I am delighted to write this note at the beginning of another exciting year for the Program in Jewish Culture & Society at the University of Illinois.

First off, I am thrilled to announce the arrival of our new colleague – Rachel S. Harris. Rachel has just been appointed Assistant Professor of Hebrew Literature/ Israeli Cultural Studies. For the first time in the history of the Program in Jewish Culture & Society and the University of Illinois, we now have a full-time faculty member in Israel Studies. This hire was made possible by the special relationship between the University and the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago. Together, we have been running “The Israel Studies Project,” an innovative collaboration designed to bring Israeli writers and artists to Urbana-Champaign for short-term visits. Last year, we took the relationship to the next level by announcing a jointly financed permanent position. We ran an international search that resulted in Rachel’s hire. We couldn’t be more pleased – and you will know why when you read her profile in these pages.

This year, we will formally kick off our new Initiative in Holocaust, Memory, and Genocide Studies. Under the directorship of Michael Rothberg, we have an ambitious agenda: we will provide fundamental education and community outreach on the history and legacies of genocide, racism, and anti-Semitism; promote cutting-edge research on the ethical, political, and cultural implications of extreme violence; and, most important, develop responses and offer resources to counter the continued threat of genocide. The launch of the Initiative will take place during a joint visit by James Young and Shimon Attie in October, followed by a state-of-the-art conference on the Holocaust in comparative context in November.

Everything we do is made possible by our friends and donors. The faculty we hire, the courses we teach, the public lectures we organize, the workshops we convene – the entire presence of Jewish Studies at Illinois – it all comes from the support of our contributors. We want to thank all of our friends who continue to give with such generosity. We simply couldn’t do our work without them.

We are proud to thank all of our donors in this Newsletter. But let me take this opportunity to give special acknowledgment to Norman Ascherman. A long-term friend and donor of the Program, he passed away in July 2008 at the age of 81. He generously remembered the Program in his will. We are honored to preserve his legacy through our work at the University of Illinois.

If you are interested in becoming a friend of the Program, please don’t hesitate to get in touch with me at bunzl@illinois.edu. Even the smallest contribution makes a difference!

Matti Bunzl
Director, Program in Jewish Culture & Society
Professor, Department of Anthropology
MICHAEL ROTHBERG ON HIS WORK IN HOLOCAUST STUDIES

What happens when different histories of extreme violence confront each other in the public sphere? Does the remembrance of one event erase others from view? When memories of colonialism and slavery bump up against memories of the Holocaust in contemporary multicultural societies, must a competition of victims ensue? Such problems of remembrance, justice, and comparison have preoccupied me over the last several years as I have worked on my new book, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization.* In that book I focus on some exemplary sites of tension revolving around remembrance of the Nazi genocide of European Jews in order to offer a new framework for thinking about and confronting the recent “memory wars.”

Many discussions of collective memory today are based on the logic of the zero-sum game, a logic in which evocation of sites of tension revolving around remembrance of the Holocaust and African American identity is said to relativize or even deny the Holocaust’s uniqueness. The literary critic Walter Benn Michaels presents a sharp version of this argument in a typically provocative discussion of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Evoking the perspective of African Americans whom he suggests are frustrated by the absence of commemoration of their traumatic history on the Mall in Washington, D.C., Michaels asks if “commemoration of the Nazi murder of the Jews on the Mall [might not] in fact [be] another kind of Holocaust denial.” It is not difficult to understand the frustration of individuals and groups who feel, often justly, that their histories have been marginalized by the mainstream. The problem with Michaelis’s account lies not in the feelings he describes but in the logic he ascribes to the workings of public memory. Michaels assumes that both memory and the public sphere are defined by a logic of scarcity: in this familiar scenario, an excess of Holocaust memory is deemed responsible for the dearth of remembrance of slavery and the lack of acknowledgment of the ongoing forms of racism suffered by African Americans. Although few people would put the matter in such controversial terms, many other commentators, both inside and outside the academy, share the understanding of collective memory articulated by Michaels. But are such conflicts of memory best described as a zero-sum competition over scarce resources? Is the problem really the presence of Holocaust memory or does the source of injustice in fact lie elsewhere? Could it even be the case that memory of the Holocaust can be a vehicle for redressing the deficits in recognition of other histories, such as those of slavery and American racism? After all, even Michaels himself uses a reference to the Nazi genocide to bring dramatic attention to “another kind of Holocaust.”

In my new book, I address the omnipresence of memory conflict in order to offer a novel way of thinking about the presence of the past in multicultural societies. Over the course of several years of research on different national contexts I have come to see that collective memories of different histories—such as those of slavery, the Holocaust, and colonialism—do not neatly separate from each other. I have discovered not only that memory of the Holocaust has served as a vehicle through which other histories of suffering have been articulated, but also something even more surprising: the emergence of Holocaust memory itself was from the start infected by histories that at first glance might seem to have little to do with it. The very period during which an international public learned about the extent of Nazi destruction and slowly started to come to terms with it was also the era of decolonization—a time when the world order was shifting radically due to the onset of the Cold War and the collapse of the European colonial system. Historians and cultural critics have almost entirely ignored this conjunction of world-historical events. But by focusing on the unlikely pairing of Holocaust memory and decolonization, I have been able to offer new accounts of both the postwar period and the workings of memory.

