

Canadian Society for Jewish Studies Société canadienne des études juives



13th Annual Conference
May 24th to 25th, 2017
Samuel Bronfman House Atrium
Concordia University, Montréal Québec

Agenda

Wednesday May 24

- 9:00 - 9:15 Registration / Welcome
- 9:15 - 10:30 **National Identities**
Baruch Beckerman
Michael Gesin
Myer Siemiatycki
- 10:30 - 10:45 Break
- 10:45 - 12:00 **Crypto-Jews**
Wesley K. Sutton
Michael P. Carroll
Judith S. Neulander
- 12:00 - 13:00 Lunch
- 13:00 - 14:15 **Troubled identities**
Simcha S Fishbane
Martin Lockshin
Sarah Gelbard
- 14:15 - 14:45 Break
- 14:45 - 16:00 **Israel**
Tamas Kovacs
Ira Robinson
Amir Locker-Biletzki
- 16:00 - 16:30 Break
- 16:30 - 17:30 **Keynote**
Dr Eran Neuman

Thursday May 25

- 9:00 - 9:15 Registration / Welcome
- 9:15 - 10:30 **Traditions and Rituals**
Naftali Cohn
Deidre Butler and
Betina Appel Kuzmarov
Lindsey Jackson
- 10:30 - 10:45 Break
- 10:45 - 11:10 **Instructional Talk**
Edith Lubetski
- 11:10 - 12:00 **Language**
Meir Lubetski
Claire English
- 12:00 - 13:00 Lunch
- 13:00 - 14:40 **Literary & Religious Imagination**
Leore Shmueli
Laura Wiseman
Justin Jaron Lewis
Nanette Norris
- 14:40 - 15:00 CSJS AGM

Israel on Display: Expo 67

Wednesday May 24
4:30 - 5:30 pm

Joint keynote address to Faces of Israel at Expo 67 and
the 13th Annual Conference of the Canadian Society for Jewish Studies

Eran Neuman, Tel Aviv University
The David Azrieli School of Architecture,
The Yolanda and David Katz Faculty of the Arts

Expo 67 opened to the public on April 27, 1967, at the height of the nerve-wracking period leading to the Six-Day War, continued during the war (June 5-10), and closed in October 1967. The tense political situation in the Middle East and Israel's achievements during the brief but decisive war turned the pavilion into a powerful source of attraction; indeed, it drew in the third largest number of visitors, following the Soviet Union and the United States.

"Israel on Display: Expo 67" examines the story of the pavilion and the determination of its architectural character in the context of the Israel Pavilion at the 1958 Brussels World's Fair, the pavilion's physical location in Montreal in 1967 and the exhibition displayed within it. Looking back from our current vantage point, fifty years after both Expo 67 and the Six-Day War, the Israel Pavilion in Montreal signifies a turning point in the official attitude toward the representation of Israel on the international stage.



BIOGRAPHY: Dr. Eran Neuman is an architect and the head of the Azrieli School of Architecture, Tel Aviv University, and the Director of the Azrieli Architectural Archive, Tel Aviv Museum of Art. Neuman's research focuses on postwar architectural culture. Neuman has published extensively, including articles in leading journals such as *Journal of Architecture*, *Leonardo*, *Mathematics and Architecture*, *Architectural Theory Review* and more. His book *Shoah Presence: Architectural Representation of the Holocaust* was published in 2014 by Routledge. In 2014, Neuman edited the book *David Yannay: Architecture and Genetics*. His book *Arieh Sharon and Israel Architecture* is forthcoming in 2017.

National Identities

Wednesday, May 24

9:15 - 10:30am

Baruch Beckerman (Bar-Ilan)

Permutations of ethnicity in Canadian Jewish literature

In his study of recent North American Jewish fiction, Norman Ravvin (1997) observes that its “surprising power” comes from the “borderland between the limitless future and the *alte heim*.” While the future of Canadian Jewish fiction may be limitless, Canadian Jewish identity in the mid to late twentieth and the early twenty-first centuries, like for other minority ethnicities in Canada, has been shaped not only by the contemporaneous patterns of immigration, but also by the history of ethnic segmentation in Canada’s formative period. As Evelyn Kallen (2010) argues, Canadian multiculturalism does little to mitigate the absence of institutional expression of minority ethnicities in the public sphere, while the dominant ethnic groups—the French in Québec and the English in the rest of Canada—enjoy the expression of their culture in the public institutional structures of Canadian society, respectively. This paper will address permutations of ethnicity and transitions of identity in the work of three Canadian Jewish authors: Mordecai Richler, David Bezmozgis and Ayelet Tsabari. I have chosen to compare the writings of Mordecai Richler to the recent fiction of David Bezmozgis and Ayelet Tsabari because, while Richler’s third generation immigrant fiction differs from Bezmozgis’ and Tsabari’s first generation writings, the latter’s strategies of adaptation are informed by the former’s acculturation, and the patterns of ethnic expression for all three are circumscribed by the political structures of ethnic differentiation in Canada. In regard to Bezmozgis, and the recent crop of Russian Jewish North American fiction, Adam Rovner (2006) argues that American or Canadian identity appears as performance, and that “variously figured Jewishness” remains essential. According to Zvi Gitelman (2009), for Soviet and post Soviet Jews, Jewishness is “an immutable biological and social fact;” and Herbert Gans (1994) observed that, when the ethnic culture of earlier generations immigrants is “an ancestral memory or exotic tradition,” re-ignition of ethnic feeling feeds the nostalgia for distinctiveness. While Bezmozgis’s short stories and novels mine the experience of Soviet Jewish emigrants, Israeli Canadian author Ayelet Tsabari’s debut collection focuses on the fissures in Israeli identity, and points out how the Mizrahi Jewish identity is shaped within the dominant Ashkenazi culture. Tsabari’s stories offer a fruitful parallel to Richler’s and Bezmozgis’ tales of the formation of Canadian Jewish identity highlighting the permutations of ethnicity. In this paper, relying on contemporary sociological and literary scholarship, I will show how racialized Jewishness functions as essentialized Jewish ethnicity within Canada’s segmented ethnic mosaic.

