 2015-2016

Friday, August 28 • 3PM
THE ISRAEL-PALESTINIAN E-WASTE COMMODITY CHAIN: FINDINGS AND REFLECTIONS
A lecture by Yaakov Garb, Ben Gurion University of the Negev, Blaustein Institutes
This is a SDEP (Social Dimensions of Environmental Policy) event
Location: Lincoln Hall, room 1092

Monday, September 21 • 5:30PM
ART OF LOSS: THE RESTITUTION OF JEWISH PROPERTY IN AUSTRIA AFTER THE HOLOCAUST
A Lecture by Lisa Silverman, Associate Professor of History, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
FOLLOWED BY SCREENING OF THE FILM WOMAN IN GOLD
Screening will be followed by a Q & A with Silverman and KAM curator Maureen Warren
This event is made possible by the generous Rosenthal Family Endowment
Location: Krannert Art Museum, room 62 (500 E Peabody Drive)

Monday, November 9 • 5PM
SCREENING OF THE FILM INHERITANCE
Followed by a Q&A with Chris Benson, Associate Dean, College of Media/Associate Professor, Journalism and African American Studies, UIUC
This is a Holocaust, Genocide, and Memory Studies event
Location: Hillel (503 E John Street)

Monday, November 16 • 5PM
AMERICAN JEWISH SURVIVALISM AND THE POLITICS OF PRIDE:
MEIR KAHANE’S CRITIQUE OF AMERICAN JUDAISM
A lecture by Shaul Magid, The Jay and Jeanie Schottenstein Chair in Jewish Studies, Professor of Jewish Studies and Religious Studies, Indiana University
This lecture is made possible by the generous Samuel and Sheila Goldberg Lectureship Fund
Location: Illini Union 210

Monday, January 25 • 7:30PM
SCREENING OF THE FILM BORROWED IDENTITY
The film is based on Sayed Kashua’s novel Dancing Arabs
There will be a Q & A with Sayed Kashua after the screening
Location: Art Theater (126 W Church Street, downtown Champaign)

Monday, February 8 • 5PM
POST-HOLOCAUST ANTISEMITISM AND THE INVENTION-DISCOVERY OF PTSD
A lecture by Dagmar Herzog, Distinguished Professor, History, CUNY Graduate Center
This lecture is made possible by the generous Krouse Family Visiting Scholars in Judaism and Western Culture Fund
This is a Holocaust, Genocide, and Memory Studies event
Location: Alice Campbell Hall, East Ballroom
Monday, February 15 • 5PM
MACHINE GUNS, MOTHERS’ GRAVES AND HITLER THE HAMAN: SOVIET YIDDISH SONGS OF WORLD WAR II
A lecture by Anna Shternshis, Al and Malka Green Associate Professor of Yiddish Studies, University of Toronto
This lecture is made possible by the generous Oscar and Rose Einhorn Fund
Location: Illini Union, room 104

Monday, April 11 • 5PM
OH OTHER WHERE ART THOU: IDENTITIES AND SPATIAL METAPHORS IN HEBREW AND ENGLISH LITERATURE OF THE NINETEENTH- TO MID-TWENTIETH CENTURY
A lecture by Vered Weiss, JUF Postdoc, UIUC
This lecture is made possible by the generous support of the Jewish United Fund/ Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago and the UIUC Chancellor’s Office
Location: Illini Union, Colonial Room

JEWISH STUDIES WORKSHOPS 2015-2016
All workshops will be on Tuesdays from 4-5:30 in 109 English

SEPTEMBER 8 • TADEUSZ BOROWSKI, WALTER BENJAMIN, AND THE STATE OF EXCEPTION
Jonathan Druker, Director of Undergraduate Studies, Associate Professor of Italian, Illinois State University

OCTOBER 13 • THE IDOLS OF ISIS
Aaron Tugendhaft, Collegiate Assistant Professor, Humanities, University of Chicago

NOVEMBER 17 • SATMAR HASIDISM’S JEWISH THEOLOGY OF THE ANTI-CHRIST
Shaul Magid, The Jay and Jeanie Schottenstein Chair in Jewish Studies, Professor of Jewish Studies and Religious Studies, Indiana University

FEBRUARY 9 • SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND THE NAZI HOLOCAUST
Dagmar Herzog, Distinguished Professor, History, CUNY Graduate Center

FEBRUARY 16 • ON A JOURNEY FROM SOVIET CITIZEN TO JEWISH REFUGEE: JEWISH PERCEPTIONS OF 1941 IN THE SOVIET UNION
Anna Shternshis, Al and Malka Green Associate Professor of Yiddish Studies, University of Toronto

MARCH 8 • SEEKERS OF HAPPINESS: MOBILITY, CULTURE, AND THE CREATION OF THE SOVIET JEW
Sasha Senderovich, Assistant Professor, Germanic and Slavic Languages & Literatures, Program in Jewish Studies, University of Colorado Boulder

APRIL 12 • SPATIAL METAPHORS IN HEBREW LITERATURE
Vered Weiss, JUF Postdoc, UIUC
On Monday, April 13th, Sara Blair, Professor of English at University of Michigan, was invited to lecture to our program as part of the Vivian Marcus Memorial Fund, which focuses on the topic of the arts in the Jewish experience. We are pleased to thank Annette Turow for dedicating the fund in honor of her sister, Vivian Marcus. Professor Blair gave her talk to a rapt crowd, inspiring excellent questions from the audience of community members, faculty and graduate students. As the Director of JCS Brett Kaplan remarked, the response to Blair was great in terms of “the quality of the lecture, the turn-out, and the event overall.”

Blair’s talk, and the workshop she led for faculty and graduate students the following day, drew from her ongoing research on the cultures of the Lower East Side. Blair studies the dynamics of cultural production, especially photography, film, and literature. Her recent research emphasized late-nineteenth and twentieth-century Jewish American and African American literature and photography. In addition to her earlier book on Henry James, race, and the U.S., Henry James and the Writing of Race and Nation (1996), she has also written Harlem Crossroads: Black Writers and the Photograph in the Twentieth Century (2007) and Trauma and Documentary Photography of the FSA (2012), which she co-authored with Eric Rosenberg. She has also coedited a collection of essays, Jewish in America (2004). Harlem Crossroads traces the little known interaction between midcentury black writers and the work of (mostly Jewish) documentary filmmakers and photographers in order to show the crosspollination between these two groups. As Blair notes, “it is startlingly evident that virtually every African American writer of national significance during the postwar period engaged directly with the archives, practices, and effects of documentary photography” (10).

Her talk here, “D.W. Griffith, Early Cinema, and the Lower East Side” was an incisive analysis of Griffith’s The Musketeers of Pig Alley (1912), a precursor to his famous films Birth of a Nation and Intolerance. Blair examined the uses of location and the realistic representation of the Lower East Side and, in doing so, showed how the film reproduced the “Lower East Side” in Fort Lee, NJ. Instead of using the Lower East Side as his location, which he easily might have done, Griffith moved across the Hudson to create Fort Lee as the “idea” of the Lower East Side as the illusion of the actual place. In the film, Blair concentrated on the staging of two women and a Jewish man, a moment cited for its lifelikeness, but actually created elsewhere so that the illusion of the place could be managed more effectively. This attention to location marks a new direction in film studies, a category long taken for granted, and made vibrant through Blair’s poised and forceful analysis. Blair’s deft interpretation concentrated on a close reading of one of the most important scenes in the movie: with Lillian Gish as heroine, and her sister as a minor character. These famous Gish sisters—twinlike—represented two different possibilities for women on the Lower East Side: purity or prostitution.

Graduate students from Professors Lilya Kaganovsky and Michael Rothberg’s documentary class, ENGL 578 / CWL 561 / SLAV 591 “Documentary Aesthetics: History, Memory, Trauma” were engaged in this lively discussion. The audience centered on Blair’s documentary perspective, such as those concerning the Lower East Side’s Jewish presence and the notion of representation and temporality. The Jewish culture that Griffith wanted to reference occurs in the single male—reading at a table—and representing the stereotype of the Jewish rabbinical style.

