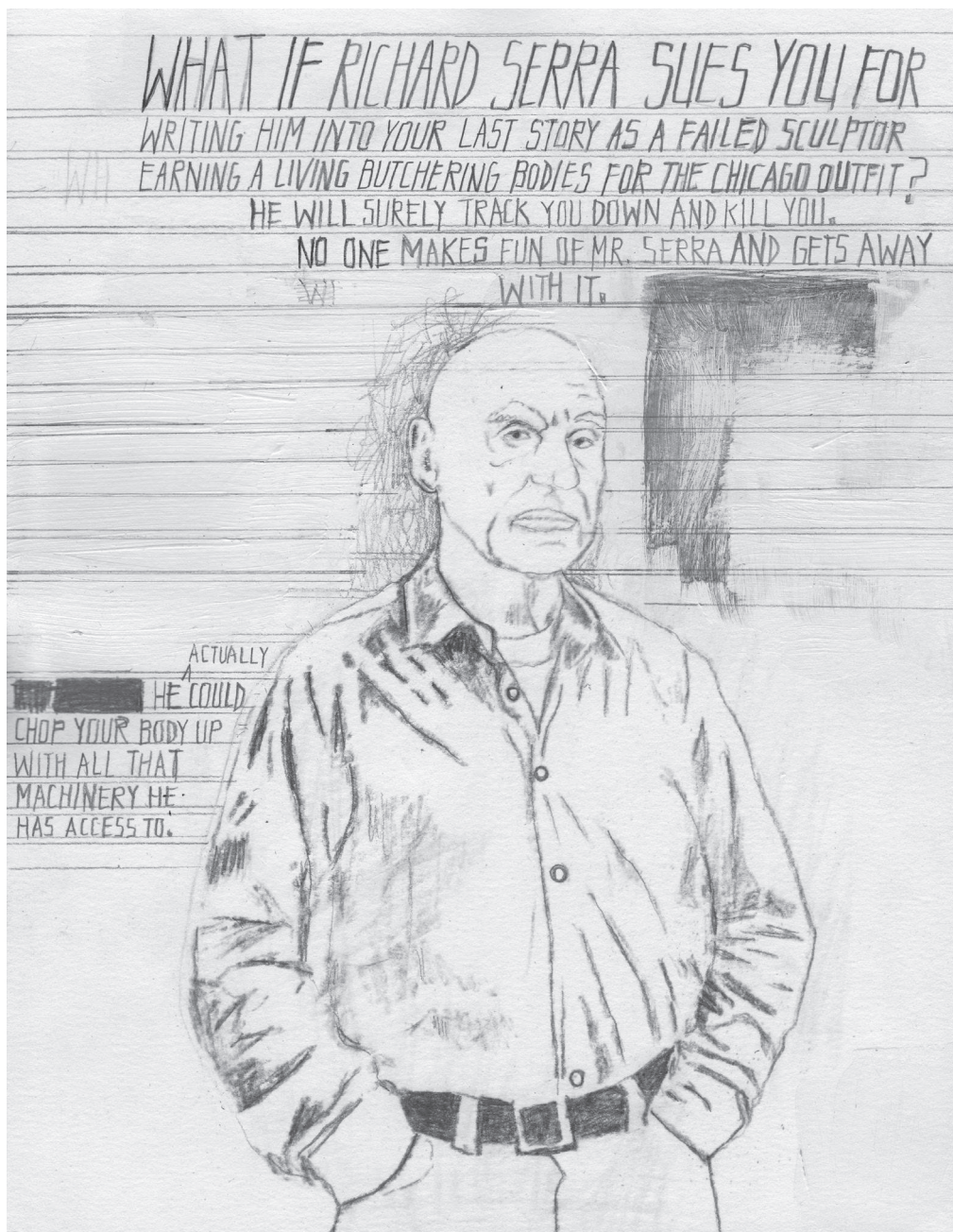


The Questionnaire:

What film do you find most relevant to Jewish Studies?

# AJS Perspectives

THE MAGAZINE OF THE ASSOCIATION FOR JEWISH STUDIES



OK. LISTEN. DON'T FEEL BAD.  
SO IT DIDN'T TURN OUT LIKE  
YOU THOUGHT IT WOULD THIS TIME, BUT  
NO ONE DIED, YOU KNOW? SO  
DON'T WORRY, YOU'LL GET IT THIS  
RIGHT NEXT TIME. AUSE YOU CAN KEEP  
TRYING. JUST DON'T LOSE YOUR COOL AND  
WET YOUR PANTS.

DON'T WEEPY, IT I

OK, SO IT DIDN'T TURN OUT LIKE YOU  
THOUGHT IT WOULD, BUT NO ONE (THIS TIME)  
DIED, YOU KNOW? SO DON'T WORRY.  
YOU'LL GET IT RIGHT NEXT TIME.

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#### The Cover

Chicago-based Deb Sokolow, a contemporary artist who is rapidly gaining national attention, creates a paranoid universe of conspiracy theories, half truths, and general disease, destabilized, in turn, by an impish sense of humor. Her work brims with references to Jewish figures like Richard Serra and Sidney Gottlieb, a set of self-conscious references that undergirds a reading of Sokolow's art as a performative enactment of and critical commentary on Jewish anxieties. For more of Sokolow's artwork, see pp. 10, 14, 28, 31, 40, 43.

#### Artwork by Deb Sokolow. Courtesy of Western Exhibitions, Chicago.

**Front Cover:** *No One Makes Fun of Mr. Serra*, 2011, graphite, acrylic, ink on paper, 11 x 8 1/2 inches

**Back Cover:** *The Bodies in Mitchell's Cabin*, 2012-2013, two inflatable mannequins, two black tablecloths, tape, 44 h x 72 w x 32 d inches

**Front inside cover:** *Revision #7*, 2011, ink, graphite, acrylic on paper, 11 x 8 1/2 inches

**Back inside cover:** *Many Organizations*, 2013, graphite and gesso on paper, 11 x 8 1/2 inches

**Page 10:** *Secretarial Retribution*, 2014, graphite, acrylic, colored pencil, crayon, collage on paper, 8 1/2 x 11 inches

**Page 14:** *Planning for a Political Campaign*, 2014, graphite, acrylic, colored pencil, collage on paper, 11 x 8 1/2 x 3/4 inches

**Page 28:** *The Curse on the Building*, 2014, graphite, acrylic, adhesive and collage on paper, 30 x 22 inches

**Page 31:** *Some concerns about the candidate #3*, 2013, acrylic, graphite, charcoal, tape, collage on two panels, 78 x 50 x 1 1/2 inches (detail: image of left panel)

**Page 40:** *CIA Failed Assassination Attempt on Castro #6 (Fungus in Scuba Gear)*, 2011, graphite, ink, acrylic, collage on paper, 11 x 8 1/2 inches

**Page 43:** *The People Who Care About Culture*, 2012-2013, graphite, charcoal, acrylic, ink, tape, adhesive and collage on paper, 30 h x 22 w x 1 d inches (detail)

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## Message from AJS's Vice President for Publications:

Dear AJS Member,

After five years at the helm of *AJS Perspectives*, editors Matti Bunzl and Rachel Havrelock will be stepping down. Over their tenure as editors, Professors Bunzl and Havrelock have sought to create an engaging and accessible publication of interest to AJS members and the wider public. The Anxiety Issue represents their last collaboration as *Perspectives* co-editors, and we will read it with much gratitude for the innovations, aesthetics, and energy they have brought to the magazine. Leading the magazine into the future will be a new team of editors: Professor Jonathan Hess of University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Professor Laura Lieber of Duke University. We very much look forward to their first issue in the fall of 2015 and *Perspectives*' continued engagement with the most pressing and interesting issues in the field.

I am also delighted to announce the launch of *AJS Perspectives* online (<http://perspectives.ajsnet.org>). Now you can easily share your favorite pieces with colleagues, students, and friends. Print, tweet, post, and email articles from the latest Anxiety Issue, or go into the archive of past issues to use materials in your syllabi. *Perspectives* online is the longtime vision of Matti Bunzl and Rachel Havrelock; it is both fitting and bittersweet that we launch the online magazine at that same time that we come to the close of their tenure as editors. We thank them for this great contribution.

Leslie Morris

Vice President for Publications  
Association for Jewish Studies

## From the Editors

### Dear Colleagues,

We don't venture to provide any formal definition of anxiety or to try to qualify the half smile that passes many people's lips when they hear the term "Jewish anxiety." But we do wonder about the source of anxiety. Is it best understood as an internal cognitive or psychological state or as a response to external factors? Does the anxiety of an ethnic or cultural group manifest genetic inclination or is it the result of historical circumstances that produce a particular response? Hoping to have peaked your curiosity, but not anxiety, we present the Anxiety Issue.

This is our final issue as editors of *Perspectives*. We look back fondly on five years and ten issues, as well as forward to the continuation of the magazine under the editorship of Laura Lieber and Jonathan Hess. This year we launched online *Perspectives* with great excitement around connecting and expanding the community of Jewish Studies. We hope that the online version of *AJS Perspectives* will become an important part of your reading, referencing, and

teaching lives. Articles and questionnaires from all of our past issues are on the website along with the featured artwork from the issues and information about the artists. We see the online and print editions of *Perspectives* as a valuable way to showcase some of the best work in Jewish Studies and disseminate it to the wider public. This production would be impossible without the many talents of managing editor, Karin Kugel, whom we thank for years of wonderful, collaborative work.

Without anxiety, we pass the project on to a great new team and look forward to watching it change and grow.

**Matti Bunzl**

*Wien Museum, Vienna*

**Rachel Havrelock**

*University of Illinois at Chicago*

## From the President

### Dear Colleagues,

The Anxiety Issue seems like the appropriate venue to think about the most anxiety provoking of all the questions that I receive from students and parents: Will a degree in Jewish Studies get me (or my child) a job?

Once upon a time, job training was not seen as the primary purpose of an undergraduate college major. Instead, majors like Jewish Studies trained students to think, research, and write. Of course, we also added to our students' store of knowledge and sometimes helped them to explore their personal identities. Most importantly, though, we pushed them to broaden their intellectual horizons, grapple with hard questions, and expand their sense of what it means to be a human being. That, we thought, was how best to prepare them for the world.

Nowadays, with so many recent graduates still struggling to find employment and parents more involved than ever before in their children's education, the practicalities of the job market shape college majors. STEM subjects—science, technology, engineering, and math—are all the rage. At my university, health and business, two undergraduate majors that did not even exist when I was an undergraduate at Brandeis, now rank among the most popular of all majors. As for Jewish Studies, students sometimes tell me that they would love to major or minor in it, but their parents won't let them.

The problem is even more acute at the graduate level. "Where will an MA in Jewish Studies equip me to work?" prospective students anxiously ask. Even those completing their doctoral dissertations wonder whether their hard-earned PhD will actually land them a secure academic job.

My department, like many others, seeks to alleviate employment-related anxieties by trumpeting success stories. One of our alumni, our website exclaims, "is a Saturday Night Live writer who was hired for her depth of knowledge about Jewish culture and affairs." Another "manages educational materials that promote the values of global citizenship for the American Jewish World Service." More broadly, the website reports, graduates of our program, in addition to successfully pursuing jobs in the Jewish world, "go on to careers in

law, health care, business, politics, writing and the arts."

All of this is quite true, of course, but I wonder whether it is truly persuasive. As my colleague Leonard Saxe likes to observe, "the plural of 'anecdote' is not 'data.'"

Felicia Herman, in a marvelous paper posted on the AJS website ([www.ajsnet.org/herman.pdf](http://www.ajsnet.org/herman.pdf)), suggests a different approach. Based on her personal experience as a Jewish Studies PhD who moved into the world of Jewish foundations (she is currently executive director of the Natan Fund), she encourages graduates in Jewish Studies seeking jobs outside the academy to focus on their *skills*. What you know, she argues, is less important to employers than what you know how to do. And she offers a helpful list of skills that most Jewish Studies graduates do know how to do, and should remember to boast about when they apply for jobs:

1. You have public speaking skills—you've taught classes, led seminars, given conference papers, maybe given public lectures. So you are probably comfortable in front of a crowd, and hopefully you know how to adapt yourself to different kinds of audiences.
2. You know how to write—and maybe, how to write quickly.
3. You know how to edit, and you know how to analyze other people's work and ideas.
4. You know how to read—to read critically, to read a lot, or to read very little but sound like you've read a lot.
5. You have *sitzfleisch*—you can sit for hours, reading, and distilling large amounts of information into important points or arguments.
6. Maybe you speak a few languages—this is always in high demand—at least if you speak actual living languages.
7. And—if you've gotten the PhD—you have a credential that signals to the outside world that you're smart. You're a professional smart person, and don't underestimate the power of the letters PhD or MA in any job market, no matter what your field of study actually was.

Professor Anthony T. Grafton of Princeton and the American Historical Association's executive director, James Grossman, offer an analysis parallel to Herman's in a much-discussed article, published during the depth of the Great Recession, entitled "No More Plan B." Rather than considering non-tenure-track jobs to be "alternative careers" or Plan B, they make the case that historians actually learn multiple skills in graduate school that equip them for a wide range of jobs. "There are many ways to be a historian," they insist, "there are many ways to apply what you've learned to a career." (<http://chronicle.com/article/No-More-Plan-B/129293/>)

The job situation in Jewish Studies is relatively better than the situation in History, as recent AJS surveys of job market trends amply demonstrate (see <http://ajsnet.org/jobdata2015.htm>). Nevertheless, about half of recent Jewish Studies PhDs (since 2005) did not hold tenure-track academic positions in Jewish Studies three years after receiving their PhD degrees, according to Steven M. Cohen's recent survey. In our field, as in the humanities and social sciences broadly,

## From the Executive Director

*Dear Colleagues,*

AJS is still unpacking and absorbing the findings of its Survey of the Field, conducted in the fall of 2014 by Professor Steven M. Cohen. The purpose of this survey was not only to give students, scholars, administrators, and donors a nuanced sense of the state of the field, and the professional lives of scholars in the field, but also to help AJS chart its own course over the next several years. Taking the pulse of the Jewish Studies community would be important under any set of circumstances, but it has assumed a particular sense of urgency in what feels like a never-ending period of dramatic change in higher education.

This change is by no means all bad: we are witnessing a revolution in teaching, scholarship, and publishing unleashed by new digital technologies, which have the potential to improve access to knowledge, data, students, and audiences on a scale never before possible. We are also seeing a new emphasis on teaching and learning outcomes, which is elevating the status of pedagogy and the classroom experience, to the great benefit of professors and students alike. Part of AJS's duty is to help its members navigate new opportunities as well as push the field along in uncharted areas, whether by providing a platform at the AJS Annual Conference for members to explore new frontiers, or (even better) to provide funding to members to experiment with them on their own campuses.