Michael Gesin (Worcester State)

Case Study of Ukrainian nationalism and the Holocaust

This study will focus on the Holocaust in Central Ukraine, carried out by Nazi Germany with the help of the local Ukrainians and ethnic German colonists. Various aspects of the Jewish tragedy in the Ukraine during the occupation period will be scrutinized such as the principal stages of the annihilation in different regions of Central Ukraine, development of national movements, collaboration among local inhabitants, the role of the Ukrainian press in implementing the Holocaust and the interrelations of Jewish and non-Jewish population during the Holocaust. The question of why the Jewish nation was subjected to such historically unprecedented violence will be answered using unresearched archival materials, evidence and reminiscences of eyewitnesses and prisoners of the Jewish ghettos in Central Ukraine. Gas chambers and death camps such as Treblinka, Auschwitz and Sobibor did not exist in Central Ukraine, but starvation, forced labor, mass shootings and other methods of deliberate murder were implemented very efficiently.

Myer Siemiatycki (Ryerson)

We, Polish Jews': The Troubled Identities & Poetry of Julian Tuwim, 1894-1953

Julian Tuwim suffered much for his determination to bridge both his Jewish and Polish identities in 20th century Poland. The triumphs and tragedies of this leading poet embody both the hopes and impossibilities of the country’s prevailing cross-cultural relations. A study of Tuwim’s writing highlights the challenges of championing hybridity and pluralism in societies more rooted in homogeneity. Julian Tuwim (1894-1953) was a torrent of words and passions. Largely unknown in the West, he is well-recognized in the canon of Polish letters. Ryszard Matuszewski has said of Tuwim: “He was a storm – a spring storm which passed across the sky of Polish poetry.” And what happens when that storm is unleashed by an ethnic minority Jewish voice seeking to speak with and for a majority ethnicity, itself often beleaguered and embittered? Tuwim recognized that cross-culturalism could land you in a cross-fire. Nor would he capitulate. In a 1924 interview he declared: “For anti-Semites, I am a Jew and my poetry is Jewish. For Jewish nationalists, I am a traitor and a renegade. TOUGH LUCK!” Tult was for Tuwim however, that sustaining cross-culturalism would get tougher and tougher. This paper examines Tuwim through literary, historical and political lenses to exemplify the challenges of bridging cultural differences in divided societies. Tuwim was increasingly vilified for ‘Judaizing’ the country’s literature. With the Nazi Holocaust, the full horror of cross-cultural essentialism and extermination was unleashed. Tuwim fled his beloved Poland, and in 1944 authored an extraordinary anguished confessional poem (*We, Polish Jews*) proclaiming his continued devotion to both his Jewish and Polish identities. And sometimes bridges are swept away. Today in Poland, Tuwim’s legacy is celebrated in selective recall, while in the Jewish world he is all but forgotten. Tuwim is a major diasporic voice and witness of Polish Jewry.

Crypto-Jews of New Mexico: Fact and Fiction in the Land of Enchantment

Wednesday, May 25

10:45am - noon

This panel will examine academic claims that a significant population of secretly professing, or “crypto-“ Jews entered colonial New Mexico among the founders of today’s Hispanic community. Academic proponents of such claims point to genetic diseases, religious practices, and statewide folk traditions to confirm their discovery, but none of them is a geneticist, a religionist, or a folklore specialist. Of the three presenters on this panel, one is an anthropological geneticist whose doctoral work determined the genetic profile of New Mexican Hispanics, one is a sociologist of religion who has done extensive work in New Mexico, and one is a folklorist whose doctoral work examined the folkways given as evidence of New Mexico’s crypto-Jewish past. In that order, each will explore these claims according to their own area of expertise. Combined, the three presentations will provide a valid and reliable assessment of what is, and is not, accurate in New Mexican crypto-Jewish context, suggesting directions for more productive research, and for improving Jewish Studies curricula to limit naïve academic adventurism, and its negative social consequences.