On April 14th, Blair also gave a workshop dedicated to “Memory and Revolution: Allen Ginsberg on the Lower East Side,” another part of her book-in-progress. This workshop focused on Ginsberg’s poem for his dead mother “Kaddish” and was also concerned with the Lower East Side, which students of the poem have heretofore discussed rarely.

Blair’s wide-ranging lecture and intense workshop made us more grateful for the generosity of the Vivian Marcus Memorial Fund.
A new generation of Israeli writers, born since the 1970s, that began publishing in the 2000s was the subject of a symposium I organized on ‘Israeli Literature in the 21st Century’ at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign March 4-6, 2012. This summer Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies published a collection of articles I edited that grew out of the conversations that first took place at the symposium. Though diverse in subject and form, their writings reveal distinct characteristics that suggest cohesion. This generation can be defined by its transcultural identity.

Adopting Fernando Ortiz’s notion of transculturation, offers the opportunity to consider these writers as innovators who work within the native culture (Hebrew/Israel) while experimenting with the foreign experiences and landscapes that they encounter (or come from). Ortiz imagined five stages of transformation from one culture to another as the native culture was slowly eviscerated in the presence of an invading culture. Yet culture is more problematic than his designation in the 1940s. Instead it is a two-way street in which a constant back and forth destabilizes the notion of any single culture, instead fusing together and creating innumerable new forms of cultural hybridity. Nor is this cultural fusion the exclusive province of Colonialism, or cultural Imperialism (even of the ubiquitous Americanization of global culture), rather it is the recognition that encounters with other cultures become a transformative experience, offering writers both the opportunity to look outwards at difference, and to reflect inwards on one’s home culture. Transculturalism seeks to avoid the polarizing boundaries of multiculturalism, and the homogenization of globalization. Thus today’s understanding of transcultural avoids the trappings of binaries, while moving beyond Ortiz’s original conceptualization of dominant and subordinate cultures.

It is movement - physical, virtual and imaginative, Arianna Dagnino argues, that triggers the transcultural process offering writers a decentered perspective in which all cultures may be viewed in relation to one another “including one’s own.” Significantly, migration does not provoke the anxiety of the exiled or displaced in the way that migrant or post-colonial writing does. Instead these writers are relaxed about movement and their encounters at the cross-roads of culture. While moving physically across the globe and across different cultures, transcultural writers find themselves less and less trapped in the traditional migrant/exile syndrome and become more apt instead to embrace the opportunities and the freedom that diversity and mobility bestow upon them. This generation of Israeli writers is comfortable in other cultures and other places, while simultaneously choosing to re-explore ideas of homeland and home.

At a time when Zionism is under-fire, rather than rejecting Israel and its founding, this generation seeks to redefine Zionism, and to create a new inclusive Israeliness. Moreover the very nature of transcultural identity allows for a highly varied and idiosyncratic path as “individuals find themselves to be negotiating, compromising (or in conflict with) several cultures on a daily
basis” (Dagnino, 176). In a transcultural model we see “the right of individuals to independence from their own cultures” (Epstein, 335). As a result a multivocal space has opened up within Israeli culture that allows for new possibilities including a space for non-Jews writing in Hebrew, and for Israeli writing in other languages. Global citizens, this new generation translates the encounter with other cultural experiences into a local framework to create a literature that is both of Israel and, simultaneously, engaged with the world beyond; creating a new but distinctly Israeli literature.

In tune with global literary currents, Hebrew literature has revealed influences from other cultures and literary movements from modernism to American pop, filtered through a local lens of language, place and experience. Dominated by the presence of a white, Ashkenazi, male, socialist agenda, the canon’s centre has been the province of masculine nationalist narratives, preoccupied with subjects of war and nation building. Even when these texts questioned the nation, they did so from the white male hegemonic perspective. The periphery, by contrast, had more fluid boundaries that tolerated the presence of female voices, anti-establishment texts, and ethnic identity politics. Yet it was only at the end of the twentieth century that these marginal voices gained public recognition as they were rediscovered by contemporary audiences interested in seeking out a more diverse, and more representative literary past. The political and economic rise of minority sub-cultures reshaped the definitions of periphery creating a significant impact on the literary landscape. In turn this revealed not only the presence of Mizrahim (Jews who migrated to Israel from Arab lands), but also the cultural impact of religious Zionists and Arab-Israelis. As individuals these writers remained peripheral, as marginal and marginalized figures, yet collectively they represented a change in the trends in Israeli literature.

Writers do not exist in a vacuum. They are part and parcel of contemporary Israeli society, and in many cases are politically active within it, both in the sense of national politics which includes activism in movements that challenge the government’s position on a wide range of issues including housing, poverty and the occupation, and within the field of identity politics, and women and minority rights within Israel. By 2011, many were at the forefront of the ‘tent’ demonstrations held on Tel Aviv’s Rothschild Boulevard, where protestors appealed against the rise in the cost of living and the prohibitive cost of housing in Israel. Nir Baram, Assaf Gavron, Matti Shmuelof, Eshkol Nevo and other young authors, gave speeches, offered free public readings, and supported the activists. In between the tents were signs and banners that offered comic twists on old Zionist slogans. In their writings these same authors engaged with similar questions – what does it mean to be an Israeli and to live in Israel? Not as a question of a universalized identity, but specifically as an attempt to understand the historical context of Zionism, the missteps and the consequences of past actions as they impact the present, and the way to forge a new understanding of Zionism for the future.

For many in this new generation there has been a return to the heart of Zionist culture, examining the origins of the country’s formation and reselecting images, myths and narratives in a continuation of Zionist tradition, while at the same time this generation has developed a richer array of sub-cultures exploring ancestral origins before the immigration to Israel, and examining counter-cultural experiences at odds with the centrist Zionist narrative from which they were excluded. Thus contemporary Israeli literature has redefined Ivriut – Hebrewism as an inclusive Israeliness that pushes at the traditional definitions of the national culture, while returning to many of its abandoned values and literary forms.

The symposium considered a broad range of writers and literary work. At the time I had no clear idea that there would be commonality among the writers’ works or experiences, only that there had been a recent boom in Israeli literature, that it wasn’t being treated critically, and that it represented a much broader swathe of Israeli society than had been true of Hebrew literature in the past. In order
to showcase the variety of materials currently being produced, and to help both the audience and participants understand the material under discussion, the event opened with short poetry and fiction readings in Hebrew and English, written or translated (and read) by many of the speakers who would give papers over the following two days.

Indeed, the participants themselves reflected a characteristic of this literary moment—they all wore more than one hat; they were scholars, writers, poets, journal editors, translators, or book series editors responsible for fostering talent as much as studying it. With the exception of keynote speaker Dan Laor, who addressed new ways the Shoah is being envisaged and represented in Israeli culture, most of the other participants were also peers of the writers under discussion at the three day event. Thus the constituents of the conference revealed the literary heart of this generation: individuals crossing disciplinary lines and serving as cultural producers, curators, and distributors, as well as scholars. Moreover, this period of collaborative and interactive creativity is not bound by place, but through the wonder of the digital age is able to transpire in Israel and elsewhere through different forums including university campuses, cultural festivals, writing and translation workshops, literary journals, and international awards. Yet despite this international dimension, the writing reveals a preoccupation with Israel, Zionism, Hebrew, and other core institutions of Israeli society. In identifying a new generation of writers, we can see that beyond the age of fragmentation and identity politics, and past the globalization of culture, there is a specific and clearly demarcated frame in which this transcultural Israeli generation operates, and it is this cultural moment that “Israeli Literature in the 21st Century” set out to explore.