Besides targeting the problem of zero-sum thinking and bringing together histories that are usually kept separate, my research questions another one of the cornerstones of the memory wars, namely the taken for granted link between collective memory and group identity—the direct line that seems to bind, for example, Jewish memory and Jewish identity and to differentiate it clearly from African American memory and African American identity. As my book reveals, however, memory of the Holocaust is not simply a form of Jewish memory, just as memory of slavery or colonialism is not limited to the victims or descendants of slavery and colonialism. Instead, by peeling behind the zero-sum presuppositions of the competitive model of memory, I have unearthed a dialogic process in which diverse historical experiences provide each other with a hybrid vocabulary of remembrance. Not separation and competition best describe the relation between Holocaust memory and the memory of other events, but echoing and creative adaptation. In the place of competitive memory, then, I propose a theory of multidirectional memory that rediscovers the public sphere as a field of contestation where memories interact productively and in unexpected ways. By making visible an intellectual and artistic counter tradition that resists the dominant zero-sum game and instead links memories of Nazi genocide, colonialism, and slavery, I reveal how the public articulation of collective memory by marginalized and oppositional social groups provides resources for other groups to articulate their own claims for recognition and justice.
Article by Marguerite Duras in France-Observateur

the Holocaust directly, Du Bois reflected on the significance of the Jewish experience during World War II for the global problem of race. The result of his visit, he wrote, “and particularly of my view of the Negro problem of race in the United States was no longer in my mind . . . a relation that neither erases their differences nor fetishizes their uniqueness.”

About a decade after Du Bois published “The Negro and the Warsaw Ghetto,” the French writer Marguerite Duras also took inspiration from the ghetto to put forward another vision of solidarity against the backdrop of difference. In a short interview-based article for the French newsweekly France-Observateur called “Les deux ghettos” [The Two Ghettos] (1961), Duras brought together a survivor of Warsaw and a pair of Algerian workers. In the article, Duras asks her interviewees about their living conditions and about how they see their experiences in relation to other histories. While the title of the piece seems to suggest an equation between the ghettos that held Jews during World War II and those that held Algerians at a late stage of colonialism, the actual answers provided suggest as many asymmetries as similarities. The comparison of Algerians in France and a Jewish survivor of the Holocaust may seem strange today, but its context is all important. On October 17, 1961, during the late stages of the Algerian War of Independence, tens of thousands of Algerians attempted to march through central Paris to protest a racist curfew that had been instituted. The Algerians were immediately met with brutal repression by the Paris police: up to 200 people were killed that night and more than 11,000 were arrested and brought to makeshift camps (often in sports stadiums) at the edges of the city. The murder and roundup of people marked as other in the middle of Paris awakened memories of the Holocaust for many who witnessed it: comparisons abound — especially among those who opposed the French war in Algeria — with the infamous Vel’ d’Hiv’ roundup of July 1942 in which thousands of Jews living in Paris were arrested and held in a bicycle-racing stadium before being deported toward the east. Another article published in France-Observateur in late 1961 is accompanied by a photograph of Algerians held in another sports stadium that bears the caption “Doesn’t that remind you of something?” — a clear reference to the arrest of Jews by the Nazis and their French collaborators. Like “The Negro and the Warsaw Ghetto,” these French articles demonstrate a multidirectional sensibility — a tendency to see history as relational and as woven from similar, but not identical, fabrics.

The examples of Du Bois and Duras come from two moments when the meanings of Nazi Jewish policies had not yet solidified into the current, widely held understanding of the Holocaust as “a separate and unique thing.” They thus provide us with the opportunity to observe a now almost forgotten understanding of the Shoah in which its specificity was grasped at the same time that its potential links to other histories of racism were also in view. A model of competitive memory cannot explain the dynamic, multidirectional interactions that these examples illustrate. Du Bois and Duras help us see that history is an echo chamber and practices of memory can establish fidelity to its echoes.
GEORGE GASYNA DISCUSSES HIS WORK ON AND WITH THE BORDERLAND FOUNDATION IN SEJNY, POLAND

Several years ago the Foundation contracted me to collaborate on an English translation of a memory book they had published in Polish, entitled Kroki Sejnskie (The Sejny Chronicles). The work constitutes an important contribution to the field of Polish cultural history, including the history of minority cultures, and in particular Jewish history — though in a somewhat paradoxical way. It consists of a series of historical documents and artifacts (copies of photographs, fragments of old newspapers, city ordinances and the like), along with interviews of town elders conducted by the youngest generation of Sejnskis: a group of local school children and teenagers.

The first question someone unfamiliar with contemporary Polish culture might ask is, why establish a foundation devoted to historical research of this sort in a place like Sejny — that is to say, a sleepy town of about five thousand, located as far away as one can be from Warsaw and other metropolitan centers, and equally far from the routes and pathways of international travel. The Foundation offers the following raison d’être:

We have chosen Sejny... because elements of the material and spiritual legacy are still present here. The main street with the White Synagogue recalls Jewish presence; the little evangelical church reminds us of Protestants... In the vicinity of the town one can also find many traces of Russian Old Believers, and if we move further south and east, we may find more territories of cultural interpretation... We are trying to gather the wisdom and richness of borders — a wealth which results from coexistence of different traditions and beliefs. We are searching for... a language which can make the elders’ wisdom available to the young generation and inspire new artistic, pedagogical and scientific research.