Michael P. Carroll (Wilfred Laurier)

The not so crypto crypto-Jews of New Mexico: what we know and still don’t know

In the 1980s and early 1990s, Stanley Hordes and others made two claims: first, that there had been a strong crypto-Jewish presence among the early colonists that settled in New Mexico and second, that traditions associated with those early crypto-Jews had persisted in some Hispano families until the present day. In the mid-1990s, Judith Neulander, without denying that Hordes’s claims were possible, challenged the evidentiary basis of those claims, the second claim in particular. My goal in this presentation is to provide an update on the often-heated debate over a crypto-Jewish presence in New Mexico by doing three things. First, I will be reviewing what knowledgeable scholars have said about the strengths and weakness of two key monographs (one by Stanley Hordes, the other by Seth Kunin) published since that debate first erupted. Second, I want to look more carefully at something that is always mentioned in connection with this debate but rarely evaluated, namely, Neulander’s counter-contention that many of the contemporary “crypto-Jewish” traditions mentioned by Hordes could be the result of relatively recent Adventist proselytizing in the New Mexico area. Finally, I want to call attention to an increasing emphasis by Hordes and his supporters on genetic ties supposedly linking contemporary Hispanos to the crypto-Jews who settled in colonial New Mexico and the implications of this emphasis for the popularity of Hordes’ core argument with the general public in New Mexico and neighboring states.

Wesley K. Sutton (Brooklyn College/City University of New York)

What DNA Can Tell Us About Jews, Non-Jews, and Crypto-Jews

Every person’s genome carries an historical record of their ancestry, and whether drawn from maternal or paternal lines, parentage has traditionally been used to determine identity as a Jew. But we can now sequence our entire genomes, and this increased technological ability has given us access to a much greater repository of information about our biological heritage. In recent years, researchers have found genetic markers that they state can identify Jewish ancestry (e.g., the Cohen Modal Haplotype or CMH), and have used these markers to reconstruct the Jewish past, adding a new perspective to information from traditional sources. Here we examine the scientific validity of such claims, discussing the genetic markers that researchers have used to identify Jewish populations and to trace their historical movements. We will examine whether there are genetic motifs unique to Jews, or any subset of Jews (e.g., kohanim), and ask whether DNA can be used to distinguish Jews of Middle Eastern origin from other Middle Eastern populations. We will also use genetic data to support or refute historical accounts of a significant “secret-” or crypto-Jewish migration into colonial New Mexico.

Judith S. Neulander (Case Western Reserve)

Fake News and Crypto-Jews

In the 1980’s, New Mexican Hispanic folkways were first sensationalized in the press and media as secretly Jewish; a discovery purported by a handful of local academics, none a folklore specialist. My subsequent doctoral dissertation, completed for the Folklore Institute at Indiana University (2001), concluded that claims of a ‘secret-’ or ‘crypto-Jewish’ survival were not supported by the folkways placed in evidence. Rather, naïve ‘crypto-Jewish’ identification was reliant on conflating ambiguous, superficially related items into an overgeneralized, and imaginary, crypto-Jewish “type”; a technique borrowed from early ethnographic dilettantism, as practiced in the 19th century by ‘gentlemen scholars’ like Sir James Frazer. To strengthen their claims in the face of growing criticism, the same academics slid deeper into the 19th century, following Sir Francis Galton, father of eugenics, who in 1878 preceded Frazer by conflating photographic images of Jewish adolescents into an overgeneralized, and imaginary Jewish “racial” type; a photographic science fiction. Following Galton’s notion that he could register types of the racial and diseased—and apparently inspired by the Human Genome Project—New Mexican academics began identifying unwitting Hispanics as “Jewish-by-disease”; a biological science fiction. For more than 30 years, these demonstrably unfounded claims have been legitimated by the most powerful information-generating force of all time: the news media. Using slides and a film clip from a New Mexican newscast, my presentation will develop the above statements in the context of fake news reporting. In conclusion, I will discuss the negative social consequences of fake ‘crypto-Jewish’ news, and the implications for Jewish Studies.

Troubled Identities

Wednesday, May 24

1:00 - 2:15pm

Martin Lockshin (York)

Sinat Yisrael (= Hatred of Jews) in the Eyes of the Talmudic Rabbis

It is often argued that classical rabbinic Judaism teaches us that “in every generation they rise up against us to destroy us” (as we find in the Passover Haggadah, in a line that was added after the Talmudic period). Careful analysis of the works of the ancient rabbis leads, however to different conclusions. In this paper I argue that: (1) the rabbis of the Mishnaic and Talmudic periods actually did not write very much about the hatred of Jews; (2) when they did discuss hatred of Jews, at times they appear to agree with the understanding found among various Greco-Roman thinkers who claimed, as Peter Schäfer rephrases their argument, that animus toward Jews was based on “the allegation of amixia, ‘unsociability,’ and of a [Jewish] way of life that is hostile to and, therefore, dangerous to all humankind”; (3) the Talmudic rabbis did not teach that hatred of Jews is universal or inevitable. In a later period of Jewish history that teaching became common. Note: This paper takes no stand on the question of whether hatred of Jews is or is not universal and evitable. It only addresses the question of what the teaching of the ancient rabbis on the subject was.