Rachel S. Harris is Associate Professor of Hebrew Literature and Israeli Culture in the Program in Comparative and World Literature at the University of Illinois and a member of the Executive Committee of the Program in Jewish Culture & Society. An Ideological Death: Suicide in Israeli Literature was published by Northwestern University Press in August of 2014. In addition, Harris is the co-editor of Narratives of Dissent: War in Contemporary Israeli Arts and Culture (2012).


Arianna Dagnino, “Transcultural writers and transcultural literature in the age of global modernity” 1-2


Epstein, 335
לאי אני אגדיר את עצמי. אך שאלת הגזע עלתה כבר בימים הראשונים שלנו כאן.

ואני בפתח דרכו, הייתי זו דווקא התחושה הקשה של סוף התאו הזה ממש טעים.

הם ספקים הזדמנויות כלכליות, ושתייתו את התאומים שבין בני האדם, בלא בחלוף זמן ספור, או בחלוף זמן של שנים가는.

אני נזכר בעיירה, כי לא רציתי להיכנס לכל העניין הישראלי פלסטיני, ואחרי כל כך זמן שנטפסו ב Yahad, השבטים של השבטים של השבטים של השבטים, וב色々 היותי כך, './../../וונדר

ולא רק בני הקטן בכה, ההתחלה הייתה מאוד קשה. הקלישאה אומרת שכל ההתחלות קשות, אך במקרה של התחלה זו כאן במערב התיכון של ארה, אמרתי לה, כי לא רציתי להיכנס לכל העניין הישראלי פלסטיני, הזדה

It’s been about a year since I left Jerusalem and came to Urbana-Champaign with my wife and three children. We celebrated the anniversary by preparing home-made hummus and frying falafels. By now we know where to buy the right products for making food that approximates the taste of home. My younger son, who arrived here at the age of three without knowing a word of English, asked for another portion of falafel. I sliced a pita in half, stuffed it with a few falafel balls, added a slice of tomato and cucumber, and dampened the contents with some tahini sauce. “Wow, daddy,” he said after biting into the pita avidly, and added, in English, with a Midwestern accent, “This taco is really good.”

I remember how hard it was for my little boy at first. You know, he sang all the songs he learned in his Jerusalem preschool in such lovely Hebrew. “He sings the Shabbat songs better than anyone else,” his Jewish preschool teacher told me once. And now, suddenly, we’re sending him to a new school in a foreign land. There are smiling teachers and sweet children whom he can’t understand and who are incapable of understanding a word he says. So he cried. For two whole weeks he cried.

And he wasn’t the only one who cried: we had a rough ride at the beginning. All beginnings are difficult, the cliché says, but in the case of this particular beginning, here in the American Midwest, it was actually the harsh sense of an ending that accompanied me when I left the bleeding, racist, violent Jerusalem of that accursed summer of hatred and war. I remember our first week in Champaign, and above all that first Tuesday, when an air-raid alarm echoed through the house in the morning. Terror seized me, the post-traumatic guy who thought he would never be able to escape the noises of war – and lo and behold, the sounds of warning and danger had pursued me all the way here. I didn’t know where to run, where to hide the children, where the bomb shelter was. “The Japanese!” I found myself shouting as the alarm went off, trying to overcome a panic attack and call the Jewish studies department and ask what people do in Champaign when a war breaks out. “There’s no war,” the department reassured me. “There’s a tornado warning siren test on the first Tuesday of every month.”

Tornado warning? They have tornados here? Like in The Wizard of Oz? And what do you when there’s a tornado? Where do you run? Where’s the shelter?

All my life I’ve been looking for shelter, but at the beginning of last summer it hit me that there’s no place for me to escape to anymore, that for people who chose the way of life I did, or had it forced on them, there is no more haven. Another war between Israelis and Palestinians, between Jews and Muslims, between Arabs and Hebrews. The dichotomy is forced on you willy-nilly, and from the moment hostilities erupt you are automatically associated with one of the fighting camps, you have no choice. A searing sense of failure was the lot of anyone who wasn’t willing to accept the dichotomy, who dared to challenge the laws, written and unwritten, and refused to toe the line that separates the country’s citizens by ethnic, religious, and national origin.

“This is not your natural place,” my Israeli friends told me when I chose city life and moved to West Jerusalem. “This is not your language,” my Arab friends told me, because I wrote in Hebrew. I scoffed at such comments and vehemently defended my right to live wherever I wanted and write in...
whatever language I wished – though it will be less than honest of me to say that deep fears did not accompany every “unnatural” step I took. Arabic proverbs about the bitter fate of those who leave their home and forsake their ancestral heritage reverberated in my mind, and Hebrew admonitions against assimilators who thought that by adopting a foreign language and imitating the ways of the goyim they could survive persecutions by their arch-foes.

The summer of 2014 honed the dilemma of the “natural” options that are available to me as a Palestinian and a citizen of Israel. There’s no mistaking it. I have to choose between: (A) Surrendering and adopting the values of Zionism as defined by the extreme right, which has been dictating the tone for the past decade, a move that will at most insure me and my children the title of “good Arab” but will never guarantee equality, because neither my mother nor the mother of my children is a Jew; or (B) Returning home to my native village, the ghetto in which every Arab citizen is fated to live and raise his children in the conservative, patriarchal family tradition.

The days before our flight to the United States were a period in which anyone who argued against segregation was considered a fantasizer, anyone who challenged the sanctity of one’s mother tongue in defining national identity was branded a traitor. If you harbored the hope that by opting for a bilingual path tempered with humor you would succeed in devising an alternative origin story for those who share the same homeland, you were pegged as off the wall. It’s either-or – “either us or them,” in the words of the prime minister’s election-campaign slogan.

I arrived in Champaign utterly worn out from the battles I waged in the newspaper for close to twenty years, exhausted from the tests of loyalty, reeling with a feeling of revulsion from the accusations of betrayal and the identity battles. Here, at least, I thought to myself, no one will examine my every move, no one will butt into my business. Here, Hebrew will go back to being a language of writing and not of national feuds; indeed, I was reminded of what a beautiful language it can be when I tried to transmit it to students with the aid of stories and texts that I love. Here I can talk about writing satire and persuade students of the power of humor, as I once believed.

When we arrived here, I determined not to deal with identities any longer – I deserve a break from politics and from ethnic, racial and religious conflicts. Here, Hebrew will go back to being a language of writing and not of national feuds; indeed, I was reminded of what a beautiful language it can be when I tried to transmit it to students with the aid of stories and texts that I love. Here I can talk about writing satire and persuade students of the power of humor, as I once believed.

The race issue came up in our very first days here. “Race” was a category on my children’s registration form for the local schools. Here, in the offices of the Champaign education system, I couldn’t believe that race was still hounding me. I looked for “Arabs” on the race list, but to no avail; I then looked for “Jews” and didn’t find that race, either. I almost registered my children as Asians, because scientifically speaking Jerusalem is in Asia. But I was afraid, I knew that would be fraudulent, and I didn’t want to lie to the American system in our first week in the city. And even though I toyed with the thought that if I registered my children as Asians they might start to take an interest in science, I preferred to ask for help from the smiling official in the public-school registration offices.

“Excuse me, ma’am,” I said to her. “I don’t know what my race is.”

“Oh,” she responded. “Where are you from, sir?”

“We’re from Jerusalem,” I told her, because I didn’t want to get into the whole Palestinian-Israeli business.

“The Middle East?”

“Yes,” I nodded in reply.

“You’re white folks, sir,” the woman said.

I smiled, thanked her wholeheartedly and flashed a proud smile at the white children who were sitting across from me in the offices of the city’s education department. “You hear?” I said to my children in an authoritative tone of voice. “Just because we’re a majority doesn’t mean we have to be racists, understand?”
This past year has been an exciting one for The Future of Trauma and Memory Studies, the graduate and faculty reading group I founded in 2013 with my colleague, Jenelle Davis (Art History). For one, we grew substantially from our first year, adding many new student and faculty members from different disciplines across the humanities, sciences, and social sciences. This year we also had a new co-organizer, Priscilla Charrat (French), who infused the group with her energy and ideas. Together, we organized many commemorative and professionalizing events, culminating in the spring when we held a documentary film series on issues related to trauma and memory that attracted many students and faculty from across the campus.