Another way AJS needs to respond to this period of great change pertains to the changing demographics of our membership. AJS's survey response rate was a remarkable 60%; of the 3,026 current and former AJS and ASSJ (Association for the Social Scientific Study of Jewry) members who received the survey, 1,790 responded. Of these, 71% self-identified as academics, either working or retired, 11% as students, and the remaining 18% of respondents listed a range of other professions, including researcher (6%); nonprofit professional (3%); museum/archive/library professional (2%); K-12 teacher/administrator (1%); and other (6%). (Interestingly, a 2008 survey of the AJS membership yielded 13.2% members who defined their status as something other than academic or student.)

While one might look at the statistics and think this is a relatively small percentage of the AJS membership, it's very likely that the actual numbers of Jewish Studies PhDs who have moved into careers outside

there are many more job seekers than there are jobs, and that is unlikely to change anytime soon.

All of this sounds most anxiety producing, to be sure, but it should hardly dissuade students from pursuing an undergraduate major or graduate training in our programs. If, instead, we help students to appreciate the highly marketable skills and wide-ranging opportunities that a thoroughgoing training in Jewish Studies provides ("there are many ways to apply what you've learned in Jewish Studies to a career") then we ought to be able both to fill classrooms and to satisfy parental fears. In addition, we'll expand the reach of Jewish Studies, build bridges to the larger community, and fulfill an important component of our core mission: "fostering greater understanding of Jewish Studies scholarship among the wider public."

**Jonathan D. Sarna**

*Brandeis University*

of the professoriate is higher, and a priority of AJS is to prove a meaningful home for these scholars' professional needs and interests.

For instance, AJS has restructured its membership dues, conference registration fees, and travel grant opportunities in a way that recognizes scholars working outside of colleges and universities and encourages their ongoing participation. Our dues are income based, and our travel grant programs favor those who do not receive institutional support for conference travel.

So, what would an AJS even more inclusive of a range of professions look like? A high priority is making sure to appoint even more members in a range of careers to AJS leadership roles, including key committees beyond the board. Ensuring that the language of our own communications do not present such career choices as second best is equally important (to cite an oft-repeated 2011 article by the AHA's executive director, James Grossman, and past president, Anthony Grafton, "No More Plan B"). Indeed, at this time when great emphasis is being placed on the public humanities, Jewish Studies PhDs who are assuming roles in museums, libraries, archives, philanthropies, and nonprofits are playing a critical role in demonstrating the very applicability of humanities- and social science-based training across a range of professions. AJS can also work to convey to advisors how critical a role they play in legitimizing to their graduate students career choices outside the professoriate. In my conversations with graduate students and recent PhDs, several express the frustration that they lack guidance on how to navigate beyond a traditional tenure-track trajectory, and do not think their advisor would approve. Lastly, AJS can help to mentor those who wish to explore this route, especially through special workshops at the annual conference that explore such topics as how to convert an academic cover letter and CV into a more generally usable resume, and also how to interview.

What else can we do? Please let me know. Every year, we strive to make our membership meaningful and responsive to you. We need your input. Please email me your ideas at [rsheramy@ajs.cjh.org](mailto:rsheramy@ajs.cjh.org).

**Rona Sheramy**

*Association for Jewish Studies*

# The Anxiety Issue

## Anxiety and Anti-Semitism: Emotions and Judeophobia

Jonathan Judaken

If anti-Semitism at base is hatred of Jews, what are the emotions that fire this hatred? A number of the great theorists of anti-Semitism maintained that anxiety was the axial emotion driving Judeophobia. Anxiety encompasses a whole universe of affects: fear, of course, but also apprehension, unease, and disquiet. The other driving complex of emotions is resentment, including envy, dissatisfaction, and animosity. A number of thinkers followed Freud into the recesses of the unconscious, explaining how anxiety and resentment are the emotional undercurrents driving anti-Jewish wrath.

Sigmund Freud's *Moses and Monotheism* (1939) was the urtext in this discussion. But Freud had first speculated on the unconscious origins of anti-Semitism in a footnote in the case of "Little Hans" (1909). There he suggested it was rooted in the fear of castration anxiety aroused by circumcision. The footnote intimated a shift in Freud's oeuvre that took shape with *Totem and Taboo* in 1912, where he moved from a focus on individual psychology to mass psychology, generalizing to groups and civilizations his exploration of identity construction as a result of the sublimation of incestuous, parricidal, and murderous wishes. With the backdrop of World War I, he began to explore the relationship to death and narcissism at work in group psychology. His writing on the "Uncanny" (1919), where he examined the stranger who is at the same time "secretly familiar" and who might therefore be constructed as the "internal enemy" also proved central to his analysis of anti-Semitism. In *The Problem of Anxiety* (1926), he analyzed displeasure (*Unlust*) that arises in situations of perceived danger, whose psychic origins are traced back to the "trauma of birth," where the helplessness and sense of loss from leaving the womb and with it the threat of "non-gratification of needs" derive from the loss of the mother. Freud noted that this sense of loss was replayed in situations of castration anxiety.

Such insights are all brought together in Freud's interpretation of *Moses and*



*The Wandering Eternal Jew.* Colored wood-engraving by S.C. Dumont, 1852 (based on Gustave Doré). Nazi propaganda poster at Yad Vashem. Photograph of poster by David Shankbone.

*Monotheism.* In the work, he discussed the oedipal relationship between the "religion of the father" (Judaism) and the "religion of the son" (Christianity). He connected the claim of Jewish chosenness and his analysis of circumcision as the font of anti-Semitism. And he evoked the notion of the "narcissism of minor differences," which leads to the rigidification of group boundaries and the domination of group identity in terms of the superego. Bringing this all together, Freud suggested that anti-Semitism was the product of seething resentment at Jews by Christians. Christians were often first converted at the end of a sword and their core narrative in the New Testament was a set of stories about Jews. Christians consequently unconsciously begrudged Jews for being the source of the core civilizational moral precepts, whose ideals all assent to

but that prove difficult for individuals to uphold given their instinctual drives. Freud's understanding of anti-Semitism—provoked by (oedipal) conflict—thus coupled fear and anxiety along with resentment, frustration, and displacement as the driving emotions in the psychic life of anti-Semitism. His insights would have an enduring influence.

Freud's analysis surely inspired Maurice Samuel's once-important account of anti-Semitism, *The Great Hatred* (1940). In lecture after lecture that made up the book, Samuel hammered home his thesis that "Christophobia" was the underlying cause of anti-Semitism: "Jews are loathed as the Christ-givers, the creators or representatives of the non-force principle in human relations," he thundered. The great Catholic intellectual Jacques Maritain would pick up on Samuel's formulation of Freud's thesis, giving his theory a distinctly Christological spin in his interventions against anti-Semitism during the Second World War.

Following Maritain's Catholic theological spin, Talcott Parsons gave it a sociological bent. Parsons's effort, "The Sociology of Modern Antisemitism," was included in a lengthy collection, *Jews in a Gentile World: The Problem of Antisemitism*, edited by Isaac Graeber and Stuart Henderson Britt, published in 1942. Parsons's contribution was a major new theoretical understanding of the problem. His key claim in "The Sociology of Modern Antisemitism," is that "the most important source of virulent anti-Semitism is probably the projection on the Jew, as a symbol, of free-floating aggression, springing from insecurities and social disorganization." Anti-Semitism results from modern social dislocation, explained Parsons. It resulted from what Ferdinand Tönnies discussed as the shift from the *Gemeinschaft* to the *Gesellschaft*—leading to the breakdown of the social system of the close-knit community, which had clearly defined values, goals, and routines. The sociological processes of modernization—including urbanization, industrialization, the debunking of traditional



values and ideas, and the expansion of mass means of communication—all result in what Parsons termed the “large-scale incidence of *anomie* in Western society.”

Parsons borrowed the notion of *anomie* from Durkheim’s study on *Suicide*. *Anomie* is a state of rootlessness, disconnection, and social alienation. It results from the breakdown of norms or cultural expectations, which conflict with the social realities attendant upon the transformations of modernity. Parsons claimed that the result of *anomie* is social and psychological insecurity, frustration, and resentment, often expressed as aggression. The more heightened the anxiety, the more “free floating” the aggression. In these circumstances, people act out this frustration and insecurity on a symbolic object. In the case of modern Europe, this symbolic object was the Jew, who was to be found “everywhere and nowhere” as Hannah Arendt later put it.

With the Holocaust ramping up, the leading lights of the Frankfurt school also picked up on Freud’s insights. Their most ambitious effort as a group was the Studies in Prejudice series, whose five books brought together Weberian sociology, Marxism, and psychoanalysis. First published in 1950, they made an important contribution to the study of racism and discrimination. Perhaps the most ambitious undertaking of the series was *The Authoritarian Personality*, a collaborative work led by Theodor Adorno. Institutionally *The Authoritarian Personality* was a joint undertaking of the Berkeley Public Opinion Study and the Institute of Social Research, combining Berkeley’s experimental and empirical academic social psychology with the Frankfurt school’s sociological, psychoanalytic, and philosophical bent. In his methodological chapter on “Types and Syndromes” Adorno justified the drive to locate the etiology of the “authoritarian personality”—and its correlate types: the anti-Semite, the fascist, the xenophobe. All modern social processes tended toward standardization and mass production, Adorno maintained, including the personality types of individuals. Only by identifying the social types of the authoritarian personality could the all-pervasive thrust toward classification in modernity be challenged. Social types were the products of social rubber stamps.

How these rubber stamps were constituted as socially produced phenomena was the basis of Adorno’s specific anthropology of anti-Semitism in the three



Max Horkheimer (front left), Theodor Adorno (front right), and Jürgen Habermas (background, right, running hand through his hair). Photograph taken in April 1964 by Jeremy J. Shapiro at the Max Weber-Soziologentag.

substantive chapters he authored in *The Authoritarian Personality*. Adorno concentrated on the social production of the stereotype, which is itself linked to psychological needs that are created by the cold, alienated world of modernity. The psychological motor of stereotypes is projection. The key mechanism that prompts it is the defamation of other groups as a way to code one’s own status. The social functionality of anti-Semitism is consequently that it serves as a compensation for social alienation. Also key for Adorno was that anti-Semitism serves as a means to *personalize* an explanation of the complicated contradictions that engender social and psychological discomfort and unrest that are the outcome of alienation. The ineloquence or confusion of social life can be unraveled in an instant through a set of stock images. Going deeper into the Freudian psyche, Adorno suggested that stereotypes screen the internal contradictions of individuals—their inner conflicts between superego and id. Stereotypes are the externalization of these inner conflicts, which are themselves the internalization of the contradictions of global capitalism. This is why many positive stereotypes are closely linked to their shadow side. For example, the contention that Jews are solidly entrenched in family values has its double in the assertion of Jewish clannishness; Jewish

intelligence is coupled to Jewish manipulation and power; the Jews as law-abiding to materialism and spiritual lifelessness.

Unlike the Frankfurt school, Sartre’s major analysis of anti-Semitism preferred an existential psychoanalysis to a Freudian-inspired model. *Réflexions sur la question juive* (*Anti-Semite and Jew*) was written in the fall of 1944 between the liberation of Paris and the liberation of Auschwitz, and published in 1946. Since then it has remained a forceful examination of Jewish subjugation, explored as a dialectic of recognition between Self and Other. In French discussions, it became the urtext to postwar debates about anti-Semitism and the Jewish condition. For Sartre, the key affective driver is once more anxiety, but his understanding is existential, not psychoanalytic. Sartre focuses less on the unconscious and more on human freedom than Freud did.

The *Réflexions* is an existentialist analysis of the Jewish Question, whose core claim is that the anti-Semite is a man of “*mauvaise foi*” (bad faith or self-deception). “Antisemitism, in short, is fear of the human condition,” Sartre avows. In doing so, Sartre picked up on a key distinction introduced by Martin Heidegger in his existentialist opus *Being and Time* (1927) between fear and anxiety. Fear, Heidegger insisted, has a fixed object—we fear

the specific thief who assaults us, for example. Anxiety is free-floating; it is provoked by the groundlessness of our being. When we tune in to our contingency, it manifests bodily as nausea: the taste of our freedom, according to Sartre. Anti-Semitism, for Sartre, was an inauthentic response to man's situation in the world and being-with-others. While he wrote that anti-Semitism is animated by "fear of the human condition" Sartre clearly means that anti-Semites are deeply *anxious* about the constitutive limits of the human condition (change, death, and a world shared with Others, who call into question one's essence and values). Denying their own freedom, they justify themselves through their typologies of the degenerate Jewish Other. As such, they avoid responsibility. They flee from it by focusing their passions on "the Jew," the free-floating symbol of decadence, decay, and degeneration that must be eliminated to redeem the modern world.

Hannah Arendt offered her interactionist account of modern anti-Semitism partly as a response to her unfavorable assessment of Sartre's existentialism as well as the Frankfurt school's socio-psychoanalytic approach. Arendt wrote in the preface to the *Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), "even a cursory knowledge of Jewish history . . . should be enough to dispel this latest myth in these matters . . . somewhat fashionable in intellectual circles after Sartre's 'existentialist' interpretation of *the Jew* as someone who is regarded and defined as a Jew by others." What explained modern anti-Semitism for Arendt was the role of the Jews in the development of modernity. "Modern antisemitism," she asserted, "must be seen in the more general framework of the development of the nation-state, and at the same time its source must be found in certain aspects of Jewish history and specifically Jewish functions during the last centuries." In taking this interactionist turn,

Arendt would help to launch the dominant approach to analyzing anti-Semitism after her work: the turn to history. But in focusing on historical contexts, the affective elements of anti-Semitism so pronounced in the early theoretical approaches to anti-Semitism receded into the background or were absorbed into the narratives developed by historians. Her interactionist and historicist approach has dominated the research on anti-Semitism in the last fifty years. For all it has contributed to our understanding of the social conditions that produce anti-Semitism, historians have sidelined the emotions. Perhaps it is time for a return of the repressed.

*Jonathan Judaken is the Spence L. Wilson Chair in the Humanities at Rhodes College. He is the author of Jean-Paul Sartre and the Jewish Question: Anti-antisemitism and the Politics of the French Intellectual (University of Nebraska Press, 2006).*

## Did you know?



**The AJS website is a central location for resources on Jewish Studies research, teaching, and program development, including:**

**Syllabi Directory:** A listing of more than 150 syllabi, organized and cross-listed by topic. Designed to assist AJS members in developing new courses and identifying new readings for current classes. New submissions are welcome.

**Public Programming Best Practices Resource Guide:** A guide for scholars launching public programs in conjunction with a Jewish Studies department, including information on audience targeting, marketing and outreach, program evaluation, and more.