Simcha S Fishbane (Touro College)

The Destitute in the World of Mishnah

Giving to the poor has a dual effect; it assists the needy individual and has the potential to create social solidarity for the community. If not properly monitored, the destitute in any social structure can pose a potential threat to the solidarity and weaken the stability of the group. Stability in a society is maintained at the expense of the individual in favor of the group. In the case of the pauper, it is the emphasis on the individual poor person that is the focus and thus the social threat. For rabbinic Judaism, while there is always the possibility for personal generosity, Scripture, makes supporting the poor an obligation rather than a gift out of one’s kindness. Thus the poor do not simply request their support but aggressively demand it. The redactors of the Mishnah in organizing their ideal Temple/agricultural based society were cognizant of these dangers and formulated a system of laws that would thwart the threat. While Mishnah’s discussion of the poor is apparent throughout its six orders, an entire tractate, Pea, is devoted to “presents for the poor”. This essay will examine how Mishnah perceived the status and role of the destitute in its world.

I will explore Mishnah’s stance toward the poor and the means Mishnah redactors instituted to guarantee their position while assuring the solidarity of the society. To achieve this goal in addition to analyzing the Mishnah text and any other tannaic sources that compliment Mishnah I will apply different socio-anthropological theory that can shed light upon the understanding the destitute in the world of the Mishnah. Therefore, what this paper will be seeking is “1) the reconstruction of major aspects of the sociology and culture of the early rabbinic movement itself; and 2) the better understanding of the sociology and culture of the “world” defined by and in Mishnah’s substance, even if that world does not mirror any contemporary, historical Palestinian Jewish world”.

Sarah Gelbard (McGill)

Schlemihls and squatters: undesirable people and places in the city

Both Jews and punks are generally (mis)represented as predominantly urban cultural groups—both with histories of being “undesirable” people who occupy marginal and “undesirable” spaces of the city. Yet, little scholarship directly investigates their spatial practices and experience or their relation to dominant city-making processes such as urban planning. What is the relationship between (un)desirable people and (un)desirable spaces? Who controls the definition or creation of urban desirability? From the theoretical traditions and lived experiences of both the Jewish Diaspora and subculture, several common conflicts emerge with dominant spatial practices that control and order the city: the struggle for integration without assimilation; incongruities with the essentialist fixing of identity in territorially defined space; and negotiating perception of group identities that are systematically misrepresentation and misunderstanding from the mainstream. I argue that a radical reimagining and reading of urban place-making is possible through the alternative perspectives and practices of a multitude of marginalized and alternative groups that together can guide us towards “messier” analyses of spatial tactics and traditions. In contrast to traditional urban planning approaches, ideals and narratives, these tactical traditions have adaptively circumvented restrictions, covertly contested exclusive and dominant claims to territory, and facilitated repeated reconstitution and relocation of marginalized groups. As a preliminary iteration of this hypothesis, this paper looks at intersections between Jewish thought and subculture theory that suggest alternative readings of place-making in contrast to mainstream planning along two themes. First, I consider how futurity and utopia are imagined and enacted through spatial practices in examples from both traditions. Second, I will look at redefining style as ethics vs aesthetics as a way to open material analyses of space beyond the formal readings most commonly employed in planning and architecture histories. Finally, I elaborate on how these two alternative approaches to reading space might be rooted in shared experiences of being “undesirable” urban cultural groups.

Israel

Wednesday, May 24

2:45 - 4:00pm

Tamas Kovacs (Concordia)

The View of Suez from Tel Aviv

1956 was a hot year, when two exceptional incidents occurred in parallel. One of them was the Hungarian revolution and war for independence against USSR, and the other one was the nationalization of the Suez Canal by President Gamel Nasser. Fundamentally, the lecture deals with the modern Jewish state's challenge during the autumn of 1956. Although Israeli ships were not allowed to use the Suez Canal, the nationalization of the canal and the "new friend" (USSR) of Egypt exacerbated the situation. France and Great Britain wanted punish Nasser and Egypt. Only the way and the method were yet the questions. The two great powers remembered the Munich pact of 1938. Finally, France, Great Britain and Israel made an agreement in Sevres. As the first step, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) started their campaign in the Sinai Peninsula. The IDF were successful in Sinai, and in the Gaza Strip as well. In the meanwhile, an uprising broke out in Hungary and the fighting started. There are no sources or evidences that Ben Gurion was impressed by the events in Budapest. The Israeli politics was influenced by a potential step by Jordan. The US politics was very changeable and equivocal, but a presidential election campaign was just going on. The USSR wanted to defend its ally and "free hands" in Hungary. The "Bulganin letter" and President Eisenhower wanted the peace to be decided at the fate of war and the fate of the Hungarian revolution as well. Basically, Israel was the winner of the war and the international conflict, namely it reached its strategic objectives: security guarantees and free shipping.