In the fall, the University of Illinois marked the centenary of the Great War with a campus-wide initiative organized by Professors Michael Rothberg (English) and Marcus Keller (French and Italian) that included film screenings, a lecture series, and an exhibition of French propaganda posters at the Krannert Art Museum. The haunting legacy of the Great War resonates with our group’s focus on trauma and memory and as such, we organized an affiliated series of readings and participated in many of the initiative’s events, including attending one of the sold out performances of Oh What a Lovely War at the Krannert Center for the Performing Arts. This musical was originally written in 1963 about recovering her Jewish family history for her memoir, What They Saved: Pieces of a Jewish Past (2011). Over lunch, we held a lively discussion with Professor Miller about her recent work and our own projects. Events like these connect emerging and established scholars and are essential for the professional development of graduate students as they help us develop our own research and ideas. We look forward to organizing similar events next year with visiting scholars through the Program in Jewish Culture and Society.

To further enhance the professional development of our students, this year we started implementing monthly workshops where students can submit works-in-progress in order to get feedback from other students and faculty members. Some of the highlights of our workshops have been tailoring Joshua Shelly’s (Religion) application materials for the future of trauma and memory studies.
for a doctoral program in German studies (he got into his top choice program!) and helping Jennifer Anderson Bliss, who recently received her doctorate in Comparative Literature, to refine an amazing article on a French-Japanese web comic about Anne Frank. We hope to continue these workshops next year to further assist both junior and senior graduate students advance and publish their research.

This spring, Priscilla and I, along with two new group members, Naomi Taub (English) and Helen Makhdoumian (English), organized a series of documentary film screenings in order to expand the campus-wide dialogue that began with the Great War initiative about the legacies of trauma to include more contemporary contexts of violence and genocide that remain ongoing and unresolved. To frame our series we started with Watchers of the Sky (2014), a film about Raphael Lemkin, the Polish-Jewish lawyer and Holocaust survivor who coined the term “genocide” in an effort to convince the international community that there must be legal retribution for mass atrocities committed against minorities. Lemkin’s story is interwoven throughout the film with that of other humanitarians who are working in various areas, including Bosnia and Darfur, who have been influenced by Lemkin’s tireless efforts to eradicate interethnic violence. After the screening, Naomi Taub moderated a panel discussion with Professors Mark Micale (History), Tim Wedig (Global Studies), and Mina Sohaj (Theater) about the film and Lemkin’s lasting influence on the juridical and discursive framing of human rights in our contemporary age.

Our second film, My Perestroika (2010), traced the lives of five children from their sheltered Soviet upbringing, through the collapse of the Soviet Union during their teenage years, and to the constantly shifting political landscape of contemporary post-Soviet Russia. Throughout the film, these classmates paint a complex portrait of the dreams and disillusionment of growing up during this momentous transition. The roundtable panel following
the film organized by Priscilla Charrat included Anya Hamrick-Nevinglovskaya (Comparative Literature), a graduate student at Illinois who, like the documentary’s subjects, experienced the fall of the Soviet Union from behind the Iron Curtain, giving the audience additional insight into this very moving film. Professors Diane Koenker (History), Harriet Murav (Slavic and Comparative Literature), Mark Steinberg (History) also provided personal reflections and critiques that added texture to our discussion of the documentary.

For the third film in our series, we partnered with the Documentary Aesthetics: History, Memory, Trauma graduate seminar co-taught by Professors Lilya Kaganovsky (Comparative Literature) and Michael Rothberg to screen The Act of Killing (2012). The Academy Award nominated documentary brings to the fore the genocide of ethnic Chinese in Indonesia after the military coup in 1965, an event that has been lauded in the country as a successful battle against communism. By uniquely exploring the perpetrator perspective, the documentary interrogates what it means for perpetrators to go unpunished and for film itself to be implicated in acts of violence and genocide. While many reading group members saw the film last year, it has haunted us ever since and continues to stir rousing discussions amongst our group. With the generous support of the Program, I was able to organize an interview via Skype with the documentary’s director, recent MacArthur “Genius” Grant recipient Joshua Oppenheimer. The fruitful conversation with director, faculty, and students addressed the film’s context and we learned more about the filmmaker’s decision-making process and the film’s reception in Indonesia. It is clear that Oppenheimer’s work has opened up a dialogue about this genocide in our community, and, most importantly, in Indonesia where there has been a critical rethinking of the nation’s past.

The final screening commemorated the centenary of the Armenian Genocide, one of several events our group organized with the University of Illinois Armenian Students Association to observe Genocide Remembrance Day on April 24th, when, in 1915, 250 Armenian scholars were arrested by the Ottoman government and later assassinated. We started the week by participating in a worldwide reading of Armenian literature in solidarity with authors and institutions from 65 different countries. This worldwide event was organized by Literature Festival Berlin and Lepsiushaus Potsdam and brought together people from across the globe to increase awareness and recognition of the genocide. On April 24th, we screened the documentary The Armenian Genocide (2006), in order to educate those not familiar with the genocide about its context and its lasting political connotations. Following the film, Helen Makhdoumian, who works on Armenian literature, led a discussion with the
audience, which led to a candlelight vigil in honor of the victims of the genocide organized with the Armenian Student Association. For a Daily Illini article publicizing these events, I told the reporter, “genocide [is] a difficult subject. Not everyone wants to study […] or think about [it], but it is necessary to learn […] and make sure that victims of genocide [and their] memories are not lost.” It is our sincere hope that by screening films like these we can continue to raise awareness about difficult histories on our campus.

It was with the generous support from The Program in Jewish Culture and Society and The Initiative in Holocaust Genocide and Memory Studies that we were able to hold and publicize these events. We had an amazing turnout from the community for these films and they generated a lot of interesting and important discussions. We hope to continue the conversation in the year to come, especially as Naomi and Helen take on organizing roles in the reading group. If you are interested in joining our reading group, you can visit our website at traumaandmemory.weebly.com or you can join in the conversation on our Facebook page. We look forward to seeing you at our future events!

Jessica Young is a Ph.D. student in the English department. She holds a B.A. from Reed College and an M.A. from San Francisco State University. Her dissertation focuses on South Asian literature and the transmission of transcultural memory after trauma.

INTRODUCING SARA FELDMAN

Sara Feldman is joining the Program in Jewish Culture & Society as a Lecturer in Hebrew and Yiddish language. Having studied several languages, especially Hebrew, Yiddish, Russian, and Spanish, she uses her many experiences as a language learner to inform her approach to teaching Hebrew and Yiddish. Her goal as an instructor is not only to empower students to express themselves with the formal structure and vocabulary of a new language, but also to present the language as a window into the culture that produced it, such as food, the arts, politics, and practical matters that come up in everyday life. She has previously taught Hebrew to English-speakers and English to Russian-speakers.

Feldman received her doctorate in Near Eastern Studies in 2014 from the University of Michigan. Her dissertation, entitled “Fine Lines: Hebrew and Yiddish Translations of Alexander Pushkin’s Verse Novel Eugene Onegin, 1899-1937,” explores the function of translated Russian literature in the development of both modern East European Jewish and Israeli culture. Her recent article, “Jewish Simulations of Russian Simulation of Folk Poetry,” is forthcoming in Slavic and East European Journal. She has also published translations from Russian and Yiddish. As a postdoctoral fellow at the Frankel Institute for Advanced Judaic Studies, Feldman began work on People of the Russian Book, her monograph in progress about the ongoing Jewish attachment to (and ambivalence towards) the Russian national poet.

Bridging Jewish and Slavic studies, this book will frame modern Hebrew and Yiddish literary history as a product of the Russian imperial context. When constructing modern literature in Jewish languages, East European Jewish intellectuals simultaneously expressed a Russian imperial understanding of world literature and resisted aspects of Russian aristocratic culture.