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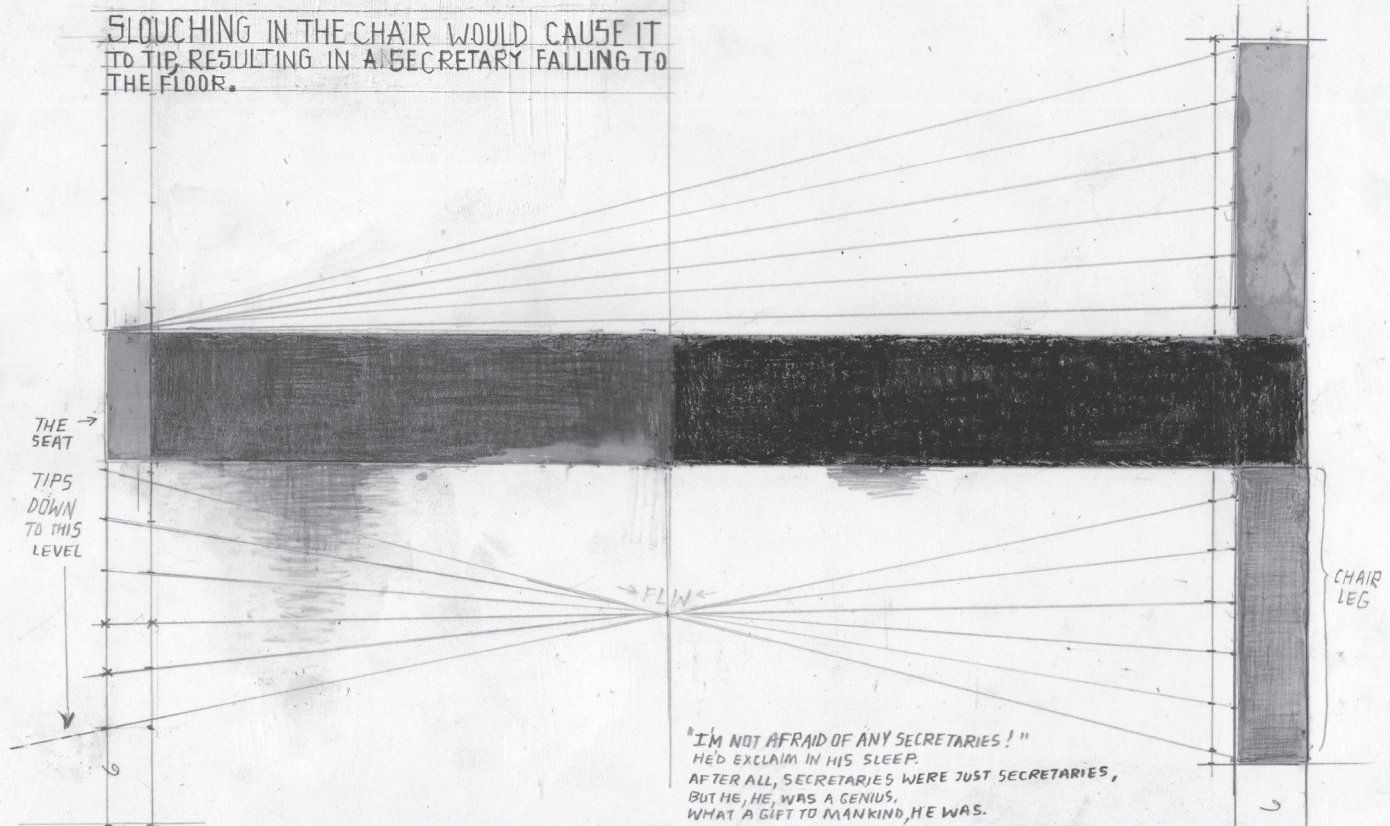
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# Psychoanalytic Literary Theory and the Hebrew Bible

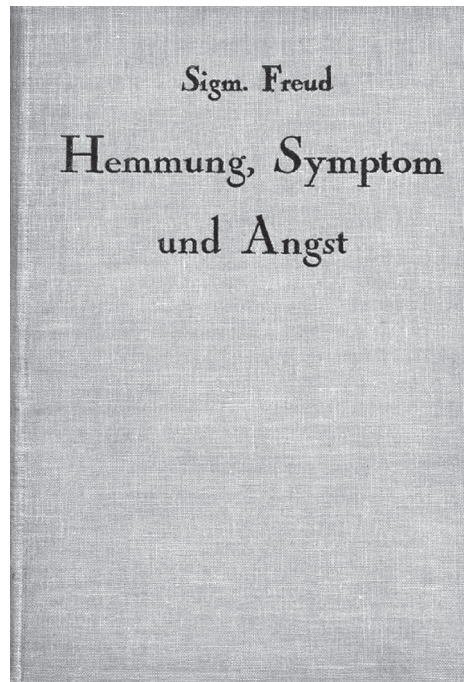
Ilona Rashkow

Sigmund Freud once acknowledged that most of his discoveries about the unconscious mind had been anticipated by the poets of the past. Thus, it should not be surprising that psychology has been used in an effort to explain the origins, character, and effects of literature, including biblical literature.

What makes a reading of a literary work “psychoanalytic?” To call a reading “psychoanalytic” introduces ambiguity immediately because the expression can refer either to the use of psychoanalytic themes or methods. That is, interpretation can be called “psychoanalytic” with respect either to the substance of the text (*what it reads*), or to the interpretive procedures and techniques a reader uses (*how it is read*).

Generally speaking, there are three points at which psychoanalysis can enter the study of a biblical text: examining the mind of the author, the minds and behavior of the author’s characters, or our own minds. There is a long tradition of psychoanalytic criticism that examines the text for buried motives and hidden neurotic conflicts that generated the writer’s art: (in writing *Hamlet*, for example, Shakespeare was working over the death of his son). Because the hazards of examining an author’s mind are inversely proportional to the amount of material available on the writer’s life and private thoughts, it is never completely safe to guess at the psychic significance of a work of art, even that of a candid living author, and for biblical writers, we have only the most minimal sense of what their private lives may have been. Thus, this form of psychoanalytic literary criticism generally is viewed as mere speculation.

Most of Freud’s own ventures into literature were the analyses of literary characters. His initial remarks on the Oedipus complex were literary, involving both Hamlet and Oedipus Tyrannis. Hamlet, according to Freud, is “the hysteric” who delays because he is paralyzed by guilt over Claudius’s enactment of his own unconscious wishes. A stream of essays by other analysts followed, mostly on fictitious textual characters. They wrote what might be described as “case studies” of literature, dealing with those authors or characters whom they categorized as “neurotic.” Most of them emphasized such



Cover of Freud’s *Hemmung, Symptom, und Angst* [*Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety*]. (Internationaler Psychoanalytischer Verlag, 1926).

analytic themes as the Oedipus complex, anality, schizoid tendencies, latent or expressed homosexuality, guilt, etc., and the roles they played in the works of the writers or among their other literary characters.

Analyzing literary characters has not fallen into as deep a disrepute as concentrating on the writer, in great part because fictional characters are viewed as representatives of life and as such can be understood only if we assume that they are “telling a truth.” This assumption allows us to find “unconscious” motivations, albeit in fictitious characters. For example, Abraham’s actions and language reveal a great deal about him, despite the fact that all we will ever “know” is contained in the 1,534 verses of Genesis.

On the other hand, literary characters are both more and less than real persons. This presents a problem. While one aspect of narrative characterization is to provide a mimetic function, another aspect is primarily *textual*—to reveal information to a reader or to conceal it. This situation has no precise parallel in life (although it can be argued that real persons often resemble literary

characters in the masks they present to the world). As a result, examining a narrative character is not risk-free either. For instance, contradictions in Abraham’s character may result from the psychic complexities the biblical writer imagined; or, they may result from the fact that Abraham is an agent in a literary narrative with a highly developed system of conventions—his “traits” may be more a function of the requirements of the story line than his personality.

Since authors may not provide much material for the theorists and since characters are not real persons, many scholars have shifted their focus from the interpretation of meanings embedded within a text to the processes of reading. Rather than attempting to determine objective meanings hidden within a text, which a reader needs to extricate, these scholars concentrate on the subjective experience of the reader, interactions between reader/text/author, and the values and premises with which a reader approaches interpretation of a text. As within psychoanalysis itself, their foci are problems of indeterminacy, uncertainty, perspective, hermeneutics, subjective (and communal) assumptions, and agreements.

Until recently, reading the Bible was thought to be a rather straightforward procedure. The goal was to respond “properly” by trying to “understand” the text and grasp *the* “meaning.” The unspoken and unwritten rule was: “Do not confuse what *you* are doing to the *text* with what *it* is doing to *you*.” The proper aim of biblical exegesis was the apprehension of the text itself.

Yet, in spite of the impressive pressures designed to preserve this view of reading Scripture (both within the academy and by society at large), the rules seemed to change when the Bible became an object of interest to literary theorists. Poststructural literary criticism was particularly forceful in calling attention to the problematic interaction between reader and text. Scholars were producing counterexamples of irreducibly different and often contradictory readings of the same biblical narratives, and this wealth of interpretations had the effect of undermining the long-established and accepted doctrine of “objectivity” (whatever that may mean). As a result, scholars began

to acknowledge the idea that how a biblical text is read is determined, in great part, by who does the reading. The effect of text and reader on one another has been the focus of several poststructuralist analyses, including deconstructionist, rhetorical, reader-response, and ideological (including Marxist, feminist, womanist, liberationist, Hispanic, etc.).

Of course, psychoanalytic literary theory is no more a conceptually unified critical position in biblical studies than in literary studies generally. The term is associated with scholars who examine the writer, the biblical characters, or the reader. Further, the approaches are neither monolithic nor mutually exclusive. But biblical scholars who use psychoanalytic literary theory seem to agree that “meaning” does not inhere completely and exclusively in the text and that the “effects” of reading Scripture, psychological and otherwise, are essential to its “meaning.” Ultimately, this type of literary criticism yields in biblical studies a way of looking at biblical narratives *and* readers that reorganizes both their interrelationships and the distinctions between them. As a result, recognizing the relationship of a reader to a text leads to

a more profound awareness that no one biblical interpretation is intrinsically “true.” That is, the “meaning” of biblical narratives is not waiting to be uncovered but evolves, actualized by readers (and interpreters).

One of the primary objections to psychoanalytic literary theory (among biblical scholars and others) is the Freudian idea of penis envy, since a common phallic phase does not characterize the infantile development of both sexes. One psychoanalyst who seems to bridge the Freudian and anti-Freudian schools of thought is Jacques Lacan, who reinterpreted Freud in light of structuralist and post-structuralist theories of discourse. By focusing on the mutual interaction among society and the self with the use of language as a signifier, Lacan shifted from Freud’s biological penis to the phallus as the signifier of power, and as a result, many scholars find his writings more relevant to both males and females.

Reading is always a relationship of conflict or debate within the unconscious, and this conflict seems to be intensified when reading the Bible. Psychoanalytic literary theory may lead to feelings of anxiety, since these theorists take no position on the “truth” claims of any particular religious

interpretation, but instead read the Bible as a “text” rather than as “sacred Scripture.” Consequently, many non-biblical scholars are anxious approaching the Bible from this perspective.

One aspect of psychoanalytic literary theory is its focus on the relationship between the literary text and reader in the context of the psychoanalytic concept of “transference.” Transference is generally considered the very essence of Freudian theory. Briefly described, in the course of treatment the analysand (or patient) may unconsciously “transfer” on to the analyst (or doctor) the conflicts he or she is experiencing. If a patient has difficulty dealing with his or her father, for example, he or she may unconsciously cast the analyst in that parental role. As a result, the analyst has particular insight into the analysand’s psychology, and can “trigger” responses in the analysand. A biblical text, similar to an analyst, “triggers” responses in a reader. Simultaneously, the text also influences a reader to conduct a self-analysis, to examine his or her own responses to a narrative. In effect, a reader acts as both analyst and analysand; the relation of text and reader is in constant exchange.



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Within the psychoanalytic framework, by virtue of transference, the analysand tries to force or coax the analyst to “play out a scene” he or she remembers, although the analysand is not aware of either the coaxing or the scene as such. Just as the psychoanalytic concept of transference is a structure of repetition linking analyst and analysand, literary “intertextuality,” the relation of a particular text to other texts, is a repetition of the very structure it seeks to understand. According to this theory, a work can be read only in connection with or against other texts. In other words, a reader acts as an analyst who points out “slips” in the text. As a result of intertextuality, the text acts as a reader’s analyst as well by enabling a reader to draw certain analogies and conclusions. In both the reading process and the psychoanalytic process, a new, more complete narrative is ultimately generated.

Reading a biblical text may cause some anxiety, which can manifest itself in at least two ways: first, the reader’s response to the approach of psychoanalytic biblical scholarship; and second, interpreting anxiety in biblical characters. Although each of these topics is worthy of a lengthy

discussion, I consider briefly only the first aspect.

Psychoanalytic readings explore new understandings of the language of symbols. This leads to an exploration of the meanings of cultic ritual, sacrifice, bans, miracles, etc. to explain the use of imagery in biblical language, including the metaphorical significance of miracle stories—the wellsprings of apocalyptic visual and auditory experiences. For example, when using psychoanalytic theory, the deity is viewed as just another “character” in the narrative—displaying anger, fear, hostility, love, jealousy, and a myriad of other human emotions with which the reader can empathize. As a father figure, the reader may transfer some of the repressed emotions inherent in a father-child relationship onto God. Some readers find this disquieting and as a result, it has been argued that a psychological or psychoanalytic reading disqualifies itself from giving “proper” consideration to “faith.” Unlike the New Testament in which the characters are either “good” or “bad,” the Hebrew Bible characters are all very human—including God. Nevertheless, the deity is “supposed”

to be above petty human fears and desires—at least as taught in synagogues and churches. In defense of psychoanalytic biblical criticism, however, approaching the Bible from any postmodern perspective is likely to cause anxiety in those readers who have been trained only in a theological setting.

Whether Freudian, Lacanian, feminist, or any combination thereof, over the past thirty or so years, there has been a shift in focus from the author to the text to finally the reader. Thus, perhaps wittingly or otherwise, more of us seem to be using some form of psychoanalytic literary theory—dissenters notwithstanding.