As can be surmised from this, the keystone of the Foundation’s mission has been to elaborate a sense of local East European identity and subjectivity. Yet the territorial locators invoked above are important for another reason: this particular space of cultural interpretation, the borderland region, is richly layered. It forms a kind of ethnological palimpsest.

Such sites of contested, reconstructed, and revived memory are often subject to politicization; they are typically attendant to the cultural agenda of the state — in particular regions in which the memories are internally divided or divisive. To determine how Poles lived alongside their Jewish, German, and Lithuanian neighbors in borderland cities/often has been of immense interest to the self-definition of the Polish state as a liberal democracy, ever since its regaining of full independence in 1989.

The Borderland Foundation has been a leader — if not the leader — in this type of reconstructive work in post-socialist Poland, both in its cultural initiatives and in the practice of everyday life in Sejny, as it plays itself out in the form of artistic gatherings, festivals, concerts, plays, conferences, and the like. It is noteworthy, given the situatedness of cultural practice, that at least two of the buildings in which the foundation carries out its activities (and either owns outright or leases on subsidy) were Jewish structures before 1939: a synagogue and an adjacent yeshiva. Both structures were restored and in a sense recycled, but obviously not to their original functions and, by extension, to their former architectural value.

Yet for all the stated sincerity and sensitivity in wishing to re-create a sense of continuity and place through an impressively mapped oral history initiative, one encounters a problematic omission. The authentic voice of the minorities, in particular the Jewish voice, is notable mainly for its absence: indeed, local Christian Poles were the only interviewees for this memory project. And despite the fact that Christian and Jewish communities were largely intertwined in pre-1939 Poland, if not mutually assimilating, it goes without saying that the perspective of the Jewish community on the interwar years may have been dramatically different from the Christian view.

Today, the Jewish community of Sejny signifies an absent presence, and is marked as such in the Sejny Chronicles narrative. November 1939, the reader learns, is the date of the forced expulsion of Sejny’s Jews from the town, followed by a period of Nazi massacres. Only a handful of members of that community (which...
In my current research into the interwar period in Poland I am looking for ways of disentangling some of these overlaying narratives, paying special attention to contested memories and competing interests while also attempting to show that the historians and fates of Poles of all ethnic backgrounds and religions faiths were, indeed, largely intermeshed in the revived Polish Republic which existed between the two World Wars. To this end, I would be very interested in hearing from anyone who may have information about the Jewish community in Sejny and the surrounding area -- and I would be glad to share it with the editors of the Sejny Chronicles, in order to help complete the picture.

Certainly, one might be led to believe that is better than nothing, since the Chronicles seems to be a heartfelt attempt to reconstruct a large part of a social canvas that had been violently torn off. But the representational lacuna is resolved with a sort of guileless simplicity -- almost entirely through the mouths of children "researchers" relying on the memories of elderly first-hand witnesses -- suggestive of an immediate malleability of the multiple ethnic backgrounds and religions faiths that were being excavated and reassembled. In all, while important and certain laudable for its efforts to render a sense of exhilaration: "There's enormous joy in my soul, because my lifelong dream will finally begin to be fulfilled."

In 1915, a year after the third and final expedition, An-sky reported that the expedition had taken "more than two thousand photographs of old synagogues, and their internal decorations, Jewish historical buildings, ethnographic types, scenes from daily life and recorded "more than 1800 folktales." An-sky envisioned using the cultural artifacts collected and purchased over the course of the three expeditions -- the manuscripts, costumes, relics, various types of ritual and domestic objects, photographs, oral histories, folktales, legends, and songs -- as primary source material for the first systematic ethnographic study of Russian Jew. He sketched an outline for a vast and ambitious study of Jewish life and customs in the Russian Empire, a book he tentatively titled "Jews in their Daily and Religious Life" (Evrei v ikh bytovoi i religioznoi zhizni). The first chapter would begin with a discussion of Jewish beliefs about the life of the individual before birth, while the last chapter was to describe life beyond the grave. In between An-sky intended to cover education, military service, marriage and sexuality (including cases of deformity and "fallen women"), religious life, morality, Jewish norms regarding the relationship between human beings and nature, Jewish folk medicine, prayers, customs, and rituals, synagogues, Jewish legal procedures, welfare societies, messianism, Zionism, the Jewish enlightenment movement, Jewish participation in revolutionary
movements, art and literature in Hebrew and Yiddish, and, in a self-reflexive gesture, Jewish scholarship on Jews, thereby enshrining a place for his own work in the Jewish universe that the study was supposed to embody.