Besides translation and intertextuality, her interests include questions of diaspora and empire, quantitative and digital approaches to poetry, Yiddish theater, Pushkin studies, postcolonial theory, East European Jewish radicalism, bilingualism in Israeli television and film, Jewish women’s languages, narratives of apostasy, Yiddish tango, and the echoes of traditional Jewish religious texts in modern Hebrew literature. Feldman recently performed in “Wooden Wars,” a contemporary queer Yiddish play.
INTRODUCING VERED WEISS

After earning her BA in Comparative and English Literature at Tel Aviv University (Israel), Vered Weiss completed her MA in Comparative and World Literature at San Francisco State University, and her doctorate at the University of Kent, Canterbury, UK. Her research interests include nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature in Hebrew and English; literature and nationalism; postcolonial literature and theory; gender studies; and critical theory.

Her work in Hebrew literature and Israeli culture focuses on the employment of spatial metaphors and Gothic horror. She explores the ways in which these tropes are culturally based but also cross boundaries between countries and people.

Her doctoral thesis entitled “Oh Other Where Art Thou: Spatial Awareness in Hebrew and English Literature of the Nineteenth to Mid Twentieth Century,” compares several canonical works of Hebrew and English literature of the nineteenth- to mid-twentieth century and reveals similarities in the employment of Gothic elements. The comparative analysis is based on two connections between the two cultures: the first is the shared mythical roots, and the second the spatial and historical connection between the two cultures in relation to (post)colonialism. Following Ilan Troen’s conceptualization of “settler colonialism,” the comparative analysis explores literary representations of various concerns of settlers in both communities. The research examines literary means that convey and consider alterity, and the manner in which the location of the monstrous Other is indicative of the relationship of the respective imagined community and sovereignty.


While at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, Vered will offer the following courses:

CWL 199 – Israeli Cinema and TV. This course will examine the various ways through which the filmic medium has portrayed Israel’s complex matrix of cultural identities. The different sessions will address the major factors shaping Israeli culture (e.g., contemporary immigration; engagement with the Palestinian Other; gender politics; queer identity and the religious community.)

CWL 211 – War and Peace in Israeli Literature. This course introduces students to the history of attitudes to war and peace in Israel as presented through poetry, film and short stories. We will explore the plurality of voices and experiences in Israel.

SLCL 200 – Languages and Cultures of the Mediterranean (team taught). This course is an introduction to the social and cultural history of languages spoken around the Mediterranean. The sessions I will give will examine the roots of the long linguistic and cultural Hebrew tradition.

Additionally, Vered will give a lecture on her research, and hold a workshop exploring some of her fields of interest (see calendar for details).
HIGHLIGHTS OF 2014/15

Avinoam Naeh and Bruce Rosenstock

The Strange World of Ritual Murder: Culture, Politics, and Belief in Eastern Europe and Beyond

Rhona Seidelman and Sayed Kashua

Martin Kavka

The Strange World of Ritual Murder: Culture, Politics, and Belief in Eastern Europe and Beyond
Lisa Lampert-Wessig’s Workshop

Michael Rothberg and Nancy K. Miller

Sayed Kashua at Gary and Fraeda Porton’s in Chicago

Timothy Snyder

Vassili Schedrin and Harriet Murav
David Pountney’s commitment to producing the unknown opera The Passenger began when he was artistic director of the Bregenz Festival in Austria. The stage at Bregenz is surrounded by the waters of Lake Constance, with seating extending away from the shore—a strikingly good fit for Mieczysław Weinberg’s The Passenger, set in part on an ocean liner. Pountney’s production premiered in Bregenz in 2010, and has since been seen in London, Houston, New York, and Chicago. Very few contemporary operas can boast such an extensive initial series of performances, let alone the attention of multiple creative teams. Mannheim has mounted The Passenger independently, while the most recent new production of the opera opened in Frankfurt this past March.

The Passenger’s Russian premiere is scheduled to launch this fall in Yekaterinburg—more than forty-five years after it was first to be produced at Moscow’s Bolshoi Theatre in 1968. The Holocaust-themed opera by Weinberg (1919-1996), who was Jewish and hailed originally from Poland, was not allowed to be performed then or anytime during the composer’s lifetime, to his lasting chagrin. A concert performance in Moscow in 2006 was its first public hearing, attended by the opera’s librettist Alexander Medvedev. Pountney was able to engage Medvedev’s input in preparing his Bregenz production, and that of Zofia Posmyz, the Polish author of the semi-autobiographical 1962 novel Pasażerka that inspired the opera.

The story begins with Liese travelling on a boat to Brazil with her husband Walter, who will take up a diplomatic post there. A mysterious woman on the ship uncannily reminds Liese of her former life as an overseer at Auschwitz. That woman is a Polish camp prisoner named Marta whom she until now believed dead. Liese’s unlocked memories yield a confession to her husband, who previously knew nothing of her role at Auschwitz some fifteen or twenty years prior. Tension mounts between them as he fears the revelation could destroy his diplomatic career. Their desperate hope that her past be kept secret speaks to the problematic veil of silence that many Nazis adopted after the war. Liese’s flashbacks come to dominate the dramatic action, however, forcing her to confront her guilt. A climactic moment near the drama’s end involves the unknown woman physically driving Liese to rewitness the brutal punishment of Marta’s lover Tadeusz that she had helped bring about.

Whereas Posmyz’s novel concludes with the German couple agreeing to look past Liese’s difficult history, Weinberg and Medvedev’s opera ends with a solo...
scene for Marta. We witness her as survivor, voicing the pleas of her many less fortunate friends not to be forgotten. Weinberg escaped Nazi persecution by fleeing east and eventually made his way to Moscow, only to later learn that his entire immediate family and many other relatives had perished. The opera’s concluding gesture of remembering had tremendous personal value for Weinberg.

Anthony Freud, a key figure in the success story that The Passenger has become, set into motion plans for the performances of the opera in Houston before assuming the general directorship of the Lyric Opera in 2011. His move to Chicago gave him the opportunity to mount The Passenger in the city with the largest Polish population outside of Poland, with a company that has tended to eschew contemporary works. The success that Freud has facilitated should be qualified, however, for artistic representations of the Holocaust invite serious questions concerning tone and purpose. Many who experienced the harrowing inhumanities of the mid-twentieth century rightly resist or avoid any such effort. Himself the son of a Holocaust survivor, Freud is highly sensitive to overly nostalgic engagements with this past, and he held firm to a question that he poses of all operatic works: is it a story that is compellingly told through music and not merely with music?

In the case of The Passenger, Weinberg balanced his coolly ironic and sarcastic treatment of the German characters in the opera with a quasi-realistic depiction of women in the barracks in Auschwitz. Early in the creative process, Weinberg and Medvedev latched onto an aspect of Posmyz’s story that could be developed into the musical raison d’être of the piece. Tadeusz, Marta’s lover, would be a violinist in addition to a craftsman. His final act of defiance would involve a command performance in which he is supposed to play the Commandant’s favorite waltz but instead plays the Chaconne from Bach’s Partita No. 2 in D Minor. Music making, which was an important if complex dimension of life in many concentration camps, thus became a central focus of the opera.

The composer Weinberg, in what would be his first of seven operas, revealed tremendous facility working with a dramatic form. His first wife’s family was bound up with the theatre, and Weinberg thus gained many years of experience working with stage music and narrative before he arrived in Moscow. Having conceived the climactic scene featuring Bach’s music in the place of the displaced waltz, Weinberg and Medvedev wove references to dance music throughout the score. Popular dance rhythms filter in and out of the opening scenes as Liese and Walter entertain the idea of going to the area with live music on the ship. We first hear the aesthetically hollow favorite waltz of the Commandant as a broadcast in the camp, as music that all heard regardless of choice. The past and present collide when Liese and Walter are enjoying themselves in a carefree manner in the dance salon and the unnamed woman requests none other than the Commandant’s waltz to be played by the band—the pivot point at which the veiled figure takes control of Liese’s memory and forces her to witness Tadeusz’s final performance. Weinberg and Medvedev crafted the scene so that the Commandant lazily dozes off as Tadeusz begins to play, allowing the violinist to play many measures of the haunting, well-known melody of arguably Germany’s most famous composer. Strings in the orchestra join Tadeusz in unison, in solidarity, before the boor is jostled awake and orders Tadeusz’s removal. All of the drama’s transitions between the present and Liese’s past, especially this one, were rendered effective by the set Johan Engels designed for Pountney’s production. The white and cream-bathed world of the ocean liner sat pristinely, even proudly, but also heavily upon the dirt-hued world of Auschwitz, whose variable set pieces moved smoothly along iconic railway tracks.