*Ilona Rashkow is professor emerita at the State University of New York at Stony Brook and teaches regularly at New York University. Among her book publications are Taboo or Not Taboo: The Hebrew Bible and Human Sexuality (Fortress Press, 2000); The Phallacy of Genesis: A Feminist-Psychoanalytic Approach Westminster John Knox Press, 1993; and Upon the Dark Places: Sexism and Anti-Semitism in English Renaissance Biblical Translation (Almond Press, 1990).*



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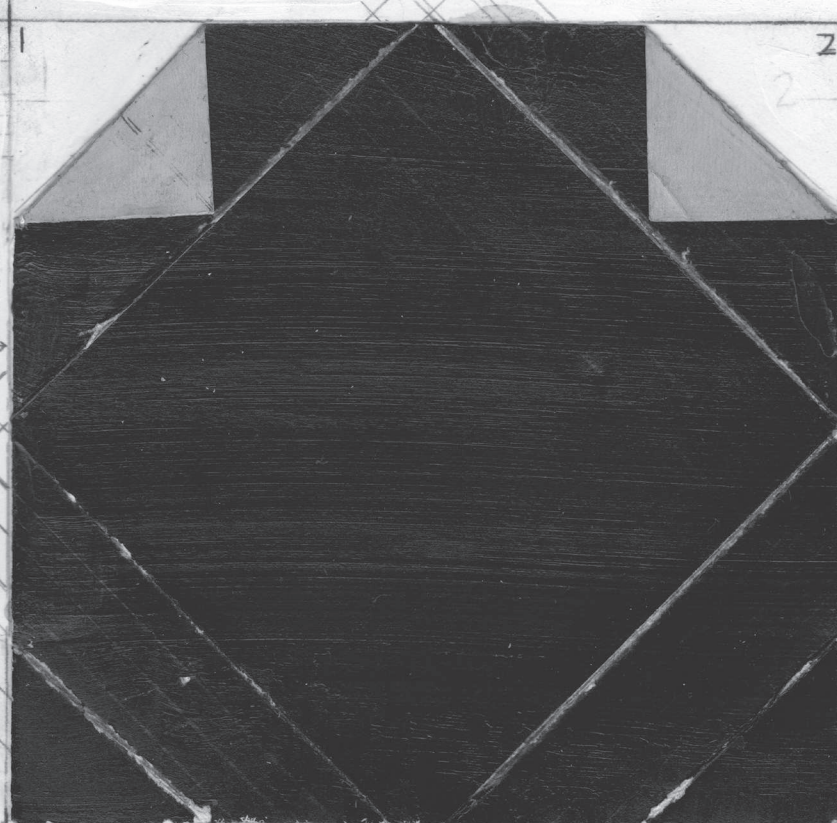
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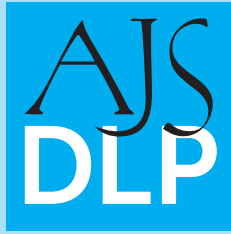
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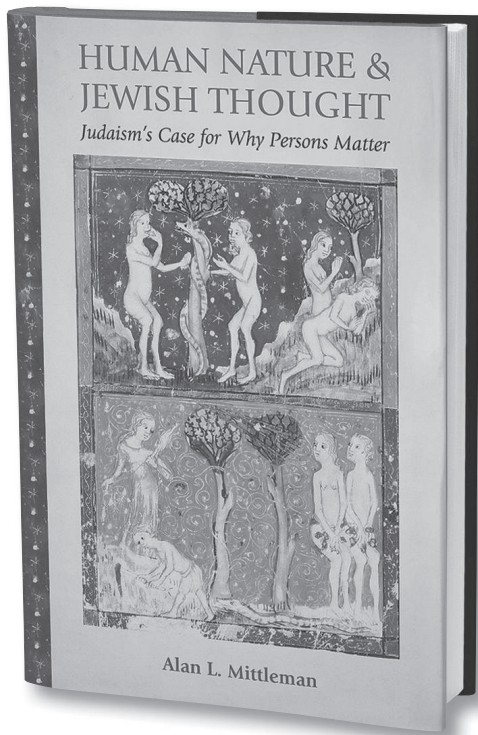
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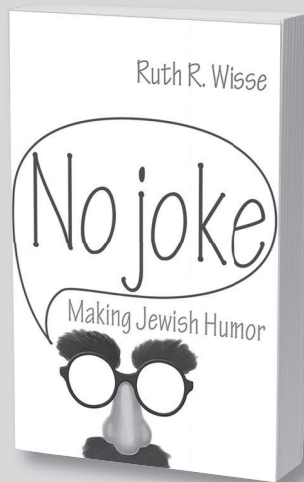
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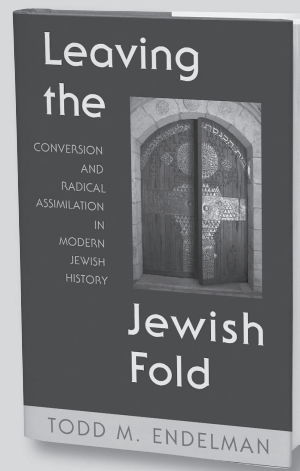
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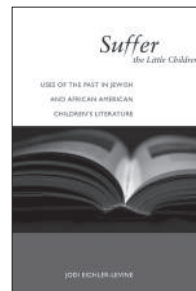
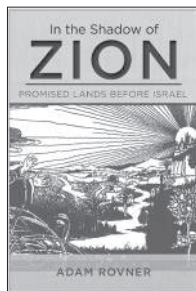
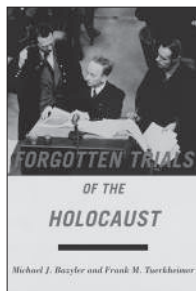
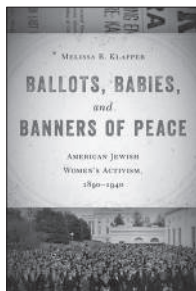
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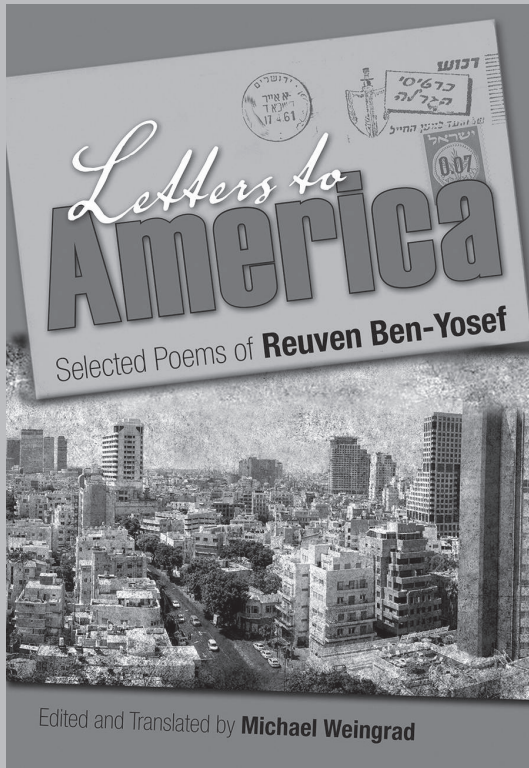
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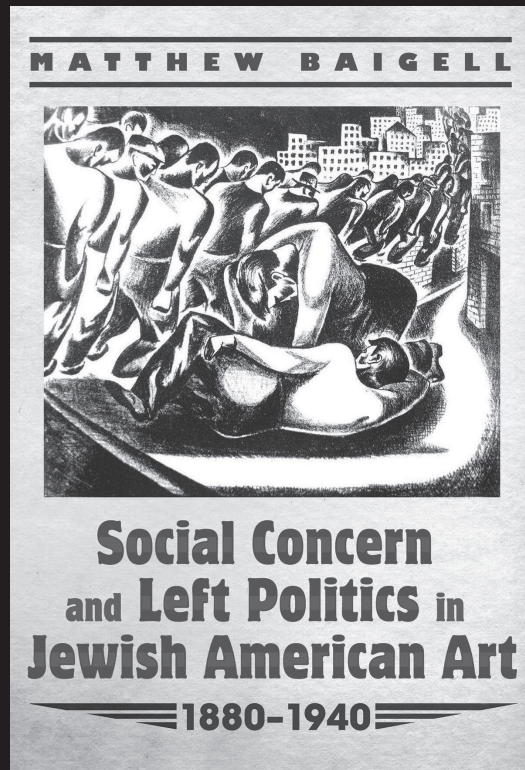
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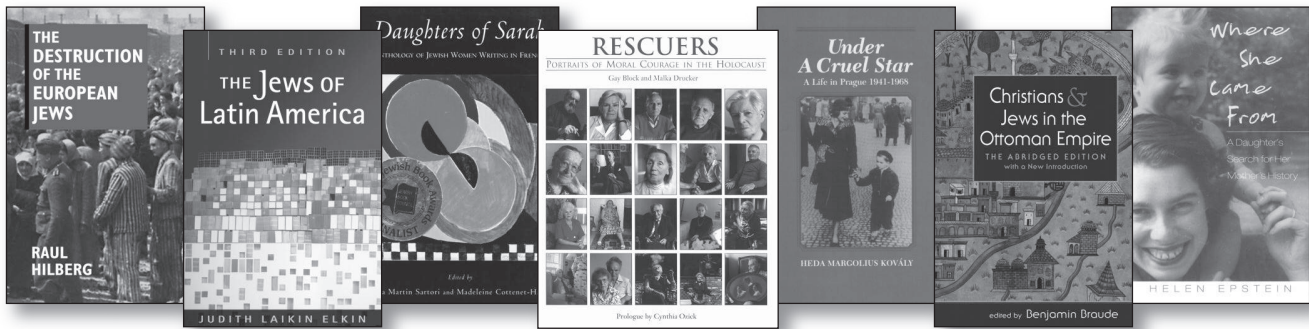
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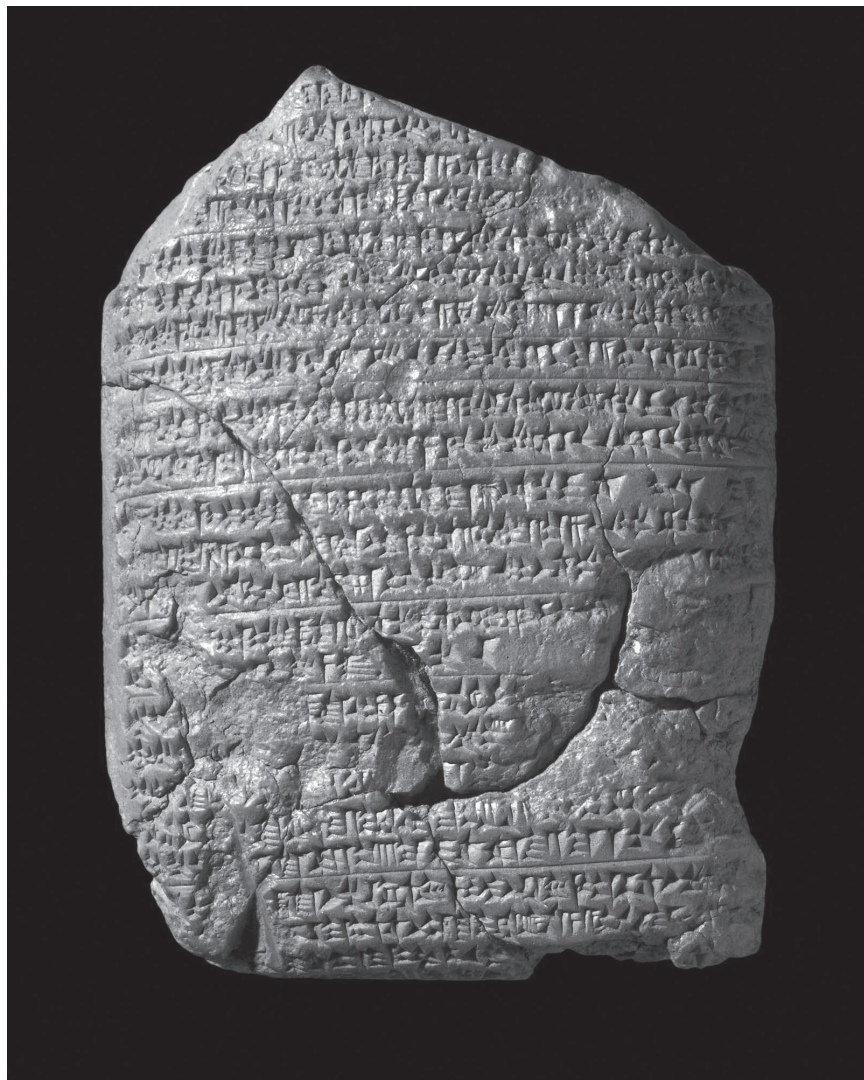
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# Trauma, Identity Formation, and Anxiety

Tamar Kamionkowski



Clay tablet; New Babylonian. Chronicle for years 605-594 BC. © Trustees of the British Museum.

**D**aniel Smith, in his recent book *Monkey Mind: A Memoir of Anxiety* (2013), has brought the topic of Jews and anxiety to the fore. He argues that Jews are predisposed to anxiety because the experience of anxiety is close to the Jewish tradition of disputation argumentation and of looking at things from every angle. In other words, Jews think too much! Smith adds that anxiety is also the result of many years of experience with oppression, persecution, and threats. While I generally agree with Smith's views, I am interested in the question of when

Jewish anxiety began to rear its head. It is my sense that anxiety was a key component of early emerging Judaism, which preceded both the development of Jewish textual traditions and a long history of persecution.

Assuming that the majority of biblical texts were edited and given a final form during the period of the Exile in Babylonia, the earliest Jewish communities developed a core identity inextricably bound up with trauma and disaster. A key site for the construction of these trauma narratives can be found in those prophets who lived

around the time of the destruction. The book of Ezekiel provides an excellent example of identity formation with trauma at its core.

For decades, trauma was understood through the lens of individual psychology. In more recent years, thinkers have suggested that trauma also operates on the communal level and that trauma is not an event but rather a socially conditioned response to an event that can never be fully understood. Jeffrey Alexander, in *Trauma: A Social Theory*, argues that collective traumas are neither about what "really happened" nor about



the level of actual suffering; rather, they are culturally constructed interpretations and reimaginings of events. There can be conditions in which the majority of a community suffer physically or emotionally, but that does not automatically make the situation a communal trauma. Furthermore, events may take place that do not impact the majority in a community, but a narrative can be constructed that impacts on the communal identity of all its members. Alexander describes the necessary elements in the cultural construction of trauma. There must be a carrier group to create and communicate the story; an audience that buys into the narrative; and a particular historical and cultural environment within which the performance unfolds. Additionally, the trauma narrative needs to serve a purpose.

Within this model, we can consider some of the latter prophets and then Ezra as the carrier group that told stories and performed within their environment. The particular historical and cultural environment was one of rapid change, great loss and dislocation, and exposure to very different worlds. In 597 BCE, Nebuchadnezzar exiled the recently enthroned King Jehoiachin, members of the royal court, and other leaders of the community (including the prophet Ezekiel). In 588 BCE, less than a decade later, the puppet king Zedekiah's revolt against Babylonian hegemony ushered in the Babylonian army and a two-year siege. In 586 BCE, the city was breached, the Temple and much of Jerusalem was burned to the ground, and there was a second deportation.

Conditions for the population that remained in the land of Judah are uncertain. Politically, the nation of Judah was at an end and the future of the Davidic line was precarious at best. Socioeconomic information is scant; the biblical record would have us believe that Jerusalem and other Judean towns were razed to the ground.

However, the minority of the deported population may have experienced the greatest sense of dislocation and loss. Devastation likely affected more than political and socioeconomic institutions. The experiences of deportation had an impact upon interpersonal dynamics, self-identity, and a host of other aspects of culture.