The book never came to fruition, but An-sky’s tireless ethnographic work helped preserve fragments of a civilization wiped away by subsequent wars, revolutions, and genocide. Contemporary Ukraine has little memory of the rich cultural and religious traditions, institutions, and multiple ethnic identities that once inhabited the land. Among the first representations of Jewish culture and society in pre-Revolutionary Russia, the photographs taken by the Jewish ethnographic expedition provide visual texture of a world that has largely been erased from contemporary Ukrainian memory, offering snapshots that rarely appear in written sources: clothing customs and fashions; occupational practices and objects of ritual devotion; the poverty and squalor of small town life; and the facial expressions and emotions of ordinary Jews. In remarkable detail, Solomon Iudovin, the young photographer who accompanied An-sky on his expeditions, captured the diversity of the customs and rituals of Jewish life in a rapidly changing milieu: the marketplaces where families bought and sold goods, the homes in which Jews lived, the prayer houses in which Jews prayed, and the shops, work benches, and factories in which men and women pried their trade. The photographs reflect An-sky’s particular interest in the Jewish people themselves: teachers instructing students in tiny crammed kheyders; children playing in courtyards during school breaks; and spinners, rope-makers, tailors, tombstone engravers, blacksmiths, and metal workers engaged in a plethora of trades and occupations in shops, factories, and streets.

However rich and emotionally compelling the images may be, they are nonetheless the product of a specific ideological project, requiring critical reading and interpretation to understand the intellectual motivations that guided the work of the ethnographic expedition itself as well as the broader societal changes and cultural differences captured by the photographs. An-sky departed to the provinces to uncover what he saw as an authentic Jewish past preserved in the lives and customs of provincial Jews, but he came away with something else. Like so many other European anthropologists and ethnographers of his time, An-sky felt a sense of urgency to record, in an encyclopedic and totalizing fashion, an integrated, holistic, and authentic universe before it began to vanish. The desire to document an organic civilization, however, was also designed to transform an entire generation of assimilated Jews whom An-sky saw as alienated from all aspects of their cultural heritage. By creating a national Jewish culture in the most concrete terms, An-sky hoped to provide a cure for an “epidemic” that had left assimilated Russian Jews indifferent to their own community, religion, ways of life, and history. We use the word “nation” in our title – as something more than a collection of separate individuals and something less than a political entity – to suggest the ways that An-sky sought to promote cultural renewal for a people whose historical origins provided a sense of commonality.

An-sky’s ethnographic work is thus caught up in the ambivalent task not only of preserving and salvaging the Jewish past, but also depicting the ways in which Jewish life had transformed in religious, economic, and social terms. Both An-sky and Iudovin were clearly compelled by a powerful sense of the fragility and the monumental importance of the Jewish world their work sought to capture. Their active political orientations, artistic sensibility, and the influence of scientific-ethnographic ideas of the time, however, played a key role in the images they created. Carefully crafted and informed by a rich cultural heritage and visual culture, the photographs of the Jewish ethnographic expedition help us to critically re-examine economic, social, and religious change in Jewish communities around 1900: the fissures of class due to rapid economic modernization, the introduction of new fashions for women and men, and the gradual disappearance of religious piety in urban spaces. While Iudovin’s woodcuts based on the images taken during the expeditions have become emblematic of the unchanging, fixed image of the shtetl Jew, the photographs reveal a striking tension between salvaging images for the future and documenting the need to change the social reality that gave rise to these images.
HARRETT MURAV EDITING NEW BOOK SERIES
BORDERLINES: RUSSIAN AND EAST EUROPEAN-JEWISH STUDIES

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the subsequent opening of archives has enabled scholars to re-examine and re-imagine a wide range of subjects related to the field of Russian and East European culture, particularly in connection with Jewish Studies. Harriet Murav, working together with other scholars, has created a new book series, Borderlines: Russian and East European Jewish Studies (Academic Studies Press), to address this important emerging field. The series promotes the development and publication of new work from a broad range of disciplines, including history, literature, and the visual arts—which will produce new knowledge in Russian and East-European Jewish Studies.

This new series will publish works that introduce new materials and open new perspectives on the dynamic between Russian and Jewish cultural relations. Borderlines seeks to (1) challenge our existing definitions and assumptions regarding Jewish Studies and its place in Russian and East European studies; (2) emphasize new theoretical approaches; and (3) closely parse formal structures to discover new meanings, or trace themes or tropes across disciplines, languages, geographical regions, and time periods. The resulting series will provide valuable insights for a wide range of scholars in both Slavic and Jewish studies, each adding to and complementing the existing scholarship being conducted in both disciplines.

To date, the series is planning on publishing several new, exciting manuscripts whose scholarship meets these criteria. From Religious Mythopoetics to Political Myth: Kabbalistic Imagery in Russian Literature, by Marina Aptekman, explores the fascinating and neglected topic of Jewish mystical and kabbalistic ideas, images, and beliefs in Russian literature. It introduces readers to new materials in Russian literature and history, highlighting an intriguing and forgotten symbiosis between Jewish religious and Russian literary culture. Jews in the East European Borderlands: Daily Life, Violence, and Memory, edited by Eugene Avrutin and Harriet Murav, comprises a volume of essays from leading scholars in the US, Russia, and Israel that explores Russian, East European, and Jewish cultural interaction from the 19th century through the present day by focusing on daily life, violence, and memory. Marat Ginzburg’s, The Poetics of Boris Slutsky, is another valuable addition to our roster. Slutsky (1925-1986) was a major original figure of Russian poetry of the second half of the 20th century, whose oeuvre has remained critically unexplored and unstudied in both Russian and English. Henrietta Mordov’s The Jew’s Body in Russian Culture, 1880s to the Present, presents an important and original argument about the centrality and persistence of a negative stereotype of the weak, sickly, parasitic and over-sexed Jewish male body in Russian literature authored by both non-Jews and Jews.