One of The Passenger’s greatest early champions was Weinberg’s colleague and friend Shostakovich. Whereas Shostakovich, who experienced his own domestic challenges, was promoted internationally and was sure of his artistic reach by the end of his lifetime, Weinberg, even more prolific a composer in a wide range of genres, was not. His Jewish heritage obviously played a role. Still, as UIUC colleague Liyla Kaganovsky (Comparative Literature) recalled from the days when she used to play with Weinberg’s young daughter from his second marriage, there was a sense that...
his musical activities were locally valued, for the family had a four-room apartment for only three people. Weinberg had a large music room for composing, and the girls needed to be very quiet when he was at work, Kaganovsky added. The composer is now better known than when Pountney first contemplated the score of The Passenger. As the opera continues to reach more and more stages, increasing interest has been shown in Weinberg’s greater oeuvre, especially his chamber and orchestral music.

The 92-year-old Posmyz has meanwhile been able to attend various performances of the opera. She travelled from her home in Warsaw to be a featured guest in Chicago in February of this year. Nearly four hundred people turned up at the Cultural Center on Michigan Avenue on an inhospitable wintry day to hear her speak about the story drawn from her own life. Pozmyz, a reflective and also vibrant and beautiful woman, shared how she was incarcerated despite being Catholic. After the Nazis closed all Polish Universities, she was caught in a covert classroom and one of her colleagues had anti-Nazi literature stashed in her belongings. The whole group was arrested immediately.

In more private conversation, Posmyz recalled the genesis of the opera, and how she worked closely with Medvedev to shape a story that was credible while being dramatically effective—not an easy task. The opera, for example, required ensemble scenes in which the female prisoners could communicate freely amongst themselves for a stretch—a situation that Posmyz noted was not entirely realistic. She also pointed out the score’s nod to Soviet-style social realism: a Russian folk song sung by the prisoner Katya. That only one of the female prisoners is explicitly identified as Jewish also reflects the Soviet context in which the work came into being.

The dramatic handling of Katya’s Russian folk song is, however, strikingly handled in the opera. Katya is unable to recall how the song ends for memories of her former life have become fragile. Her sad silence is rudely invaded by a distinctive percussive onslaught (first heard at the opera’s opening) as Nazi soldiers enter to round up some of the women for execution. Tadeusz’s command performance is scheduled to accompany their march to the gas chambers. As initially composed, the opera was all sung in Russian, the language of its intended audience, and so Katya’s folk song would have been at home in that context. Pountney and Freud, however, both supported a multi-lingual approach, with characters singing in their native languages. This enhanced a more cosmopolitan view of the concentration camp and the individual identities of the prisoners. Marta’s closing monologue was thus sung in Polish in Chicago.

Featuring poignant lyrical touches rarely found elsewhere in the score, Marta’s closing scene recalled Katya, and above all that of Tadeusz, with passion and even grace, while moving beyond the harsher memories brought to life in the drama.

Today we are set to leave Illinois for the University of Oklahoma. There I have an exciting job as Assistant Professor in History that (once I am tenured) will become the Schusterman Chair of Modern Israel Studies. These have been incredible years for me and Yair, and while we can’t wait to begin our new adventure in Oklahoma, we will be sorry to say good-bye.

It’s hard to properly express how grateful I am to everyone in the Program of Jewish Culture and Society. I could not have hoped for a more wonderful environment for these critical foundational years for my career and for our family. I have found colleagues and friends here who are not only extraordinary scholars but also able and generous mentors who have read, shaped and encouraged my work. Some of the fondest memories that I will take with me are of the many discussions that were held around the conference table at the Jewish Studies Workshop. In snow and rain, there were lively debates about Zionism, blood libels, ghosts, Yerushalmi, Arendt and so much more. Sometimes Elsa the lovely dog softly snored on Matti’s lap, while other times my precious son, Shalev - just a few months old - looked on intently from my lap. As I said: a truly wonderful environment.

DOV WEISS ON HIS NEW BOOK PIOUS IRREVERENCE: CONFRONTING GOD IN RABBINIC JUDAISM

In Pious Irreverence: Confronting God in Rabbinic Judaism, I argue that the protest of God tradition in Judaism is not simply the result of difficult recent historical circumstances – as some have asserted – but is rooted in the most canonical of Jewish works. I demonstrate that in ancient Judaism, the idea of debating God was itself a matter of debate. During the early rabbinic period (second and third century), the sages explicitly opposed challenging God, but in the later rabbinic period, from the fourth to the seventh centuries, a more complex attitude began to emerge, albeit subtly, in some rabbinic circles as sages began to imagine biblical heroes criticizing God. By elucidating these competing views about confronting God and exploring their theological assumptions, my study also makes a larger argument about ancient Jewish ethics and theology. Based on the evidence from the later rabbinic period, it challenges the scholarly assumption that the rabbis conceived of God as a morally perfect being whose goodness therefore had to be defended even in the face of biblical accounts of unethical divine action. Pious Irreverence examines the ways in which the rabbis searched the words of the Torah for hidden meanings that could grant them the moral authority to express doubt about, and frustration with, the biblical God. Using biblical characters as their mouthpieces, they often challenged God’s behavior. And, remarkably, in a few instances, the sages even envisioned God conceding error, declaring to the protestor, “You have taught Me something, I will nullify My decree and accept your word.” (Numbers Rabbah 19:33)
OKLA ELLIOTT JOB ANNOUNCEMENT

I have been offered and have accepted a position of assistant professor in the English Department at Misericordia University in northeast Pennsylvania, just two hours from NYC and Philadelphia. I will teach world literature and creative writing, an ideal combination for me, given that I have an MFA from Ohio State University and just this summer completed my PhD in comparative literature at the University of Illinois. Perhaps as appealing as the job description itself is the fact that the university is dedicated to social justice, including in its mission statement the goal of eliminating poverty via education.

But this dream job would have remained just that, a dream, without everything I’ve learned at the University of Illinois and all of the support I have received here. I can say with perfect honesty that I have had what can only be described as the ideal graduate school experience here. I was admitted with an Illinois Distinguished Fellowship, which allowed me to take coursework and write both creative and scholarly works unhindered by teaching obligations for three years. Then during two years of teaching, I was offered TA positions for world literature overview courses as well as being allowed to teach the 300-level Literary Representations of the Holocaust as a sole instructor, using my own syllabus.

I have to thank Brett Ashley Kaplan first and foremost. She helped me receive a summer fellowship to Northwestern University’s Holocaust Educational Foundation and was directly responsible for my being able to teach the aforementioned advanced Holocaust literature course. These two facts helped lead to my success in receiving the position at Misericordia University, as I have been asked by the department head of English at Misericordia University to develop an advanced Holocaust literature and film course which I will teach annually.

I also have to thank the HGMS Program for excellent courses I took over the years. I would also like to thank Nancy Blake, George Gasyna, Cary Nelson, and Michael Rothberg who have worked with me in various capacities (coursework, comprehensive exams, dissertation, etc.) during my time at Illinois. I likewise must thank my fellow graduate students, particularly Priscilla Charrat and Matt Nelson, who discussed difficult problems (theoretical and practical) with me more times than I can recount. I owe all of you and the institution itself a debt I can never repay. Earning my PhD and becoming a professor are particularly meaningful for me, given that I am among the first generation of my family to even graduate high school. Teaching at the university level has been my career goal since I was a teenager. Given my background and the current academic market, I know how lucky I am to have this opportunity, and I know who made it possible. Thank you all.