Some scholars believe that the biblical texts greatly exaggerate the impact of the Babylonian invasion and that events may not have been as traumatic as widely believed.

The truth is that regardless of the historicity of this event—what conditions were like for the first-generation Judeans in Babylonia, what conditions were like for people who remained in the vicinity of Judah after the destruction of Jerusalem—we do know that something about this event branded the identities of those Judeans and early Jews. While history is unclear, the constructed memories of those events are revealed through biblical literature. The community's subjective memories helped to constitute the narrative.

An important author/performer who helped to shape identity through a trauma narrative was Ezekiel. Building upon a trope that other prophets had developed, he sent out the message that when the community develops political alliances with Others or engages in any socioeconomic intercourse with Others, God gets enraged and punishes the people through violent means. Ezekiel's language is strong and violent as he presents God's voice:

My anger will be spent and I will vent my fury upon them and I will be comforted. Then they will know that I, YHVH, have spoken in my jealousy when I vent my fury upon them. I will make you into a ruin and a disgrace among the nations that are around you, before the eyes of every passerby. You will be a reproach and a taunt, a warning and a horror to the nations all around you when I execute judgments against you in anger and fury, with raging rebukes—I, YHVH have spoken. (Ezekiel 5:13–15)

Ezekiel uses similarly horrific imagery throughout the book, especially in chapters 16 and 23, where alliances with other nations are communicated through the metaphor of marital infidelity and punishment is described metaphorically as rape and mutilation. The lasting message for the community that accepts this narrative is that it is perilous to interact with outsiders and that the result of such behavior can be catastrophic.

Another component of the trauma narrative is that the community is in an unending intimate covenant with a God who has absolute control over the relationship. The covenant with God is a mixed blessing. On the one hand, the people do not believe that they are subject to the random whims of the gods; the covenantal relationship provides

a framework for meaning. However, as the covenantal partner who has no power in the relationship, who can never escape God's wrath, the community imbibes an ongoing identity of powerlessness, inadequacy, and even shame. Ezekiel's self-humiliating performances and muteness attest to the utter control that God commands over him. Even Ezekiel's prophecy regarding the return of the people to Jerusalem is set in a negative tone. Ezekiel's God promises to bring the people back from exile in order to save God's own reputation. He repeats over and over again, "not for your sake do I act!"

The prophet's narrative defines the traumatic event in such a way that makes sense of the event and helps to strengthen group identity. Ezekiel understands the event as a divine response to the community's behavior and not as a random act or bad luck. The community is bound together by a God who has not abandoned them and who still pays attention—even if the results of God's attentions are devastating. Ironically, while the story is successful in identity formation and group bonding, this particular narrative also embeds collective anxiety into Jewish consciousness. It ritualizes the "event" without any assurance that history will not repeat itself. The collective anxiety about Israel's place in the larger community of humanity and the unease about being forever bound with a God who can wreak havoc serves to keep the people together under a shared anxiety. The impact of exilic and postexilic literature is that the early Jewish community knows who it is, but also lives in a state of constant anxiety, worrying about maintaining a distinctly separate identity and wondering when the next disaster will occur.

This prophetic narrative of trauma sets the stage for ongoing trauma that is sometimes real and sometimes imagined. The message of deserved suffering, an inextricable link with a jealous God who does not tolerate relationships with others, and a feeling of powerlessness and lack of agency have been significant contributing factors to Jewish anxiety and general unease, especially as Jews find themselves living in an increasingly multicultural world.

*Tamar Kamionkowski is professor of biblical studies at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College. She is the co-editor of Bodies, Embodiment and Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures (T&T Clark, 2010).*

# Christian Anxieties and Jewish Dreams: Jewish Kingship during the Early Middle Ages

Alexandra Cuffel

In studying medieval Jewish-Christian relations, one often encounters anxiety. Some Christians asserted that Jewish anxiety was a sign of their cursed status, for example when Jacques de Vitry (c. 1160/70–1240) maintained that certain Jews were fearful and weak because of their ancestors' participation in Jesus's execution. Jewish fear in the face of Christian persecution in poetry and chronicles is a common theme. Finally western Christians imagined all manner of supposed Jewish plots against the Christian community, from well poisoning to child murder. Less expected perhaps is Christian anxiety about Jewish martial activity or kingship.

For Jews to posit the existence of one or more Jewish kingdoms outside Christian dominion undermined one of the fundamental arguments of Christendom against the Jews. "The scepter shall not pass from Judah, nor the law from between his feet until Shiloh comes and the obedience of the peoples belongs to him" (Genesis 49:10); Christians interpreted this verse as a prophecy that Jewish political independence and kingship would end with the coming of the messiah, namely Jesus. In Byzantium, Genesis 49:10 figured prominently in Jewish-Christian polemic. The biblical passage continued to be central in early western Jewish and Christian discussions of Jewish power. However, early medieval western European Christians and Jews approached this question differently than their counterparts in the eastern Mediterranean. Western Jews and Christians debated not merely whether the "scepter of Judah" had passed, but whether a distant eastern Jewish king, whose subjects consisted of one or more of the lost ten tribes of the Jews, might possess it. The focus of Christian consternation and Jewish hope remained around the figure of a Jewish king, that is, the holder of the "scepter." Nevertheless, this king's relationship to the other tribes, and his own tribe of origin became an integral part within these texts.

Before the coming of Islam, Christian authors had a long tradition of depicting Jews and Samaritans as militarily aggressive, treacherous, and hostile to the "Roman"

population. The incidents reported from late antiquity were repeated and elaborated upon by medieval Christian writers as well. Instances such as the clash of the Christian monk, Barsauma, who purportedly battled 15,000 armed Jews, or the more historically grounded sixth-century Jewish king of Himyar, Dhu Nuwas, who forced the local Christian population to convert to Judaism before being defeated by Ethiopian forces, became part of eastern Christians' narrative memory of relations with Jews in Byzantium, the Middle East, and Arabia. Similarly, during the Persian capture of Jerusalem in 614 Christian sources describe Jews as aiding the Persians and brutalizing the Christian population. Regardless of the truth or mendacity of these depictions, what is clear is that eastern Mediterranean Christians feared Jewish martial activity. Such anxieties reached apocalyptic proportions during the seventh to ninth centuries in texts such as the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* or the *Apocalypse of Daniel*, wherein Jews, sometimes specifically under a leader from the tribe of Dan, would gather and persecute Christians at the end of days. Scholars have posited a number of theories about the meaning of Jews in Christian apocalyptic, including the possibility that Jews were rhetorical foils for Muslims within Christian texts, yet all of this literature points to intense anxiety on the part of late antique and early medieval Christians in the eastern Mediterranean about past, current, or future Jewish military activity. Even when Jews were defeated, as they regularly were according to historical and hagiographic sources, the martial potential of Jews continued to cast a shadow of fear on Christians' imagination and became part of Christian cosmology.

Yet it was not merely Christians who reported or imagined Jewish power or ability to act. A poem by the eighth-century Jewish writer R. Elazar ha-Kallir indicates that Jews re-established the Temple cult briefly under the Persians, whereas various versions of three Jewish apocalypses that seem to stem from the early Byzantine-Persian-Muslim conflicts, indicate that this attempt took place under Muslim rule. Byzantine Christian written polemical "dialogues" regularly

portray Jews as taunting Christians with their loss of power to the Muslims as a retort to Christian attempts to prove that Jews' loss of sovereignty indicated that they were no longer the chosen people of God. Although one must be cautious about accepting Christian portrayals of Jewish belief, the persistence of this retort attributed to Jews might also be indicative of the frequency with which Jews were willing to evoke this problem to their Christian neighbors in Byzantium.

In western Europe, remarks by Isidore of Seville (560–636) in his *De fide catholica contra Judaeos* and Julian, Archbishop of Toledo (652–690) in *De comprobatione aetatis sextae* indicate that already by the seventh century, Latin Christian interpretations of the "scepter of Judah" were disturbed by allegations of distant Jewish kingdoms. Refutations of Jewish power based on Genesis 49:10 abound in both Isidore and Julian's polemic. The amount of space and energy devoted to this point suggests that the two authors found Jewish arguments to the contrary quite unsettling much as the Byzantine Christian authors did. As similar as the Byzantine and early Iberian argumentation is, however, there are some important differences. The repeated attempts on the part of Isidore and Julian to insist that Jesus was the fulfillment of Genesis 49:10 do suggest a certain level of Christian anxiety on the subject in Iberia, like in Byzantium. However, the tone of the Iberian Christian authors is more scornful than fearful. Regardless of the identity of this eastern Jewish king, for which the belief in whom Julian and Isidore mock the Jews, that Jews are portrayed as setting their hopes in this figure deviates considerably from the argumentation surrounding Genesis 49:10 in Byzantine sources. In the Byzantine texts, restoration of Jewish power appeared far more immanent either at the hands of the Persians or Arabs, or the hands of the Jews themselves. Nor could Jews taunt their Christian neighbors with the loss of rule in the seventh-century Visigothic kingdom, for the Muslim invasion had not yet reached so far. Thus, the issue of Jewish religious and political power or lack thereof clearly preoccupied early Iberian Christian and possibly Jewish communities, yet the

promise or threat of a Jewish kingdom's continued existence or restoration remained a distant one. On the other hand, the choice of this Jewish king's location, however vague, was an ominous one, for this "king," like the Christians' Antichrist, was in the "east."

Even after the conquest by Muslims of part of the Iberian Peninsula, early western European Christian authors continued to take a mocking tone toward Jewish assertions of a distant Jewish king. Given the known direct contact between authors such as Paul Alvero of Cordoba or Amulo of Lyons, and these authors' demonstrated familiarity with Jewish messianic beliefs, the possibility that their descriptions of Jewish arguments might reflect contemporary Jewish attitudes seems plausible. Like earlier Christian authors,

although they refute the argumentation for a Jewish kingdom, the urgency with which they sought to discredit belies their stated conviction that statements about Jewish power in distant lands were mere fables.

In 883 a Jew calling himself Eldad and claiming to be from the tribe of Dan appeared in Kairouan (in present-day Tunisia), telling tales of distant Jewish warriors constantly fighting the kings of Kush (Ethiopia), of the sons of Moses hidden away by a river of stones that flowed on every day of the week except the Sabbath. These Jewish warriors, according to the account, came from four of the tribes who had been dispersed during the Assyrian conquest of the ancient kingdom of Israel. In later recensions, all of the ten lost tribes of Israel came to find their place in the narrative,

mostly as fierce warriors fighting a variety of enemies—the Muslims near Mecca, the Persians, and the Ethiopians. In the context of early medieval Christian apprehension about claims of Jewish kingship, and hints that these anxieties were based on actual Jewish assertions, one may well imagine the profound disquiet that Eldad's allegations, or those attributed to him, were designed to inspire among Christians, alongside the hopes of Jews who believed him.

*Alexandra Cuffel is professor of Jewish Religion Past and Present at the Center for Religious Studies, Ruhr University Bochum, Germany. She is the author of Gendering Disgust in Medieval Religious Polemic (University of Notre Dame Press, 2007).*



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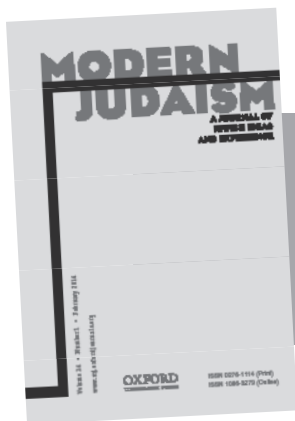
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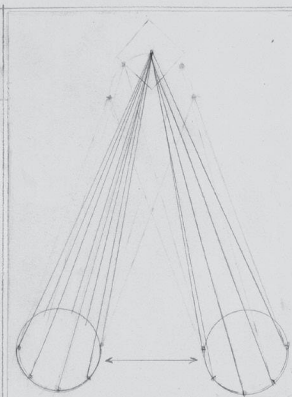
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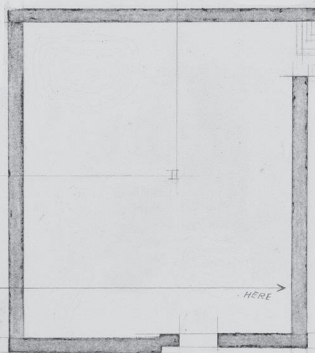
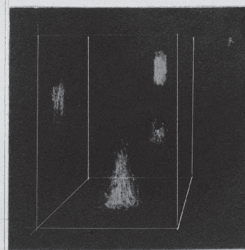
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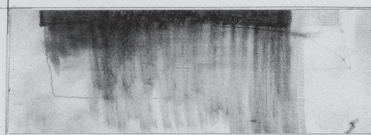
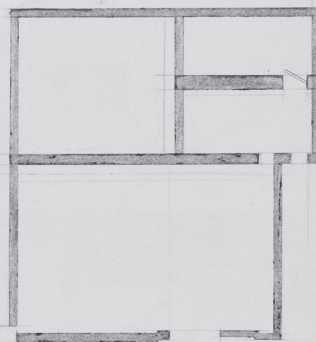
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COULD THE CURSE  
HAVE DONE THIS?  
OR IS THIS ABOUT  
SOMETHING ELSE?  
THINK



WHILE IT REMAINS  
UNCLEAR EXACTLY WHEN  
THE CURSE WAS PLACED,  
IT IS GENERALLY UNDER-  
STOOD TO HAVE OCCURRED  
BEFORE THE JUDY FRAYF  
INSTALLATION (KAT).

TO DATE, THERE HAS BEEN NO CLEAR COURSE  
OF ACTION WHICH THE INSTITUTE OF ART CAN LEGALLY  
IMPLEMENT TO HELP DISSIPATE THE EFFECTS OF  
THE CURSE ON ITS BUILDING.

IN THE MID-2000S, THE ARTIST [REDACTED] PLACED  
A MALEDICTION ON THE CURRENT BUILDING STRUCTURE.  
WHILE INITIALLY REGARDED WITH GOOD HUMOR BY  
ICA STAFF, IT SOON BECAME APPARENT THAT SOMETHING  
OR SOMEONE WAS CREATING HEIGHTENED LEVELS OF  
IRRITABILITY IN INDIVIDUALS FREQUENTING SPECIFIC  
LOCATIONS WITHIN THE BUILDING FOR SUBSTANTIAL  
PERIODS OF TIME.

AN ASSESSOR WAS QUIETLY BROUGHT IN TO MONITOR  
STATIC AND WAVE LENGTH LEVELS. WHILE IT WAS CLEARLY  
EVIDENT THAT THE CURSE WAS HAVING ITS WAY, IT WAS  
DETERMINED THAT NOTHING FURTHER COULD BE DONE.

IN ENSUING YEARS, IT HAS BECOME THE PRACTICE NOT TO  
APPRISE NEW HIRES OF THIS PARTICULAR DIMENSION OF  
THE ICA'S (RECENT) HISTORY AND CURRENT CIRCUMSTANCE.