Borderlines: Russian and East European Jewish Studies — Academic Studies Press
Editor: Harriet Murav
Editorial Board: Mikhail Arbuzov, University of Michigan, Alice Nakhimovsky, Cogitare University David Shneer, University of Colorado; Anna Shmel, University of Toronto

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Michael Berkowitz, Professor of History in the Department of Hebrew and Jewish Studies at University College London, presented the annual Einhorn Lecture in April speaking on “Jews and Photography.” During his visit, he also met with the Jewish Studies Workshop (pictured here), to discuss his book The Crime of My Very Existence: Nazism and the Myth of Jewish Criminality (2007).

David Biale, the Emanuel Ringelblum Professor of Jewish History at the University of California at Davis, visited in March. He delivered the annual Goldberg Lecture under the title “Not in the Heavens: The Relationship of Jewish Secularism to Its Religious Tradition” and discussed his book Blood and Belief: The Circulation of a Symbol Between Jews and Christians (2007) with the Jewish Studies Workshop. Flanked here by Program in Jewish Culture & Society Professors Harriet Murav and Bruce Rosenstock.

Internationally renowned artist Michael Rakowitz visited in October to discuss his work in installation and performance art. A standing-room-only crowd listened to a presentation of his project Return, for which Rakowitz revived the import/export business of his late grandfather Nissim Isaac David, an Iraqi-Jewish refugee. The project featured the opening of a storefront in Brooklyn (where the original store had been), offering shipping services to Iraq and importing Iraqi dates for sale in the United States. Rakowitz visited with Program in Jewish Culture & Society Professor Brett Kaplan before his lecture.

Also in October, we hosted former US Poet Laureate Robert Pinsky. The author of many acclaimed books of poetry, including The Figured Wheel (1996), Jersey Rain (2000), and Gulf Music (2007), he joined the Jewish Studies Workshop (pictured here) for a discussion of his literary biography The Life of David (2006).
BRUCE ROSENSTOCK TALKS ABOUT HIS NEW BOOK

PHILOSOPHY AND THE JEWISH QUESTION: MENDELSOHN, ROSENZWEIG, AND BEYOND

In the year 1781, in the Prussian kingdom of the enlightened monarch Frederick the Great, perhaps the two most notable books to be published were Immanuel Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason and Christian Wilhelm Dohm’s On the Civil Improvement of the Jews. And certainly, the three events—the publication of the books, the death of Lessing, and the death of Lessing—were culminating moments of the Enlightenment in Germany.

The remarkable place of the philosopher Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786) in the unfolding of these three culminating events of the German Enlightenment is one of the focal points of my book. Another is the story of how Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason, Dohm’s Civil Improvement of the Jews, and the death of Lessing as the three events in which Moses Mendelssohn plays a pivotal and intriguing role. Kant’s Critique set out to demonstrate that the barriers of dogmatic thought in both religion and philosophy—the existence and nature of God, the freedom of the will, and the immortality of the soul—rested on illusory foundations. Kant argued that new “transcendental” foundations for both religion and philosophy needed to be constructed. These new foundations, Kant thought, would remove religion and philosophy from the sway of worldly powers that corrupt religion into dogmatic fanaticism and silence the critical voice of reason.

Christian Wilhelm Dohm’s Civil Improvement of the Jews is a very different book from Kant’s, and the fateful conversation that joins them together as the first and the last of Germany’s so-called “Enlightened monarchs” is profoundly linked to the broader social and critical examination of history showed that the Jews were not being punished by God, but rather were unjustly suffering from Christian prejudice against them. The Jews, if given civil rights in a society free of such theological prejudices, would become useful members of the community.

The title of my book: Philosophy and the Jewish Question. While there are a number of very fine histories of modern Jewish philosophy, no previous book has focused on the relationship between Mendelssohn and Rosenzweig and the fulsome conversation that joins them together as the first and the last of Germany’s Jewish philosophers.

Let me return to Moses Mendelssohn. I mentioned Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason, Dohm’s Civil Improvement of the Jews, and the death of Lessing as the three events in which Moses Mendelssohn plays a pivotal and intriguing role. Let me return to Lessing’s Morning Hours, which he composed his masterwork, Nathan the Wise (1779). The play portrays a Jew who transgresses the narrow limits of religious prejudice and offers a vision of a humanity joined together in enlightened tolerance and respect. The play is one of several works written just before his death in which Lessing seeks to demonstrate the slow but inevitable progress of humanity towards a commonly held rational faith in a benevolent Creator, an inclusive faith beyond nation or ethnicity.

It is by no means an accident that it was a Jew and a philosopher, Moses Mendelssohn, who became the lightning rod for a younger generation of German thinkers and poets who turned against the vision of a rationally reformed and enlightened society held out by men like Kant and Dohm and Lessing. First of all, Mendelssohn was known to be Lessing’s closest friend and to have been the model for the figure of Nathan in Lessing’s play. With the death of Lessing, many leading intellectuals turned to Mendelssohn as Lessing’s heir in the battle against religious fanaticism. Second, Mendelssohn was thought to be the living proof that Dohm’s thesis was correct: given a chance, a Jew could transcend the limitations of his background and join the front rank of German culture and society. Finally, many turned to Mendelssohn to carry forward Kant’s philosophical project and, in a style more refined and elegant, to write about the national faith that could join all humanity together. Moses Mendelssohn, even though he lacked citizen rights in Prussia, was thought by many to be the spokesperson for the advance guard of an enlightened German world.