ANNA HARBAUGH ON HER DISSERTATION

My dissertation focuses on the ways in which Eastern European Jewish migration, travel, and increased connectivity influenced conceptions and performance of religious, ethnic, and national belonging for Georgian Jews during the period of the independent Georgian republic, 1918 to 1921. I aim to recreate the social and intellectual spheres within which Jews negotiated and performed ethnicity, during a time in which nationalist conceptions of Georgia as a mono-ethnic state gained momentum. I will explore the ways in which Georgian Jews created a space within the independent Georgian republic in which they simultaneously celebrated Georgian nationality and found a public sphere for the articulation of ethnic difference.
ALEX VAN DOREN ON REMOBILIZING THE EPITAPH: REPRESENTATION AND EXCAVATION OF MASS GRAVES IN POLAND AND SPAIN

My project seeks to construct a shared skeleton of trauma and representation of mass graves between two national histories, Polish and Spanish, that have previously been portrayed as entirely separate entities. I plan to investigate the paradox of the Spanish mass graves as invisible monuments that function as concealed landmarks, denoting an assertion of political power juxtaposed with the mass graves in Eastern Poland that functioned in precisely the opposite way. While both the Spanish and Polish graves contained the bodies of political and camp prisoners often executed en masse by way of shooting, the sole purpose of the Polish mass grave was to act as an erasure of history, leaving no monument of Jewish existence, invisible or otherwise, but only the complete disintegration of Jewish life. The malleability of this theoretical Spanish joint within a Polish socket speaks to the contention that the mass executions, construction of mass graves, excavations, etc., are structural phenomena rather than national.

ALEX IS ONE OF THE RECIPIENTS OF THE GENDELL FAMILY AND SHINER FAMILY FELLOWSHIP

SCARLETT ANDES ON WRITING THEIR NAMES ON THE WALLS: REMEMBERING AND FORGETTING IN JEWISH MONTREAL

This thesis examines a particular interest in the past among members of the Jewish community in Montreal. I propose that Jewish memory work in Montreal is characterized by the act of “inscribing,” physically or symbolically marking places to claim them as testimony to the Jewish lives that once inhabited them. This work is driven by a desire to retell the particular history of the Jewish community with a focus on the first half of the 20th century. While this type of interaction with memory may be found in other communities with comparable histories, the city of Montreal provides specific sociopolitical and linguistic contexts that played pivotal roles in shaping this community’s identity and relationship with its past.

SCARLETT IS THE RECIPIENT OF THE RONALD FILLER SCHOLARSHIP
The contemporary memorial building-boom led me to consider the factors behind the upsurge in memory-driven projects. My dissertation examines the contemporary social, political and visual tensions that become apparent in positioning memorialization projects funded by governments or corporate entities against personal or community-based commemorations, which follow an aesthetic impulse of their own. My initial investigation into the process of contemporarily commemorating a range of politically and contextually distinctive traumatic events, the Holocaust, totalitarian regimes in Czechoslovakia, 9/11, Hurricane Katrina and the Bosnian War, has uncovered a fascinating array of sociopolitical repercussions which are both revealed and concealed during the development of these projects and are rendered visible in the final structures.

During my research trip to Eastern Europe this May, I met with several human rights organizations that are doing amazing work. Much of their work is focused on exposing how politics is becoming increasingly intertwined with memory, including how certain political parties, namely in Hungary, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, are revising history for their political goals. Here is a small sample of the work that two organizations are sponsoring.

Based out of Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Post-Conflict Research Center (PCRC) is a non-profit organization committed to cultivating an environment for sustainable peace in BiH. They sponsor creative multimedia projects that foster tolerance, mutual understanding and positive change in the greater Balkans region. Among the multiple conferences, youth initiatives, student programs and community outreach initiatives they organize, they are currently running a campaign to support the One Million Bones Project as part of the 20th commemoration of the Srebrenica Genocide. This project was initiated by The Art of Revolution in Washington DC in 2013 as a way to petition against ongoing genocide and mass atrocities around the world. This group is now working with PCRC to bring 100,000 bones to the Sebrenica-Potocari Memorial Center to be displayed as part of a permanent memorial at the site.

For more information about the PCRC visit: http://www.p-crc.org/

For more on the One Million Bones Project and to support their campaign visit:
http://www.onemillionbones.net/
http://www.gofundme.com/wfdv24

The Open Society Archives supports a wide range of academic and research initiatives including the creative reuse of the Srebrenica Genocide. This project was initiated by The Art of Revolution in Washington DC in 2013 as a way to petition against ongoing genocide and mass atrocities around the world. This group is now working with PCRC to bring 100,000 bones to the Sebrenica-Potocari Memorial Center to be displayed as part of a permanent memorial at the site.

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http://www.gofundme.com/wfdv24

The Open Society Archives supports a wide range of academic and research initiatives including the creative reuse
and engagement with their archive, which is based on a collection of Cold War and Human Rights resources. The OSA also partners with several projects, one of which is the Yellow Star Houses Project. This project aims to raise awareness of the forced relocation of 220,000 Budapest Jews in 1944. These individuals were moved into one of the 1,944 designated apartment buildings marked with a yellow star, known as the “yellow-star” houses. The Project combines an interactive website with documents, a list of houses, a chronology, a glossary, and a place to submit testimonies and recollections. On June 21, 2014, on the 70th anniversary of the mass relocation, the Project launched their website along with an exhibit and commemorative events.

An explanation of the Project’s larger mandate from their website: “As well as presenting this history of the Holocaust in Budapest, our aim is to remind contemporary Hungarian society of the tragedy, and of the need to face up to the responsibility borne by the Hungarian political class and society of the time. We are thus concerned to emphasize our shared moral responsibility toward both the past, and the present. Finally, we want to emphasize the historical and moral indefensibility of the recurring mantras of post-Communist right-wing historical revisionism: the contemporary glorification of the interwar period, the trivialization of the role antisemitism played in the 1920s and 1930s, and the culpability of the interwar governing elite and broader politically active social groups, still swept under the carpet today.”

For more information visit their website: http://www.yellowstarhouses.org/

Or contact Gwen Jones, International Communications Coordinator: gwenjones@yellowstarhouses.org

HARRIET MURAV’S TALK AT CHICAGO YIVO

Harriet Murav gave a talk at Chicago YIVO about the Yiddish play PRINCE REUVENI by David Bergelson. In 1946, in the aftermath of the destruction of Jewish culture and millions of Jewish lives, Solomon Mikhoels, director of the Moscow State Yiddish Theatre, and David Bergelson, the great Yiddish author, return to sixteenth-century Jewish history—to the time of the false Messiah David Reuveni and the Inquisition—to make a bold comparison between the 16th century and the 20th century. David Reuveni was an actual historical figure, who sought and received support from Pope Clement VII and the king of Portugal to drive the Turks out of Jerusalem. Reuveni claimed to be the ambassador of the Jewish kingdom of Habor. In 1948, Solomon Mikhoels would be dead; a couple of years later, so would Bergelson. And yet in 1946, both Bergelson and Mikhoels work tirelessly on producing this play, which is ultimately about Jewish salvation. The last lines of the play: “du kempst, mayn folk—dos heyst—du lebst, mayn folk” (“you fight, my people, which means, you live, my people”).
The Program for Jewish Society and Culture is excited to report on plans to expand our offerings for undergraduates interested in majoring, minoring, or just taking a course in Jewish Studies. Our course offerings are broader and more varied than ever, with our strong Hebrew and Yiddish programs enriched by the arrival of Sara Feldman, our new Hebrew language lecturer, and our visiting JUF supported Israel Studies Project postdoctoral fellow, Vered Weiss. Some of the highlights in the fall 2015 curriculum include courses on literary responses to the Holocaust, readings in the Talmud, and “Muslims, and Christians and Jews in Medieval Iberia.” In fall 2016 we look forward to premiering our undergraduate seminar JS 199, a team-taught interdisciplinary course which will introduce students to the key dimensions of Jewish Studies through guest lectures from our faculty.