Amir Locker-Biletzki (Concordia)

Israeli Nationalism and Jewish Peoplehood in Moshe Sneh's Thought Amir Locker-Biletzki

Moshe Sneh was, in 1954, the most prominent political figure to join the shunned and marginalized MAKI (The Israeli Communist Party). By virtue of his considerable intellectual and rhetorical skills, Sneh can be viewed as one of the most prominent Marxist-Leninist thinkers in 1950s Israel. The paper will analyze the book that heralded Sneh's entrance into the field of Marxist-Leninist thinking and his departure from Zionist nationalism. Cumbersomely named *On the National Question: Conclusions in the Light of Marxism-Leninism*, the book undermines the Zionist fundamentals of Jewish nationalism. While rejecting Zionism because of its reliance on Western imperialism, Sneh uses Marxist-Leninist terms to offer the possibility of a local Israeli national identity. Tellingly, this local identity does not relate to the Palestinians residing in Israel and is not a bi-national identity. Briefly presenting Sneh's usage of Marxism-Leninism to reject Zionism, we will outline the local Israeli identity he does offer and, at the same time, suggest an explanation of why the bi-national option was not picked up by him.

Ira Robinson (Concordia)

Foreign Relations: the Jewish Diaspora as Reflected in the Neturei Karta Weekly, Mishmeret Homatenu

Founded in the late 1930s, *Neturei Karta* emerged in 1948 as a small but well-known group, based in Jerusalem, which challenged the religious and political legitimacy of the State of Israel. In the early years of the State of Israel it emerged as an activist militant force opposed to its perception of the public desecration of the laws and customs of Orthodox Judaism in Jerusalem and elsewhere on the part of the Zionist State of Israel. The group published a weekly newsletter, *Mishmeret Homatenu*, in order to gain further public attention for its religious and political positions. In order to fulfill its goals, *Neturei Karta* required both moral and monetary support from outside Israel. This paper will address the issue of *Neturei Karta's* relationship with diaspora Jewry as reflected in the pages of *Mishmeret Homatenu* for the years 1956-1960. Questions to be examined in this paper include:

1. What was the image of the Jewish diaspora in the eyes of the *Neturei Karta* leadership?
2. What sort of moral and financial support did *Neturei Karta* expect and receive from the diaspora and from which individuals and groups?
3. What were the personal relations between *Neturei Karta* activists and diaspora communities?

Negotiating Traditions and Rituals

Thursday, May 25

9:15 - 10:30am

Lindsey Jackson (Concordia)

Reforming, Resisting, and Rebellious Against Tradition: Changing Perceptions of Circumcision

The ways in which rituals are practiced, changed, and created provide insight into the values, norms, and customs of a particular community. Ritual also provides an accessible avenue through which one can initiate change and challenge the status quo. Rather than initiated by those in positions of authority, ritual change is often advocated by those whose unique voice and experience have been excluded and/or ignored. In the words of oral historian Alessandro Portelli, this research endeavours to “bring into vision the aspects of experience that have been ignored and left out.” The neglected experiences that serve as the focal point of this paper pertain to Jewish parents who are choosing not to circumcise their sons and, in some cases, are advocating for a non-cutting ceremony to be accepted as an official alternative to brit milah. Based on my fieldwork in Canada and the US, this research provides compelling insight into anti-circumcision and non-circumcision families throughout North America. Despite important differences between the Canadian and American contexts, Jewish communities in both milieus are witnessing changing perceptions and practices regarding brit milah. This paper examines the questions, doubts, and uncertainties some Jews have about the traditional ritual of circumcision and the non-cutting ceremonies that have been created as alternatives. Incorporating my fieldwork and interviews with traditional rabbis, mohelim, parents who have circumcised their sons, rabbis who officiate non-cutting ceremonies, parents who are opting out of circumcision, and medical professionals, this research sheds light on the fascinating dynamics of circumcision, how families understand this ritual, and why some reject it. This research investigates how non-conforming Jews resist authority, initiate change, and engage in activism in order to make their tradition more meaningful, inclusive, and welcoming to those who cannot or refuse to conform to the narrow confines of tradition. Ritual serves as an important reflection of the values and customs of a particular community and changes to the perception and practice of brit milah suggest the beginning of a potentially profound change to this ancient Jewish rite.