What did Mendelssohn himself feel about the events of 1781 that seemed to propel him forward as a representative of both Jewish and German enlightenment? The death of his best friend Lessing deeply affected him, and he decided to write a memoir about Lessing and their Decadal-long friendship. With the publication of Dohm’s book, however, Mendelssohn decided to add his voice to the appeal for Jewish civil rights, and to this he composed a brief defense of religious toleration. In general in which he argued that while Jews and Christians should have equal rights as citizens, neither Judaism nor Christianity as such should be considered to have any rights as “churches” to control any aspect of the lives of its members. As far as Kant’s Critique went, Mendelssohn would have preferred to remain on the sidelines and allow Kant himself to repair the foundations of religion and philosophy. Mendelssohn thought that, after making his small contribution to the question of civic rights for the Jews, he would settle down again to his work on Lessing’s memoirs.

Mendelssohn was never able to write his Lessing book. Instead, he was forced to reply to challenges from two men, the satirist August Friedrich Dranz and the writer Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi. Dranz challenged him to defend his own book, and in effect, both men were attacking Mendelssohn because, as a Jew, he represented the future of Germany as an enlightened nation. For Dranz and Jacobi, Mendelssohn seemed to demonstrate that an enlightened Germany was a Germany that was no longer the “Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation.” A Germany in which the Jews should be allowed to write his own memoirs as a representative figure was no longer a “Holy” nation.

Mendelssohn accepted the challenge posed by Dranz and Jacobi. In response to the first he composed his masterwork, Jerusalem, or On Religious Power and Judaism (1783) and in response to Jacobi he wrote Morning Hours, or Lectures on the Existence of God (1786). Both books were immensely controversial. In the first, Mendelssohn argued that Judaism was a model for a perfectly enlightened religion. Judaism, Mendelssohn said, was in principle opposed to all forms of coercion of thought or action. It was not even right to call Judaism a religion, he said, because it lacked a creed and was rather a way of life in conformity to revealed laws. The revealed laws of Judaism are not coercive laws but are laws meant to be discovered and obeyed only with one’s full free will. In response to Jacobi, Mendelssohn managed to put his answer to Kant: the new foundations of our belief in God cannot be built through the critical use of pure reason, but only through common sense. Kant had stepped from common sense and the human connection to the world when he made a supermundane world of the locales of God, free will, and the immortal soul. Mendelssohn argued that it was this world, the world we perceive with our senses and that we share together in our mortal bodies, that is the site of our encounter with God. We do not need a special revelation to know God, and we do not need a special faculty called “pure reason” either. Pure reason, Mendelssohn said, must be guided by common sense.

Mendelssohn’s Jerusalem and his Morning Hours were simply too much for the younger generation of Germans to take. It seemed to men like Pfitz and Heggel that Mendelssohn was trying to strip Germany of Christianity and turn it to a Jewish nation: a nation where Judaism would represent enlightened religion and where Jewish acceptance of common, everyday life was where we meet and respond to God would replace the spiritual sublimity of Christianity. Even though the younger generation did not believe in orthodox Christian dogmas, they felt very deeply that Germany’s destiny must include its “Joshua” and that a Holy Nation could only be a Christian one. After the collapse of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation in 1806 as a result of the Napoleonic Wars, the feeling only intensified that Germany must rediscover its sacred calling.

While Mendelssohn remained lashed within German-Jewish circles, he sank into obscurity as a philosopher as the Kantian emphasis on the transcendental reality of the spirit became the gospel of the new generation. Ironically, it was Mendelssohn’s argument with Jacob}
that gave the impulse to the new German idealism: God, the new philosophers said, was the power that spiritualized nature itself from within and lifted beyond its everydayness to a higher plane.

Only after World War I did the ruling power of Christianity as a way of life that was also lived entirely in moments of the here-and-now, and the futility, and the great danger, of trying to live one’s life in the world, but the Christian was torn between the everyday world and the futility, and the need for the philosopher to think in terms of the here-and-now, where the place he meets and responds to. Mendelssohn, I argue in my book, had a hope that a democratic-constitutional nation could bring all its citizens together in the common task of discovering the miracle of creation in moments of everyday life and of offering to everyone the opportunity both to witness and to and to enhance, in freedom and mutual respect, the beauty of the world held in common by humans everywhere.

If Mendelssohn and Rosenzweig are key participants in the ultimate tragic drama of Jews and Germans in the modern world, their thought nonetheless witnesses to the redemptive possibilities of their common philosophical project: to theirs within the framework of Judaism about what might be called the “human question.” Can our separateness from one another become more than a gulf dividing in hostility each from the next once or might it become the basis for the mutual responsibility of each for the next one? My book concludes by arguing that the work of Hannah Arendt and the contemporary philosopher Stanley Cavell can be seen as carrying forward Mendelssohn’s and Rosenzweig’s common philosophical project within the democratic horizons of an always normalized America, an America constituted on the principle of bringing every “next one”—every unenfranchised and marginalized one, every newcomer and immigrant—into the fold of the covenant binding together “We the people.” Arendt and Cavell are the “beyond” I refer to in my title: beyond the tragic history of German-Jewish thought and beyond Jewish question to human question.