The most important project we have in the works is a new course on Jewish Chicago. We hope to offer this class in the first summer session 2016 (runs from May 16 - June 11, 2016). The course will be taught in Chicago, where students will visit sites that reveal the rich Jewish cultural, economic, and political life of the “city of broad shoulders.” We will take a field trip to Chicago’s first synagogue, Kehilath Anshe Mayriv (KAM), founded at the corner of Lake and Wells in 1847 by a group of Jewish immigrants from Germany. Our course will compare the experiences of this group of Jews, many of whom became merchants and shop keepers with their children entering medicine and law, with the waves of immigrants from Eastern Europe – close to 50,000 – who settled into the neighborhoods around Maxwell Street on the Near West Side starting in the 1880’s. These “Russian” immigrants worked in the clothing and tobacco industries. We’ll study how Chicago Jews working in overcrowded, unsanitary factories, faced with long hours, hazardous working conditions, and child labor, built up the Jewish socialist movement and the Jewish trade union movement in the fight for better working conditions. We will visit the sites of union halls, sweatshops, strikes, and demonstrations, including Haymarket Square. We’ll explore the vital artistic imprint of Chicago’s Jewish communities, especially the many Yiddish theater companies that thrived around the turn of the nineteenth century, visiting the site of the Yiddish Theater Group at 716 W. De Koven St: established in 1887, it was still producing theater in 1951.

The course will contextualize our study of Jewish Chicago in terms of American history, urban history, gender history, and labor history, always seeking to understand how the events that shaped Jewish Chicago were related to global
When we are not out and about in the greater Chicago area, we hope to make the Newberry Library our classroom base. With the archival sources in the collection we will engage students in the fundamentals of research. Using the library’s family research files, diaries, ship manifests, Chicago newspapers, and neighborhood guides students will choose and research a topic connected to Chicago’s Jewish history. The course will culminate with a poster session in which students will share their findings.

In conjunction with the course, the Program will offer an undergraduate student an internship in events planning and co-ordination during spring 2016. The intern will help to prepare the field trips and excursions for the course. The intern will earn college credit for the work he or she does through English 199: Writing to Get that Job, an online one-credit, eight-week class.

We welcome any of our supporters who live in the Chicagoland area to join us for the excursions in the city or for our class discussions. We will make our daily schedule available and as always we welcome your feedback and suggestions.
THE PROGRAM IN JEWISH CULTURE & SOCIETY

THE STAFF

Brett Kaplan, Director
Dana Rabin, Associate Director
Michael Rothberg, Director, Initiative in Holocaust, Genocide, and Memory Studies
Craig Alexander, Assistant to the Director

THE FACULTY

Eugene Avrutin* (History): European Jewish History; Jews of Imperial Russia
Dale Bauer* (English): American Women’s Literature
Liza Berdychevsky (Recreation, Sport & Tourism): Gender & Tourism; Jewish Tourism
Edward Bruner (Anthropology): Anthropology of Tourism; Jewish Travel
Kenneth Cuno (History): History of the Middle East; Egypt
Virginia Dominguez* (Anthropology): Anthropology of Peoplehood; Israel
Sara Feldman* Hebrew and Yiddish Lecturer
Peter Fritzsche (History): Twentieth-Century German History; Third Reich
George Gasyna (Slavic): Polish Literature; Polish-Jewish Relations
Dara Goldman* (Spanish): Hispanic Caribbean; Jews of the Caribbean
Fred Gottheil (Economics): Economics of the Middle East; Israel
Alma Gottlieb (Anthropology): West Africa; Jews of Cape Verde
Jessica Greenberg (Anthropology): Democracy; Postsocialism; Youth Movements
James Hansen (English): British/Irish Modernism; Frankfurt School
Rachel Harris* (Comparative Literature): Hebrew Literature; Israeli Cultural Studies
Javier Irigoyen-Garcia (Spanish): Golden Age Spain
Lilya Kaganovsky (Comparative Literature): Soviet Culture
Brett Kaplan* (Comparative Literature): Holocaust Representation in Art and Literature, Modern Jewish Literature
Sayed Kashua (Israel Studies Project Visiting Professor): Creative Writing; Hebrew
Wynne Korr (Social Work): Mental Health Policy; Social Work Education
Harry Liebersohn (History): European Intellectual History
Harriet Murav* (Comparative Literature): Russian- and Soviet-Jewish Writing; Yiddish
Cary Nelson (English): Modern American Poetry; Poetics of Anti-Semitism
Carl Niekerk (German): German Cultural History; Vienna 1900
Wayne Pitard* (Religion): History of Ancient Syria; Bible
Gary Porton (Religion): Rabbinics; Judaism in Late Antiquity (emeritus)
David Price (Religion): Jewish-Christian Relations in Early-Modern Europe
Dana Rabin* (History): Early Modern British History; Minorities in British History
Bruce Rosenstock* (Religion): Jewish Thought; Messianism in the Jewish Tradition
Richard Ross (Law): Legal pluralism; Natural Law
Emanuel Rota (Italian): European Intellectual History; Fascism
Michael Rothberg* (English): Holocaust Representation; Holocaust and Postcoloniality
Mahir Saul (Anthropology): West Africa; Sephardic
Michael Shapiro (English): Shakespeare and the Jews (emeritus)
Marek Sroka (Library): Jewish Studies in Eastern Europe
Mara Wade (German): Early Modern German Literature
Terri Weisman (Art History): History of Photography
Dov Weiss* (Religion): Biblical Interpretation, Rabbinic Literature, Jewish Thought
Vered Weiss Postdoctoral Research Associate, Israeli Literature
Yasemin Yildiz (German): German-Jewish literature; Holocaust Studies

* Members of the Program in Jewish Culture & Society Executive Committee.
JEWISH CULTURE AND SOCIETY COURSES FALL 2015

COMPARATIVE LITERATURE
CWL 151: Israeli Cinema and TV
Vered Weiss (2nd 8 week course)

CWL 320: Literary Responses to the Holocaust
Brett Kaplan

CWL 471: Muslims, Christians and Jews in Medieval Iberia
Eric Calderwood

GERMAN
GER 260: The Holocaust in Context
Petra Watzke

HEBREW
HEBR 201: Elementary Modern Hebrew I
Sara Feldman

HEBR 205: Intensive Biblical Hebrew
Bruce Rosenstock

HEBR 403: Intermediate Modern Hebrew I
Sara Feldman

HEBR 405: Advanced Modern Hebrew I
Sayed Kashua

HISTORY
HIST 252: The Holocaust
Peter Fritzsche

HIST 269: Jewish History since 1700
Eugene AvruGn

HIST 456: Twentieth-Century Germany
Peter Fritzsche

HIST 472: Immigrant America
Augusto Espiritu

PHILOSOPHY
PHIL 230: Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion
Robert McKim

POLITICAL SCIENCE
PS 347: Government and Politics of the Middle East
Instructor TBA

RELIGION
RLST 101: The Bible as Literature
Richard Layton

RLST 106: Archaeology and the Bible
Charles Huff

RLST 108: Religion and Society in the West I
Bruce Rosenstock

RLST 110: World Religions
Dov Weiss

RLST 235: History of Religion in America
Jonathan Ebel

RLST 415: Introductory Readings of the Talmud
Dov Weiss

RLST 496: Topics in the History of Judaism
Instructor TBA

RLST 498: Topics in Biblical Studies
Instructor TBA

SOCIAL WORK
SOCW 300: Diversity: Identities & Issues
Leah Cleeland

YIDDISH
YDSH 101: Elementary Yiddish I
Sara Feldman
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