Deidre Butler (Carleton) and Betina Appel Kuzmarov (Carleton)

"A Backhanded Agunah Kind of Crazy": Rabbis speak about divorce in Ottawa

As we sat in a Reform rabbi's office in Ottawa, we heard the story of what he called “a backhanded Agunah kind of craziness.” He set the stage how in NY state, he was approached by an Orthodox man who asked him to arrange a get. A Reform divorce would be halakhically invalid. The rabbi understood that the husband was trying to circumvent the New York state law; providing a religious divorce that would still in fact keep his wife an Agunah. Against the backdrop of the New York get law that requires proof that barriers to religious remarriage have been removed before a court will enter a judgment of a civil divorce, this request brings into sharp relief the tensions between Jewish law and civil divorce law. This research is part of a larger ethnographic study of Jewish Divorce in Canada that expands the circle of stakeholders beyond the Orthodox community, to include

women, men, adult children, activists and rabbis who have experienced Jewish divorce. We use our theory of troubling orthopraxies to conceptualize the ways in which correct practice, both asserted as stringency and subverted as necessary reform, becomes the organizing principle that frames the relationship between tradition, gendered persons, religious law, civil law, and community. This paper focuses on the voices of rabbis and their accounts of Jewish divorce. Acknowledging that Jewish divorce impacts women in particular gendered ways, but is largely interpreted and practiced by men, understanding rabbinic behaviour is key to understanding the systemic and procedural context of Jewish divorce. Their stories are a window into the complexities that laypeople and clergy are trying to navigate. In particular, as scholars of Religion and Law and Legal Studies, we are attentive to the ways in which these stories illuminate the interplay between law and practice in both religious and civil domains. These stories encompass intra and interdenominational cooperation and collaboration as well as divisions and often a lack of awareness of each other's practice. Their accounts of Jewish divorce speak to a need to balance their own commitments to Jewish practice and values with their overriding concern to prevent Agunot and momzerim, always cognizant of a civil law framework. This research contributes a more robust account of how the contingency and potentiality for abuse of the religious process blunts or subverts legislative intentions or presents obstacles to solutions that depend on particular religious and civil contexts.

Naftali Cohn (Concordia)

Jewish Funerals and Shiva in Film: The Implications of Ritual Success

Jewish funerals and the observance of shiva are popular motifs in films that explicitly engage with Jewish characters and culture. The heightened emotion surrounding death, the significant changes it brings in the lives of the living, and the threat it makes to their stability and order are fruitful tools for storytelling. But the rites associated with death in film do more than create compelling narratives. Representations of these rituals also say something about perceptions of Judaism as religion. Using the analytic tools provided by theories of ritual failure or, “ritual gone wrong,” put forth by Ronald Grimes, Edward Schieffelin, and Ute Hüsken, this paper plumbs the pop-cultural understandings of Jewish ritual and its value. Looking especially at *This Is Where I Leave You* (2014), *Two Weeks* (2006), and *A Serious Man* (2009), and with reference to numerous additional depictions of Jewish death rituals in film, this paper suggests that these film representations argue for the ultimate value and continuity of Judaism. The vicissitudes of life pose threats to characters and contemporary experience poses threats to Jewishness itself. But ritual, particularly Jewish life cycle ritual, manages these challenges. These rituals go wrong in certain (sometimes fundamental) ways, but ultimately they succeed, or at least they are successfully completed. Both the challenges and the ultimate successes point to the understanding that the practices/rituals of Judaism can be beneficial, even to gentiles. Further, they demonstrate the shift in film more generally toward representing and embracing the diversity of Jews and Jewish experiences—even when this diversity is construed as a potential threat to the boundaries of Jewishness. Ritual, and its flexibility to accommodate these threats, becomes a synecdoche for Judaism itself, and its ability to absorb challenges and continue to exist successfully in its diverse manifestations. Taking up Nathan Abrams' call in *The New Jew in Film* (2012, 159) to explore “Jewishness as Judaism” in film in greater detail, this paper aims to bring out the nuances in how Jewish funeral and shiva practices are represented in film, the usefulness of ritual theory for interpreting Judaism in them, and the implications for how Jewishness is being understood by filmmakers and their audiences.

Instructional Talk

Thursday, May 25

10:45 - 11:10 am

Edith Lubetski (Yeshiva)

Approaches to Finding Material on a Biblical Verse or Topic

Biblical research cannot remain the same when new fields of information and pertinent facts constantly come to light. Abundant data continue to accumulate and obliges us to modify often long held views, while offering us to see matters we did not recognize before. Research requires the scholar not only to pursue a current investigation but also to ascertain what has been written in the past. This paper will describe a variety of reference tools, databases, and online resources that will aid the researcher in locating material in order to develop an original contribution. This interactive, instructional talk will show, therefore, how to retrieve relevant material from the ancient era through the contemporary period from multiple resources, online and in print, by using Genesis 49:22 as a model for researching verses, names, words, or topics.

Language

Thursday, May 25

11:10 – noon

Meir Lubetski (Baruch College, City University of New York)

Solving a Royal Name Discrepancy

Enigmatic 1 Chronicles 8:34 and 9:40 are due for a fresh investigation. The Chronicler names the royal grandson of Saul either as מריבעל or מריבעל. While the suffix has been treated adequately in the literature, biblical scholars have been completely at a loss to account for the meaning of mry and then the change from מרי into מריב in the prefix. In addition, a seemingly shorter version of the name, מר-בעל, appears on a Samaria trapezoidal ostrakon (#2 line 7) as well. That Baal is the theophoric component is transparent. The etymology and meaning of the prefix, however, is uncertain. This paper will attempt to clarify both forms of the same name found in Chronicles that could not be explained satisfactorily. Sources, especially Late Egyptian literary texts might offer a novel approach in explaining the etymology of the prefix mry or mryb within biblical onomastics. This, in turn, can establish an alternative, perhaps a more accurate meaning of Saul's grandson's royal name. Moreover, it will highlight an unknown aspect about Hebrew scribes; they knew how to transcribe alien names correctly.