OTHERS HAVE REPORTED  
MORE DISTURBING  
SENSATIONS

A DESIRE TO TOUCH AND POSSIBLY  
RUB UP AGAINST LOW-GRADE  
DIRTS AND PLASTICS.

A PREDILECTION FOR ORANGE BOOKS

# Anxiety in Uniform

Derek J. Penslar

Many American men of a certain age can recall the surge of anxiety that coursed through their bodies upon receiving a thin envelope from the Selective Service System, ordering them to report for induction into the United States Armed Forces. For those who served in the Second World War, anxiety was often countered by patriotism and hatred of the enemy. Those who were drafted to fight in Korea and especially Vietnam were more likely to see conscription as a curse rather than an obligation. Still, even in the unpopular Vietnam War only about 10 percent of those who were called up dodged the draft. War is frightening, but dodging

the draft is usually more frightening still. Patriotism, social conformism, the fear of punishment or of being shunned, and masculine pride kept most young men from taking that fateful trip to Canada.

“*Vi es kristelt zich azoy men yidelt zich,*” as with the Christians, so with the Jews. Since the introduction of conscription in Europe towards the end of the eighteenth century, millions of Jews throughout the Diaspora have performed military service—often unwillingly, at times enthusiastically, but usually obediently. To the extent that Jews did try to evade the army, they differed little from many others. (In Austria-Hungary in the early 1900s, draft-dodging rates were

highest in the empire’s Balkan and Italian territories, where few Jews lived.) Yet for Jews, military service evoked horrors even greater than deprivation and mortal danger.

Particularly in eastern Europe, the demographic center of the modern Jewish world prior to the Holocaust, the army threatened not just Jews but Judaism itself. Long terms of service, conversionary pressures by hostile commanders, and limited access to kosher food or Jewish learning threatened to turn generations of young Jewish men into ignoramuses or, worse yet, Gentiles.

Jewish anxiety about the military precedes modern conscription by several centuries. In medieval and early modern



**זכרו: החרדקים המסתובבים בשכונותיהם הם שגורים של הצבא לקרר את האוירה ולפחות את צאצאיו, הוקעתם חיונית להצלחתנו "וכל המרחם על האכזרים סופו להתאכזר..."**  
צור"ל מנסה לעקוף את החרם באמצעות "חרדקים ללא מדים". מסיוגרים רבים מסתובבים בימים אלו בהיכלי התורה... אם נתקלתם בהם, היו ערניים להוהיר את הציבור מכניהם ולהציל את צאצאיהם > עדינו גם אותנו בכתובות דלעיל. תודה

During recent debates about the conscription of ultra-Orthodox (Haredi) Jews, haredi opponents of the draft have distributed flyers like this one decrying what they call *ḥardakim* (*Haredim kalim*, or “*Haredim lite*”) who conspire with the evil state (this time, the Jewish state of Israel, not Tsarist Russia) to snatch tender young *Haredi* boys and dispatch them to the army. Image courtesy of Daniel Mahla.

times, some of the most famous illuminated haggadot represented the *ben rasha'a*, the wicked son, as a soldier. Jews certainly had a heritage of fighting—as warriors in biblical antiquity, and from the Middle Ages onward as defenders of towns and cities in eastern Europe. But at a time before conscription, when soldiering was a profession practiced, as Machiavelli tells us in *The Art of War*, by the crudest of men, Jews had fear and contempt for those who lived by the sword. Rabbinic Judaism was not pacifist, but it translated physical into verbal aggression, substituting talmudic disputation for swordplay.

Jews were first conscripted by command of the Hapsburg Emperor Joseph II in 1788. In April of the following year, as twenty-five timorous Jewish recruits assembled in Prague's Old Town, Rabbi Yehezkel Landau handed each soldier a prayer book, a packet of tefillin, and a packet of tzitzit, after which he told them: "Go forth to your fate, follow it without protest, obey your superiors, be loyal out of duty and patient out of obedience. Yet forget ye not your religion, do not be ashamed to be *yehudim* among so many Christians." At the end of his speech the rabbi began to sob, and young soldiers and their parents made tearful farewells.

Almost a century later, in the Russian Empire a similar spirit of grim obedience to fate suffused the most important rabbinic treatise on military service, *Sefer Maḥaneh Yisra'el* by Yisra'el Meir Kagan, known as the Ḥofez Ḥayim. The rabbi urged soldiers to follow Halakhah as carefully as possible, even in the heat of combat, when the temptation to engage in sexual impropriety and other heinous acts might be particularly great. In spare but foreboding language the rabbi instructed Jewish soldiers preparing for battle to confess their sins and to be prepared for death. Why, one might ask, did the rabbi not counsel young Jews to steal across the border rather than report for induction? Privately, he very well may have done so, but no public figure would dare flout the tsar's law. And although some Russian Jews did dodge the draft, the vast majority did not, and the Ḥofez Ḥayim's little volume was a source of comfort and calm at a time of the utmost anxiety.

While Jews in eastern Europe feared lest the army tear their communities asunder, in Germany and western Europe Jews experienced a very different sort of worry. In the first half of the 1800s, rabbis in Prussia urged the government to draft the Jews so that they could prove their worthiness for emancipation. At a time when middle-class

German Christians were cutting off their trigger fingers to avoid the draft, German Jews were clamoring to be put into uniform. Only by fighting for their country, so the idea went, could Jews overcome accusations of dual loyalty, cowardice, and effeminacy. During the Austro-Prussian and Franco-Prussian wars German rabbis and activists painstakingly counted the number of Jews in uniform, especially those who were decorated for heroism or who died in battle. This use of statistics as an apologetic tool would be repeated during the First World War and well into the 1930s, when the 12,000 Jewish war dead were repeatedly, futilely, and pathetically invoked as a defense against the theft of their rights of citizenship at the hand of the Nazis.

In France, in contrast, by the second half of the 1800s the Jews' social position was increasingly secure, and grateful young French Jews flocked to serve in their country's military at home and in its growing overseas empire. In the 1890s growing anti-Semitism caused French Jews to protest their love of country all the more volubly. The arrest and conviction of Captain Alfred Dreyfus on charges of espionage sent French-Jewish anxieties skyward. In 1898, Fernand Bernard, a Jewish army captain serving in Indochina, wrote to his brother, the famous writer Bernard Lazare, that he was disgusted to wear the same uniform as that of Dreyfus's tormentors and was considering resigning his commission: "Where is my former pride, my former faith? I ask today only to leave the army and be me, Fernand Bernard, and not Captain Bernard."

Dreyfus was eventually exonerated, calming the frayed nerves of Jews the world over. But less than a decade later the Great War stoked an utterly different kind of anxiety among Jews in the lands of the Entente and Central Powers alike. Could it happen that Jews on different sides might kill their coreligionists? Fears of such unintentional fratricide dated back to the 1848 Revolutions, when Jews both fought as rebels and served in the imperial armies that suppressed them. From the 1860s onward stories abounded about a Jew who killed, or almost killed, a Jew who became recognizable by his (dying) declamation of the Shema Yisra'el or a Magen David around his neck. In the First World War, such stories were legion, on the eastern and western fronts alike. The stories' facticity is doubtful, especially since the vast majority of combat deaths on the western front were by machine gun and artillery fire, not hand to

hand combat. But they are meaningful myths, expressions of a profound Jewish transnational solidarity even while asserting patriotism by fighting and dying for their homelands.

In a bitter irony, the Second World War, during whose course two-thirds of the Jews of Europe were slaughtered, was in certain ways the least anxiety-provoking war for Jews in modern history. There was a clear enemy, and Jews the world over fought on one side—that of the Allies against the Nazi Amalek. In the United States, there were, on a per capita basis, far fewer Jewish conscientious objectors than Christian ones. Of course Jewish men were still nervous about going off to fight, and Jewish mothers were loath to send them into danger. The mother of Meyer Birnbaum, an Orthodox Jew from New York City, urged him to flee the draft, but he consulted on the issue with his rabbi, who sat him down with the Ḥofez Ḥayim's *Sefer Maḥaneh Yisra'el* and told him that dodging would be *ḥilul ha-shem*, desecration of the name of God. Thus fortified, Meyer went off to war, where he served with distinction and rose to the rank of lieutenant.

Even in our own day, where the State of Israel has a powerful army in which most young Jews serve, distant memories persist from the Russian past, of the terror of donning a uniform, hoisting a rifle, and worst of all, leaving behind the sheltering and sustaining confines of the Jewish community. During recent debates about the conscription of ultra-Orthodox (*Haredi*) Jews, *Haredi* opponents of the draft have distributed flyers decrying what they call *ḥardakim* (*Haredim kalim*, or "*Haredim lite*") who conspire with the evil state (this time, the Jewish State of Israel, not tsarist Russia) to snatch tender young *Haredi* boys and dispatch them to the army. (See figure on previous page.) In time, no doubt, more *Haredim* in Israel will do some kind of national service, which they will not dodge any more than was the case for the vast majority of Jews, including the strictly Orthodox, throughout modern history. But fear is as strong as life; memory belies history. Although Jews are more prone to fetishize the IDF as a symbol of collective strength than to condemn it as an agent of brutality and assimilation, Israel's armed forces have not put an end to Jewish anxieties about military power.

*Derek J. Penslar is the Samuel Zacks Professor of European Jewish History at the University of Toronto and the Stanley Lewis Professor of Modern Israel Studies at the University of Oxford. His most recent book is Jews and the Military: A History (Princeton University Press, 2013).*



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IF THEY MAKE IT TO DINNER.

KNOW WHICH BEDROOM THEY SLEEP IN IF IT'S NOT THEIR OWN. IF THEY LEAVE IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT, KNOW WHO IT IS THEY'RE MEETING. KNOW WHY. KNOW THEIR PREDILECTIONS, THEIR KINKS.

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WHETHER THEY INVITE YOU IN OR NOT.

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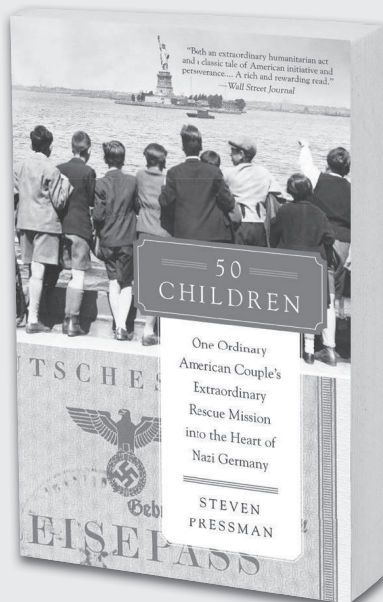
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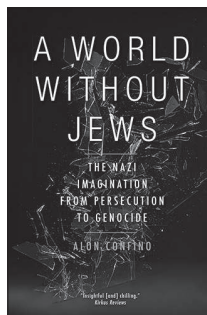
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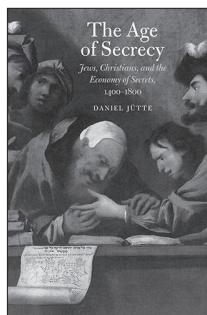
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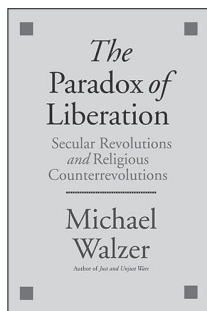
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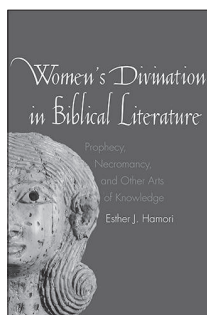


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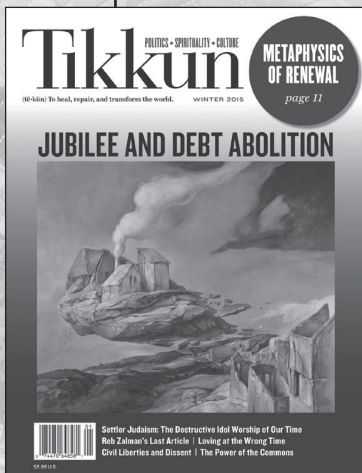
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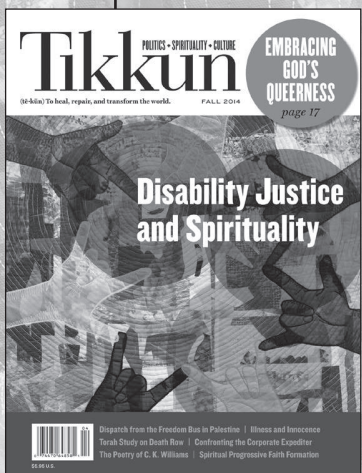
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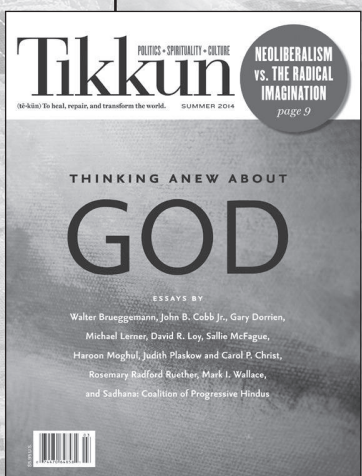
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# “Like a Weather Vane in the Mountains”: Kafka’s Anxieties

Iris Bruce

If until now our whole person  
had been oriented  
towards the work of our hands,  
towards that which was seen  
by our eyes, heard by our ears,  
towards the steps made  
by our feet, now we suddenly  
turn ourselves entirely in  
the opposite direction, like a  
weather vane in the mountains.  
Franz Kafka, *Diaries* (1910)

**F**ranz Kafka’s anxieties are manifold, extending from intensely personal to social and political situations. Readers of Kafka’s personal writings are familiar with his countless fears pertaining to his body and health, relationships to friends and family, to love or marriage. Readers of his literature know the overwhelming, claustrophobic aura of existential anxiety that penetrates all layers of his literary writings. Indeed, these anxieties—be they of a personal or literary nature—make up what we today identify as the Kafkaesque.

Specific fears and anxieties are openly addressed in Kafka’s diaries and letters, and Kafka’s frequently ironic, playful, or satiric representation of these anxieties is often ignored. Kafka’s famous “Letter to His Father” (1919) is understood as an expression of Kafka’s tortured soul, and Wilhelm Emrich speaks for many when he claims, “all the anguish of his childhood is still not overcome.” Yet, Kafka cautioned his lover, Milena Jesenská, not to forget that it is a “lawyer’s letter.” Writing was Kafka’s way of externalizing and controlling his anxieties and constituted an act of rebellion. His linguistic skills enabled him to dissipate his protagonists’ anxieties in many directions, while opening doors leading towards new paths and even into entirely opposite directions, “like a weather vane in the mountains.”