Bruce Rosenstock is the Associate Director of the Program in Jewish Culture & Society and Associate Professor in the Department of Religion at the University of Illinois. He has written numerous articles on such topics as ancient philosophy, the Hebrew Bible, and Catholicism and is the author of New Men: Conversos, Judaism, and the Philosophical Project of Mendelssohn and Rosenzweig, and Beyond is published by Fordham University Press. He is currently at work on the first English translation and commentary of Mendelssohn’s Morgenstunden.

I reached Israel Studies by a circuitous route. After attending Carmel College in Oxfordshire, the only Jewish boarding school in Europe, I believed that to truly understand the Middle East it was crucial to immerse myself in Islamic Studies. At eighteen, I began a degree at the University of Edinburgh in Arabic and Politics. I learnt about Arab language, literature and culture, medieval history, and gained some understanding of the forces that have shaped today’s political landscape in the region. Despite studying history, politics and philosophy, I returned to studying literature which has always remained my passion. I was especially inspired by the realisation that, beyond its entertainment value, more than any other discipline, literature has the power to truly motivate individuals and shape society. This influence extends to the classroom! In learning about the eighteenth century as an undergraduate, I was moved by the power of political verse in Britain. Poetry had the ability not only to sway public opinion, but to lead directly to the legal abolition of slavery. The preservation of oral Scottish ballads inspired a revival in Scottish nationhood, which in turn dramatically changed Europe’s landscape as other countries turned to their mythical past and found the beginnings of a regional nationalism that was linguistically and ethnically specific. In political philosophy I discovered, like generations before me, that Plato had conceived the idea of an entire republic with its attentive military, political and cultural wings working in harmony for the success of the collective. As I pondered over the writings of Aristotle, Machiavelli, John Stewart Mill, Thomas Mann and Mary Wollstonecraft, I began to realise that life and fiction were intertwined and that the boundaries between academic disciplines were, to some degree, fluid.

By the time I came to write my Honors Thesis in my fourth year, my eclectic interests in literature, culture, religion and history coalesced in my research on the power of translation in shaping ideology, particularly during the long history of Qur’anic translation. A mere five hundred years after the Qur’an’s first appearance in Arabic, European renditions into Latin, English, and French existed. They had been produced by priests with the aim of educating Christian missionaries about Islam as they prepared to convert the infidels encountered during the Crusades. From this I gleaned the powerful uses of literary and sacred texts in shaping and serving a society’s values, for better or for worse.

The passion that I developed for socially and politically conscious writing, particularly the notion of using fiction to shape national identity, has remained one of the guiding principles in my research. I had come to understand the power of texts to affect social behaviour well beyond the power and scope of their authors. Despite the vagaries of this literary heritage, the notion that fiction in particular could be used obliquely or explicitly to challenge or even reinforce a reader’s world view
American and European modernism on contemporary Israeli literature. I join Comparative Literature at the University of Illinois after spending four years in Jewish Studies at the University at Albany, part of the State University of New York, where I held a tenure-track position as Assistant Professor of Hebrew Literature and Language. During that time I was responsible for the Hebrew program and its ongoing development and taught a broad range of courses in Jewish history, Hebrew and Jewish literature, and Hebrew language. I believe in inspiring the same passion for knowledge among my students with which I was dazzled. Indubitably, the profundity of E. M. Forster’s statement about the power of prose, lies for me in the privilege of spending each day working with texts that have the capacity to shape the environment in which we live. I now look forward with great pleasure to meeting the challenges of developing and teaching new courses in Israeli literature, Jewish fiction, and comparative literature here at Illinois and putting modern Hebrew literature on the world stage where it belongs.

Rachel S. Harris is Assistant Professor in the Program in Jewish Culture & Society at the University of Illinois, where she also serves on the Program’s Executive Committee. I am currently developing a dissertation project, one that I expect will highlight some of the practises, beliefs, and complications of a place that encourages rather than discourages immigration (albeit, for a specific set of individuals). In general, my research focuses on The Jewish Agency for Israel (HaSochnut HaHilutu: Eretz Yisrael’s), which organization has been active, in various incarnations, since prior to the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948. While its initial goal was to assist in the creation of a Jewish national home, once the state was established its responsibilities changed. The Sochnut (for short) now focuses on immigration (aliyah) and absorption (kibbutz) of new immigrants, Zionist education, and immigration recruitment. Per their 2007 statistics, they maintain 78 offices in 44 different countries.

In particular, I am interested in how the Sochnut’s immigration and absorption practices and policies help shape different senses of national identity among new immigrants to Israel. By examining the programs that they offer to new immigrants, and the policies that govern their immigration practices, I hope to explain how the Sochnut helps to constitute Israeli society in particular ways. Since the organization has a large number of international offices, I plan to conduct a multi-sited project that considers the formation of new immigrants’ national identities both inside and outside the State of Israel, while also considering the perspectives of both the Sochnut employees and the immigrants with whom they work. I’ve been lucky to receive intellectual input not only from my advisors in the Department of Anthropology, but also from the Program for Jewish Culture and Society. One of my hopes is that the resulting project will expand the boundaries of what counts as “Jewish Studies.”