Claire English (Concordia)

The Use of ASL in the Recitation of the 'Shema Yisrael' - An Argument for Inclusion

From the Hebrew Bible to the early rabbinic texts, into modern halakhic thought and beyond, the figure of the deaf has been contemplated, derided, protected, and dismissed. Yet, increasingly Deaf Jews are claiming their place within the ritual life of contemporary 'Yisrael'. One of the more captivating outcomes of this growing engagement is the translation of the Shema prayer, the ritual call to 'Hear' the voice of God, into American Sign Language (ASL). Bringing to bear unique structural features of ASL, these translations turn word into motion and command into act. In this discussion, I seek to demonstrate the importance of Signed recitations of the Shema to Jewish ritual practice. Calling on the work of ritual theorist Catherine Bell, ultimately I will argue that the inclusion of the Deaf fundamentally restructures the "redemptive hegemony" that currently prevails. By introducing American Sign Language into shared liturgical spaces, Deaf Jews challenge the prevailing redemptive hegemony, and seek to re-write it in ways more inclusive to the full diversity of the Jewish community.

Medieval and Early Modern Literary and Religious Imagination

Thursday, May 25

1:00 – 2:40 pm

Leore Shmueli (Bar Ilan / Columbia)

Sod HaArayot: The Secret Taboo of Incest as a Mystical Key to Supernal World

In my doctoral thesis in preparation: ‘The Rationale of the Negative Commandments by R. Joseph Hamadan: A Critical Edition and Study of Taboo at the Time of the Composition of the Zohar’ by a multidisciplinary inquiry, I explore traditions about transgression and taboo of one of most enigmatic kabbalists of all time. In Kabbalah research, the concept of taboo was overshadowed by a preference of scholars of the study of ritual and theurgy, albeit taboo is no less crucial in portraying the lore contained in the works of Castilian Kabbalah and shed light on their ways in to knowing God. In this paper, I will focus on textual materials that were persevered only in Hebrew manuscripts and will be illuminated here for the first time through a combination of philological, hermeneutical and historical perspectives which will serve in deciphering secrets of these Kabbalistic texts. Many Kabbalistic works from the thirteenth century and thereafter were dedicated to explaining the meaning and ends of ritual, alongside transgressions and the violation of the negative commandments. R. Joseph Hamadan’s Rationale of the Negative Commandments is the best starting point for research in taboo in early Kabbalah, since in this composition the transgression of taboos is dealt with in a most profoundly and systematically way, as compared to all other works of the period. Moreover, through its presentation, other works of the period are better understood, especially the Zohar, in relation to taboo and rituals. I argue that a main key for understanding the way Kabbalah established the sacred nature of its teachings lies in the secret of incest (Sod ha-Arayot), which since the rabbinic period was considered an esoteric doctrine. The idea that the laws of incest concealed esoteric knowledge served as a source of inspiration for many medieval kabbalists. Thus in the Christian context of thirteenth-century Castile, a body of Jewish Kabbalistic writings developed in which sexual themes and motifs played a key role in constructing intimate relations between man and supernal worlds. The works of Joseph of Hamadan present the most explicit comprehensive discussions of the functions of body and sexuality in the system of Jewish law and taboo revealing the tensions which arouse in introducing them so boldly in Jewish mystical lore. The discussion of these focal issues will contribute to the appreciation of the diverse multilayered approaches to the role of taboo in Jewish studies.

Laura Wiseman (York)

Yoshpe and His Two Beloveds: Ménage à Trois in Medieval Hebrew Literature

The Love Stories of Jacob ben Eleazar (1170-1203?) survived in a single manuscript rendered accessible in the critical edition of Yonah David. This paper, to be delivered in English with reference to Hebrew excerpts, examines the seventh maqaama in the collection, “Yoshpeh and his Two Beloveds.” On the surface, this maqaama tells the tale of a young man whose parents’ kingdom has fallen upon hard times and into foreign hands. Yoshpe sets out into the world to seek his fortune. En route he takes up first with one, then a second clever and comely woman, each possessed of extraordinary initiative. The dynamics among the three take centre-stage. The racy narrative is bursting with lovemaking and larceny, hostage-taking, horseback-chasing, market scenes and a ménage à trois with a happy homecoming for all. Notwithstanding the colourful intrigue, I suggest that this work reflects a piece of literary history corresponding to a transition in Hebrew literature. The purpose of the talk is to propose an allegorical interpretation to support that claim by analyzing samples of language about poetry which abound in the text. My thesis is that these function as its hermeneutic key. The genre of the maqaama originates in Arabic literature, which presents rhymed prose narratives punctuated with metric poetry and embellished with rhetorical arabesques. In addressing this maqaama in the context of literary history and style, this paper points out salient features and rhetorical ornamentation of the genre’s adaptation in medieval Hebrew literature, particularly its role in carrying cultural messages of the era by embedding motifs and wordings of classical Hebrew texts.