Kafka’s “Letter to His Father” can easily be turned into other and opposing directions: he does so himself when he allows his father to contradict him at the end. Nadine Gordimer responded to Kafka’s reversal of the narrative



Etching of Franz Kafka by Jan Hladík, 1978.

structure with her own parodic “Letter from His Father” (in *Something Out There* [1984]), developing the father’s point of view. The ghost of Herrmann Kafka is conjured up from the dead and an outraged father challenges Kafka’s representation of his paternal self. But Gordimer created a caricature of Kafka’s father, exposing his narrow middle-class values and presuppositions, and highlighting the political implications of the father-son conflict.

Decency, respect, to be “a man,” to “work properly,” to do one’s “duty” are bourgeois clichés that Herrmann Kafka believed in. A “normal” young man was supposed to have “a decent marriage” with a devoted wife and children in “a home of his own.” Herrmann Kafka could not understand that his son felt so

anxious about marrying. “How is any ordinary human being to understand that.” He was also very concerned about his social status and disliked the lower-class Yiddish actors with whom Kafka associated in 1911–12, as well as Kafka’s last eastern European girlfriend Dora Dymant for “cooking like a gypsy on a spirit stove. . . . I had to turn my back on her at your funeral” (Gordimer). He was a “man” who loved the Austrian army, sang soldier songs, and Kafka’s anxiety about these expectations surfaced in a dream about his father watching the soldiers and exclaiming, “That’s something to look at as long as one can!” (*Diaries*),

Gordimer fills in the social and political background for Kafka’s anxieties, which Kafka took largely for granted, though he did



identify his father's values as typical of the assimilated Jewish middle class. He recognized that his father's inflexible, anti-intellectual stance, as well as his black-and-white view of the world, represented the locus for totalitarian thought. "From your armchair you ruled the world. Your opinion was correct, every other was mad, wild, *meshugge*, not normal." Kafka also addressed the political dimension when he compared his father to "all tyrants . . . whose rights are based on their person and not on reason." Gordimer, by giving the father a voice, makes the reader see the father's prejudice, racial stereotypes, and petty middle-class morality. By removing Kafka's letter from the intensely personal level to a political one, Gordimer shows how Kafka's anxieties resonated as much in the postcolonial situation of Gordimer's South Africa during apartheid as they related in Kafka's time to the clash in Prague between assimilated Jews and Zionists, German Jews and Czech Jews, Jews and Gentiles.

Much of Kafka's literature can be seen as creative variations on the theme of anxiety. Perhaps his father's deprecatory remark about Kafka's friend, the Yiddish actor Löwy, "If you lie down with dogs, you get up with fleas," did inspire Gregor Samsa's transformation into vermin in *The Metamorphosis*; yet, the vermin metaphor was also a commonplace in anti-Semitic discourse. Kafka's caricature of the Christian family through exaggerated religious gestures and exclamations, as well as the ironic Christ imagery that accompanies Gregor's death, suggests that the text is partly a satire of contemporary anti-Semitism.

However, Gregor's metamorphosis is initially not an immediate death sentence but gives him breathing space from the pressures of work and family responsibilities. Indeed, the very sight of the monstrous vermin chases the manager away, who has arrived in person to pressure Gregor to go to work. Ironically, Gregor is anxious to make the manager stay and "we suddenly turn ourselves entirely in the opposite direction" when not only the Christian family and the manager at work, but also Gregor, become the object of Kafka's satire. The humorous description of Gregor's unsuccessful attempts to prevent the manager from leaving suggests a Chaplinesque tragicomedy. The sight of Gregor suddenly in front of her "rocking with repressed motion" makes the mother first jump up into the air and then sit on the table and knock over the coffee. This leads Gregor to "snap his jaws several times in the air,"

which makes his mother faint. The climax is reached when the manager jumps down the stairs. The importance of gesture and sound in this situation comedy has a strong theatrical effect and quite possibly goes back to Kafka's experience of the Yiddish theatre.

The existential anxiety of Joseph K. in *The Trial*, who is arrested without having committed a crime, and attempts to vindicate himself throughout the novel, is also represented humorously. Max Brod testified that "we friends of his could not stop laughing when he read out the first chapter of *The Trial*. He himself laughed so much that there were moments when he couldn't read any further." There are several scenes where K. entangles himself in a linguistic trap when he qualifies individual utterances until they are transformed, distorted, or turned into their opposite. Moreover, the central scene of the novel—when the priest in the cathedral summons K. and subjects him to the parable "Before the Law" with its midrashic commentary—from the outset introduces a humorous note because the priest "stood [there] for a while, looking around him without moving his head." This is one of those curious theatrical gestures that Walter Benjamin pointed out long ago in his seminal Kafka essay from 1934. K.'s tremendous anxiety when confronted by the priest is deflected twofold through caricature and parody: not only is the rebellious K. parodied as an 'am ha-'arez before the Law (because he is ignorant of Scripture and the Law contained within it), but surely a priest who talks like a rabbi is a comic subject.

Though Kafka was very sympathetic to the Zionist movement, tenacious enthusiastic Zionists did not escape his sharp irony. "Blumfeld, an Elderly Bachelor" (1915) caricatures the Zionist leader Kurt Blumenfeld, whom Kafka knew and liked, and who was an inspiration to many young Zionists. Apart from the obvious sexual connotations, the reference to Zionism is explicit in Blumfeld's companions, the "two small white celluloid balls with blue stripes," blue-white being the colors of the Jewish flag. *Blau-Weiss* was also the name of the first Zionist Youth movement (1912–1929) in Germany, whose principal leaders were Blumenfeld and Felix Rosenblüth. The bouncy, hyper, blue-white balls quickly make Blumfeld's life hell, hounding him wherever he goes. Blumfeld eventually takes control of his sexual anxieties by imprisoning the balls in the wardrobe and escapes into fresh air. His frustration is

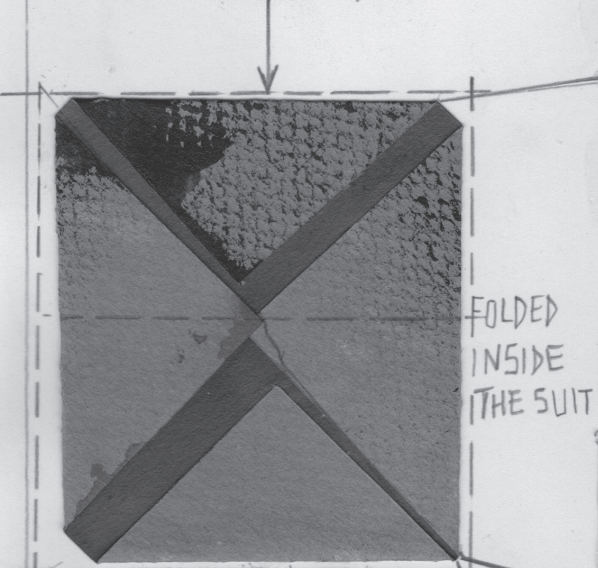
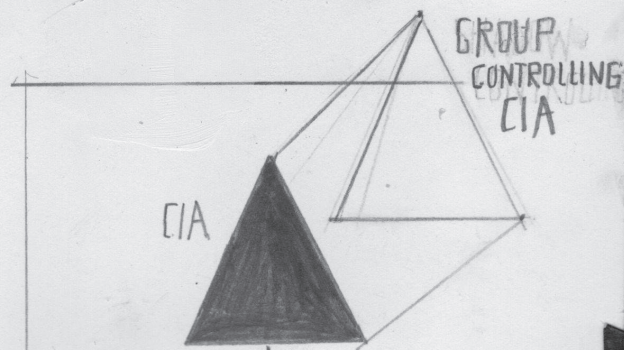
then transferred onto his assistants at work, who (like the balls before them) complicate his life, and work-related stress emerges as the source of his anxieties all along.

Jewish assimilation was a major cause of anxiety in Kafka's Zionist circles. Max Brod immediately identified Kafka's "A Report to an Academy" (1917) as "the most original satire of assimilation which has ever been written!" This political reading sees the ape Rotpeter as a caricature of the Jewish assimilationist who is overly sensitive about drawing attention to his "true" identity. Though he finds his "half-trained chimpanzee wife" waiting for him at the end of the day and "takes comfort from her as apes do," he is paranoid about being seen with her in public because "she has the insane look of the bewildered half-broken animal in her eye." The ape's behavior accords with Sander Gilman's observation of "how Jews see the dominant society seeing them and how they project their anxiety about this manner of being seen onto other Jews as a means of externalizing their own status anxiety" (*Jewish Self-Hatred*).

Kafka's anxiety about increasing anti-Semitism is reflected in "A Little Fable" (1920), in which a mouse comments that she finds the world is getting smaller every day. She has been running and running but finally she has reached the last room. If she keeps running now she will run straight into the trap in the corner. "You only have to change your direction," said the cat, and then it ate her.

Although there is much anxiety in Kafka's writings, Kafka speaks up and vocalizes his concerns. Kafka's chronicle of anxieties is his own "possession," created within "the marvelous *field for play*" which Benjamin perceived long ago. His stories are a "burrow of art," a creative space where new paths are forged continuously in many directions. By chronicling his anxieties with humor and ironic distance, Kafka affirms the last words in his diaries, "Every word . . . becomes a spear turned against the speaker. Most especially a remark like this. And so ad infinitum. The only consolation would be: it happens whether you like or no. . . . More than consolation is: You too have weapons."

*Iris Bruce is associate professor in the Department of Linguistics and Languages at McMaster University. She is the author of Kafka and Cultural Zionism: Dates in Palestine (University of Wisconsin Press, 2007).*



1963: CIA CHEMIST SIDNEY  
GOTTlieb IMPREGNATES  
CASTRO'S SCUBA GEAR  
WITH MADURA FUNGUS.

→ NOT SURE  
WHAT THIS  
IS BUT IT'S  
PROBABLY  
BAD NEWS.

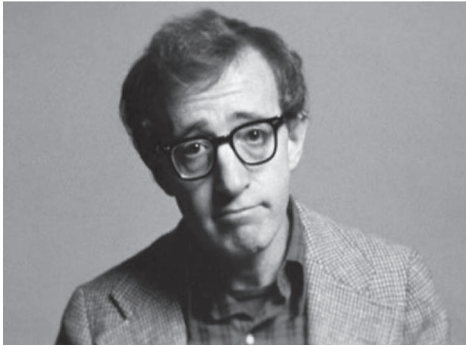
→ SURELY THIS  
WOULD KILL  
CASTRO, BUT  
IT DOESN'T,  
BECAUSE

→ CASTRO  
HATES  
WEARING  
SCUBA  
GEAR. IT'S  
SO TIGHT AND  
CONFINING.  
SO HE DOESN'T.

THE  
CONSEQUENCES  
OF SUCH  
A FUNGUS

# The Curable and Incurable Anxieties of Woody Allen

Marat Grinberg



Woody Allen as Alvy Singer in *Annie Hall* (1977), film still.

To say that Woody Allen's protagonists experience anxiety is to essentially say nothing. To draw attention to it is to fall prey to the obvious. Anxiety permeates their entire being: from the early comedies to the classic period of *Annie Hall* and *Manhattan* to the films of the 1990s and beyond. Writ large they have come to stand in for the pitfalls of the male Jewish psyche. A more productive exercise, befitting the psychoanalytic origins of the term, is to separate these anxieties into the curable and incurable ones. Reflective of the doubts and searches of this key postwar Jewish artist and moral philosopher—Woody Allen—they become the signs of the times. Where the director cannot stop worrying, we, for better or worse, cannot stop either.

I propose four intertwined and yet distinct categories of Allen's anxieties: (1) over relationships, love, and commitment; (2) over the presence/absence of God, order, and justice in the universe; (3) over the relationship between art and life; and (4) over the presence of evil and combating it. Among these, three are curable and only one is intractably incurable. The fundamental question is: which one?

## Relationships

At the end of *Annie Hall*, Alvy Singer, played by Allen, famously says to the audience, "... that's pretty much how I feel about relationships. You know, they're totally irrational and crazy and absurd and... but, uh, I guess we keep goin' through it because, uh, most of us need the eggs." This "keep goin'" may be absurd, but it's not masochistic. Allen's anxiety produced by relationships is crazily curable. The reason is his absolute belief that the prospect of a happy and long love is a reality. The hope

of marriage with the right person—or of sustaining relationships—triumphs, or at least is given a chance, in practically all of his films. When things don't work out, as in *Annie Hall*, *Manhattan*, and *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, there's sadness, but again, much more than a hint of hope. The idea of "husbands and wives" is a broad moral and existential concept for Allen. Suffused with fascination, anxiety, and ironic and comedic twists, it produces a cure predicated on the possibility and fragile knowledge of love that works.

## God/Justice

In the 2014 *Magic in the Moonlight* Stanley Crawford, played by Colin Firth, fears that his elderly aunt might die during her surgery. He begins, for the first time in life, to pray to God. "Who am I kidding," he quickly interrupts his supplication. The cold-blooded Stanley, a British aristocrat, quickly gets over his "God" problem, a merely insignificant source of anxiety. In this he is an aberration in Allen's body of work, an exception that only proves the rule.

For Woody Allen—an artist, a thinker, and a Jew—the main obsessive concern and the source of anxiety are one and the same. Is there order to the universe, embodied in the divine moral directive, or does everything happen at the whim of chance, making any notion of absolute morality irrelevant? It is also an obsessive concern of the most compelling of his characters. Allen, as exemplified by the crucial *Crimes and Misdemeanors*, leaves this conundrum in a state of aporia, in Socratic terms, or, in talmudic ones, that of *kashya*: an insoluble issue. On the one hand, the guilty one may carry on with his life, with no apparent punishment in sight, but on the other, there's no guarantee that retribution will not catch up with him. The possibility of God's existence remains on the table. In *Crimes and Misdemeanors*, Cliff, played by Allen, becomes the sign of the film's inconclusiveness, both lyrical and mesmerizing.

Here's the paradox: the issue at hand is deeply insoluble and its insolubility makes the anxiety caused by it curable. To use Lionel Trilling's term, Allen's imagination is a moral one. His practice is to keep it in perpetual motion through the constant reexamination of the same moral questions,

run through cinematic parables, situations, and plot lines. In its incessancy it is rabbinic, Socratic, and perhaps Freudian. If it is a Sisyphean task, for Allen it is anxiety relieving rather than anxiety producing.

## Art/Life

In *Deconstructing Harry*, Harry Block, brilliantly and ruthlessly played by Allen, begins to write a story at the end of the film, which breaks his writer's block. He imagines a character who can only productively function in art—in life, he's capable merely of ruining himself and anyone around. The trick is that in order to produce art, he needs to continually wreck his life. These wrecks are the source of his writing. Much more than a self-caricature, Block is a parody of Philip Roth, whose radical confluence of art and life is the cornerstone of his aesthetics. Allen's own resolution of the art/life anxiety is quite different. His insistence that his art and life are separate is not merely a cliché or self-defense mechanism against the worst of the accusations he's had to confront. The scandal that rocked his life in the 1990s and was recently revived did nothing to divert him from raising the same moral questions in film after film. In fact, to cease the questioning would render his curable existential and moral anxiety incurable.