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NEW BOOKS BY OUR FACULTY


From 1912 to 1914, S. An-sky and the photographer Solomon Lublin gathered materials and took photographs of Jewish daily life in pre-revolutionary Russia’s Pale of Settlement. Photographing the Jewish Nation offers English-language readers their first look at over 170 extraordinary, recently rediscovered photographs from their expeditions. The pictures provide visual texture – in remarkable detail – that rarely appears in written sources. The volume includes a critical introduction and the chapters that document all aspects of Jewish life inside the Pale, including work, education, and religious and cultural traditions.

Dale Bauer
Sex Expression and American Women Writers, 1860-1940
University of North Carolina Press, 2009

American women novelists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries registered a call for a new sexual freedom. Dale Bauer contends. By creating a lexicon of “sex expression,” many authors explored sexuality as part of a discourse about women’s needs rather than confining it to the realm of sentiments, where it had been relegated (if broached at all) by earlier writers. This new rhetoric of sexuality enabled critical conversations about who had sex, when in life they had it, and how it signified. Analyzing the work of canonical as well as popular writers—including Edith Wharton, Anzia Yezierska, Julia Peterkin, and Fannie Hurst, among others—Bauer demonstrates that the new sexualization of American culture was both material and rhetorical.

Liya Kaganovsky
How the Soviet Man Was Unmade: Cultural Fantasy and Male Subjectivity under Stalin
University of Pittsburgh Press, 2008

In Stalinist Russia, the idealized Soviet man projected an image of strength, virility, and unyielding drive in his desire to build a powerful socialist state. In monuments, posters, and other types of cultural production, he became the demigod of Communist ideology. But beneath the surface of this fantasy, between the lines of texts and in film, lurked another figure: the wounded body of the heroic invalid, the second version of Stalin’s New Man. In How the Soviet Man Was Unmade, Liya Kaganovsky exposes the paradox behind the myth of the indestructible Stalinite man. In her analysis of socialist realism literature and cinema, she examines the recurring theme of the mutilated male body, which appears with startling frequency.

Harry Liebersohn
The Travellers’ World: Europe to the Pacific
Harvard University Press, 2008

In a narrative that transports the reader from the salons of Europe to the shores of Tahiti, Harry Liebersohn examines the transformation of global knowledge during the great age of scientific exploration. He moves beyond the traditional focus on British and French travelers to include Germans, Russians, and some Americans, as well as the Tahitians, Hawaiians, and other Pacific islanders they encountered. Famous adventurers like Captain Cook make appearances, but it’s the observations of such naturalists as Philibert Commerson, George Forster, and Adolph von Chamisso that helped most to generate a new understanding of these far-flung societies.

Bruce Rosenstock
Philosophy and the Jewish Question: Mendelssohn, Rosenzweig, and Beyond
Fordham University Press, 2010

Drawing together two critical moments in the history of European Jewry – its entrance as a participant in the Enlightenment project of religious and political reform and its involvement in the utopian upheaval brought on by the Great War – this book offers a reappraisal of the interaction of culture, politics, theology, and philosophy in the modern world through the lens of two of the most important thinkers of their day, Moses Mendelssohn and Franz Rosenzweig. Their vision of the place of the Jewish people not only within German society but also within the unfolding history of humankind as a whole challenged the reigning cultural assumptions of the day and opened new ways of thinking about reason, language, politics, and the sources of ethical obligation.

Michael Rothberg
Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization
Stanford University Press, 2009

Multidirectional Memory brings together Holocaust studies and postcolonial studies for the first time. Employing a comparative and interdisciplinary approach, the book makes a thoughtful argument about Holocaust memory in a global age by situating it in the unexpected context of decolonization. On the one hand, it demonstrates how the Holocaust has enabled the articulation of other histories of victimization at the same time that it has been declared “unique” among human-perpetrated horrors. On the other, it uncovers the more surprising and seldom acknowledged fact that public memory of the Holocaust emerged in part thanks to postwar events that seem at first to have little to do with it, such as the ongoing processes of decolonization and movements for civil rights in the Caribbean, Africa, Europe, and the United States.

Lawrence Schehr
Subversions of Verisimilitude: Reading Narrative from Balzac to Sartre
Fordham University Press, 2009

Subversions of Verisimilitude focuses on the ways in which a number of French literary narratives written in the realist tradition show a dynamic balance between the desire of the author/narrator to present a verisimilar world and the need for aesthetic balance. While the works studied—narratives by Balzac, Flaubert, Zola, Colette, Proust, and Sartre—are set over the course of a century, from 1835 to 1938, they share a perspective on the relations between and the need to engage questions of realist verisimilitude and narrative interest and aesthetics.

Mark Smith and Wayne Pitard
The Uguric Baal Cycle: Introduction With Text, Translation and Commentary of KTU/CAT 1.3-1.4

This second volume of the commentary on the “Baal Cycle”, the most important Canaanite religious text from Ugarit, in Syria, analyzes KTU/CAT 1.3 and 1.4, the tablets that contain the long episode about how Baal secured permission from El to build his royal palace and how the palace was built. It includes a new edition of the tablets, supplemented by a DVD-ROM with 92 images and superimposable drawings, a comprehensive introduction, new translation and vocalized text, and detailed commentary. The authors develop an interpretation of the episode which places it into the larger context of the “Baal Cycle” as a whole.
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