Justin Jaron Lewis (Manitoba)

Rebbe Naḥman and the Bible: Methodology of Imagination

Every Jewish religious expression relates to the Tanakh; therefore, the ways in which Scripture is used and understood are vital to understanding any given form of Judaism. The biography of the controversial and fascinating Hasidic master Naḥman of Breslov (1772-1810) notes that he was especially well versed in Tanakh as well as Midrash and Zohar – the most imaginative interpretations of Scripture. In the imagery of his stories, and in the beḥinot – associative links between disparate images and concepts – that characterize his teachings, Biblical words and verses become raw material for Rebbe Naḥman’s own imagination. This paper will explore the methodology of Rebbe Naḥman’s imaginative reworkings of Biblical words and verses. Jacob Neusner rejected the common claim that the Talmud works by free association, and argued that it works by “fixed association” which he proceeded to explicate. This paper takes a comparable approach to Rebbe Naḥman’s imaginative approach to Tanakh. Rebbe Naḥman’s methodology can be traced through his own statements, particularly in his own comments (or those of his scribe Rabbi Nathan) at the end of some of his stories. One example is the technique of hyper-literalism. In the story “The Cripple,” the ideal man of Psalm 1:1, “Happy is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked...” becomes a man who cannot walk at all. Puns are another hermeneutical tool. At the end of the story “The Burgher and the Pauper” Rebbe Naḥman explains that Lot fled to

the hills – in the Yiddish translation of the Torah, berg – and is thus a berger, “a man of the mountains” but also “burgher” or “bourgeois”. While Rebbe Nahman presents his associations of ideas as surprising new discoveries, they are often quite standard in Kabbalah. I will explore the extent to which well-known kinuyim, appellations of the sefirot in theosophical Kabbalah, constitute, in Neusner’s terms, “knowledge shared among those to whom the writing is addressed, hence the ‘fixed’ part of ‘fixed association’” (57). In general, the techniques of hyper-literalism and wordplay can also be found in the Zohar, and in earlier midrash. What did Rebbe Nahman select from the hermeneutical resources available to his imagination, and in what ways does his own particular methodology blaze new trails?

Nanette Norris (Royal Military College Saint-Jean)

Ranani Zadikim –Influence and Friendship between D.H. Lawrence & S.S. Koteliansky

D.H. Lawrence and S.S. Koteliansky, the one a British modernist writer and the other a Russian-Jewish émigré and translator, found common ground and friendship during a walking tour of the Lake District at the end of July, 1914, a tour which ended abruptly as war was declared. Lawrence’s meeting with S.S. Koteliansky introduced him to concepts inherent in Jewish mysticism.

And I remember also we crouched under the loose wall on the moors and the rain flew by in streams, and the wind came rushing through the chinks in the wall behind one’s head – and we shouted songs, and I imitated music hall turns, whilst the other men crouched under the wall and I pranked in the rain on the turf in the gorse, and Kotelianski groaned Hebrew music – Ranani Sadekim Badanoi.

Between July and January, Lawrence began to put a plan into action for the creation of a colony of like-minded people, his Rananim. At the same time, he began the 4th draft changes to his manuscript, *The Rainbow*, changes which reflect a growing awareness of Kabbalah. The purpose of hymns in Kabbalah was/is the attainment of an ecstatic state – they are part of the ascent of the mystic to the heavenly realm, instigating the mystic contact, if you will. When Kot invoked his Hebrew hymn in the rain on the gorse he was incanting to the divine forces – to reduce the distance between man and the divine – and, as Lawrence cavorted, he recognized the primeval nature and incantatory purpose of the song. Years later, he would write “Hymns in a Man’s Life,” in which he acknowledged the sheer affective religiosity of hymns, defying reason. At this moment, in the rain, he may have become aware of the true meaning of intercession. A few days later war was declared and the straitjacket of societal response to imminent danger was tightened. War is man’s ultimate inhumanity to man, both in theatre and at home. As the vice tightened, Lawrence could not help but think of ‘escape’ and ‘change.’ Rananim attempted the first and magic the second. Kot focused Lawrence’s attention on the importance of the visionary role. In the Kabbalic and early apocalyptic traditions of Judaism, the visionary reaches towards the ecstatic experience of oneness with the sublime, but then, as prophet, brings this experience back to the physical world as words. This paper will look at the beginnings of an important friendship between D. H. Lawrence and S.S. Koteliansky and the seminal role of Koteliansky’s intellectual and spiritual sense of Jewish mysticism on Lawrence’s thinking.