A question with deep echoes in Jewish history drives Allen's art/life anxiety. How to learn to live in the world without sacrificing one's essence and destroying oneself? In resolving it, he behaves as a nuanced moralist and a conservative thinker. Unlike Block, Woody Allen wants to be able to function in art and life, without one corroding the other. The trick is not to disparage life or idealize art, but to find a compromise. For his characters, this bargain often takes on a tragic or deeply neurotic dimension. The art/life compromise of Allan Konigsberg—artist, person, and Jew—pacifies tragedy and anxiety. Unlike the Robin Williams character in *Deconstructing Harry*, he keeps himself in focus without the magic glasses.

## Evil

In "Wordsworth and the Rabbis," Lionel Trilling praised talmudic rabbis for "their non-militancy, their indifference to the



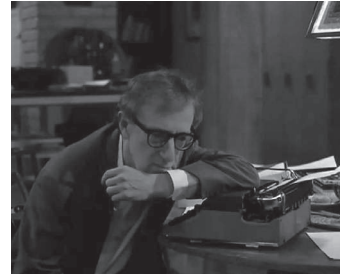
Seder scene from *Crimes and Misdemeanors* (1989), film still.



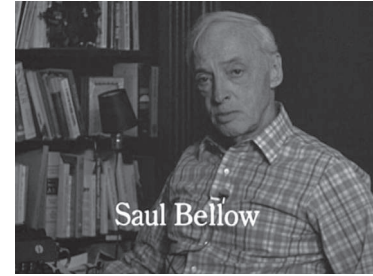
Woody Allen as Danny Rose in *Broadway Danny Rose* (1984), film still.



Woody Allen as David Dobel in *Anything Else* (2003) film still.



Woody Allen as Harry Block in *Deconstructing Harry* (1997), film still.



Saul Bellow in *Zelig* (1983), film still.

idea of evil, their acceptance of cosmic contradiction.” Disregarding the accuracy of Trilling’s assessment of the rabbinic mindset, his terminology helps in diagnosing Woody Allen’s last anxiety—his only incurable and hence most painful one.

Unlike Trilling’s rabbis, Allen is never indifferent to the idea of evil. And if like them, he does accept the “cosmic contradiction,” he does so as long as it signifies the perpetual presence of evil in history and the world. He is a nuanced moralist, but a moralist nonetheless, and therefore operates with distinct and unequivocal moral categories. None of the positive outcomes in his cinematic universe can adequately contradict Frederick’s (von Sydow) pronouncement in *Hannah and Her Sisters* regarding the Holocaust, “The reason why they could never answer the question ‘How could it possibly happen?’ is that it’s the wrong question. Given what people are, the question is ‘Why doesn’t it happen more often?’ Of course it does, in subtler forms.” Frederick does not relativize the Holocaust or diminish its unprecedented nature. He sees it, for all intents and purposes, as never ending. Thus, Allen’s anxiety is not over what evil is or whether it exists or not, but over how to respond to it: the issue, to return to Trilling, of militancy versus nonmilitancy. For Allen the two options are thoroughly grounded in Jewish experience, making his angst over

them deeply personal and often masked.

Saul Bellow is clearly an important figure for Allen. Bellow appeared in *Zelig*; his Sammler, I believe, served as a prototype for Dr. Levy in *Crimes in Misdemeanors*. In Bellow’s *Mr. Sammler’s Planet*, Sammler, a Polish Jewish intellectual who climbed out of the ravine filled with dead Jewish bodies during the war, has seen evil face to face. Toward the end of the novel, Sammler witnesses a pickpocket attacking his nephew Feffer in the middle of the street: “Feffer, in the midst of the crowd, was fighting . . . the pickpocket. There were twenty people at least, and more were stopping, but no one was about to interfere.” Suddenly, in the crowd, Sammler spots his ex-son-in-law Eisen, a veteran of both Red and Israeli armies, and implores him to interfere. Eisen “struck the pickpocket on the side of his face. It was a hard blow. . . . Everything went into that blow, discipline, murderousness, everything.” Fearing for the pickpocket’s life, Sammler implores Eisen to stop. Eisen does not and instead spells out his philosophy: “You said I had to do something. . . . I must do something. So I did. . . . You can’t hit a man like this just once. When you hit him you must really hit him. Otherwise he’ll kill you. You know. We both fought in the war.” Horrified, Sammler retorts, “Nonsense . . . *This is the man. He’s badly hurt.*”

This intensely symbolic and unnerving scene mirrors Allen’s incurable anxiety and

dilemma. At times, he temporarily resolves it in favor of Eisen, as in the underrated *Anything Else*, where Dobel, played by Allen, wants to avenge the world for the Holocaust. He is comedic and crazy, but also resolutely and admirably militant in his response to anything and anyone he recognizes as evil. In many of his other films, however, Allen cannot shake off the moral messiness of this decisiveness, as if repeating after Sammler, “*This is the man.*” Such is the philosophy of the beautifully nonmilitant comedic Jewish saint Danny in *Broadway Danny Rose* and also why the prototypical Kafkaesque Jew Kleinman opts for magic in *Shadows in the Fog*, fully realizing that the notion that it can capture evil is both an illusion and a delusion.

This incurable anxiety, I would suggest, is the reason why Allen never confronts Israel in his films, whose “anxieties of political self-rule,” to quote Ruth Wisse, bring into the sharpest focus the militancy/nonmilitancy conundrum. It would not be an exaggeration to say that Woody Allen’s unexpressed anxiety is our time’s most explicit, open, and divisive one.

*Marat Grinberg is associate professor of Russian and Humanities at Reed College. He is co-editor of Woody on Rye: Jewishness in the Films and Plays of Woody Allen (with Vincent Brook, Brandeis University Press, 2013).*

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WITH THE ASSOCIATION, IT ALWAYS IS.

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ASSOCIATION TAMPERED WITH THE MUSEUM'S ALARM  
SYSTEM.

FEELINGS OF LOW  
SELF-ESTEEM  
PSYCHOLOGICALLY  
ENGINEERED BY  
THE ASSOCIATION'S  
PEOPLE INSIDE  
THE MUSEUM.

\* THEN IT WAS A MATTER OF PATIENCE,  
\* WAITING THREE YEARS FOR THE PERFECT MOMENT  
\* (WHEN A SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF SECURITY GUARDS  
\* WERE OUT ON MENTAL HEALTH DAYS) TO STRIKE.

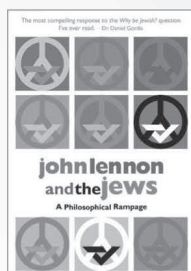
"YOU DON'T LOOK GOOD. IS EVERYTHING OK? ARE YOU SURE?"  
SOMETIMES THIS IS ALL IT TAKES TO SET SOMEONE OFF, TO GET INSIDE THEIR HEAD, TO BEGIN TO MANIPULATE.

MOST PEOPLE ARE RIDICULOUSLY FRAGILE.  
BUT NOT YOU. (EVEN THE MEAN ONES)

BUT THAT'S NOT TRUE.  
WHEN THE ASSOCIATION CAME TO YOU,  
IT WAS UNDER A FALSE PRETENSE.  
AND YOU BOUGHT IT.  
YOU DIDN'T QUESTION ANY OF IT.

YOU ARE NO DIFFERENT.  
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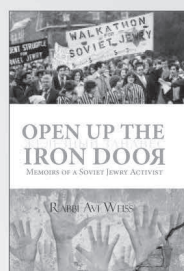


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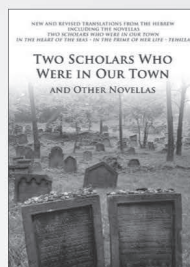
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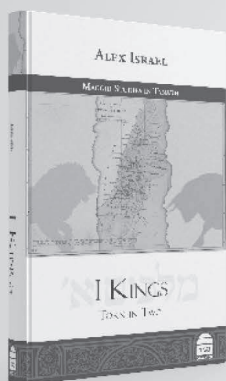


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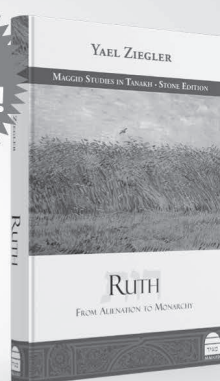


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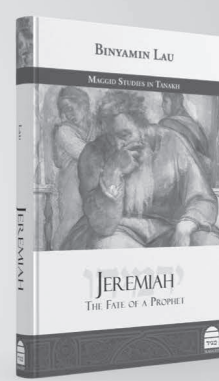


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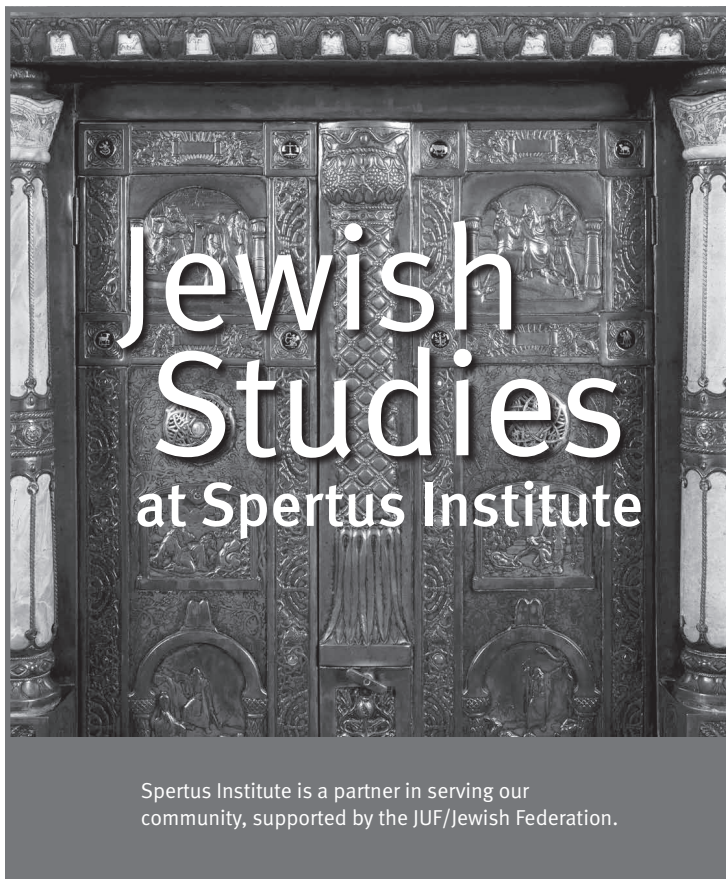


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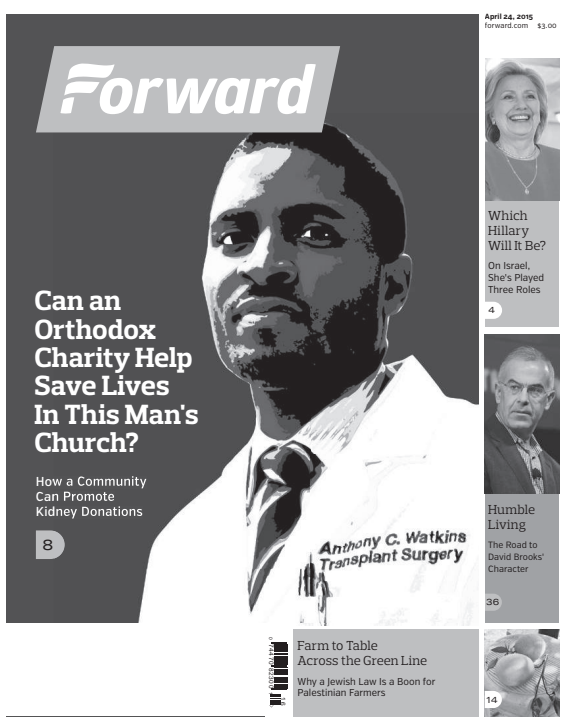
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# Two Jewish Anxieties

Steven M. Cohen

Since my undergraduate years, I have been animated by two master-anxieties. Both anxieties boast a long Jewish pedigree, arguably extending back to biblical times. Both concerns are genuine and supported by historical and contemporary evidence. Taken together, these anxieties motivate my forging close working relationships with protagonists from opposing camps—cultural/religious conservatives in one case, and political progressives in the other.

One of these anxieties centers on massive assimilation in the Diaspora; the other arises from the perpetual condition of antagonism in the Land of Israel. By “assimilation,” I mean the effective departure of millions of people with Jewish ancestry from the Jewish group. By the condition of antagonism, I mean the prospect of continual debilitating and dangerous confrontation between Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs for decades to come.

The evidence for massive assimilation of millions of erstwhile American Jews seems undeniable and irrefutable. We can turn to the Pew study of Jewish Americans or, for that matter, any of the recent Jewish population studies—all of them report similar patterns and point in the same future directions.

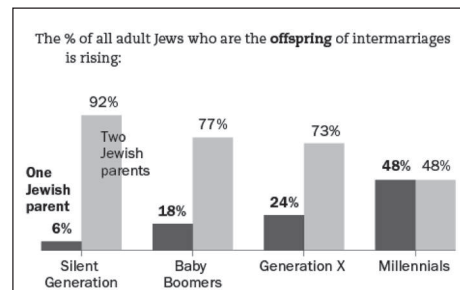
Among the most critical contemporary population trends (with specific results taken from the Pew study) are the following features of Jews who are not Orthodox:

A. They are experiencing both late marriage and non-marriage, as most (51 percent) of non-Orthodox American Jews 25–39 are not married. Moreover, of Jews in their 40s, fully 18 percent have never married.

B. They exhibit frequent intermarriage, as the individual intermarriage rate for non-Orthodox Jews in 2000–2013 reached 72 percent overall, and 82 percent for those raised Reform.

C. The intergenerational patterns point to low rates of Jewish continuity for the descendants of the intermarried. Of those with one Jewish parent, just 9 percent are raising their children in the Jewish religion. Thus, the vast majority of the grandchildren of the intermarried are being raised as non-Jews or will so identify when they mature.

D. We found demonstrable evidence of low birthrates, with non-Orthodox women averaging about 1.7 children (not unlike their counterparts among well-educated American



Detail from “Infographic: Survey of Jewish Americans” Pew Research Center, Washington, DC (December, 2013). <http://www.pewforum.org/2013/12/03/infographic-survey-of-jewish-americans/>

women). An additional consideration: a good fraction of these children will be raised as non-Jews, a direct consequence of intermarriage.

As a result of these and related processes, the current Jewish population has already experienced a loss of two million adult Jews: Of the 7.3 million adult Americans with a Jewish parent or two, only 5.2 million self-define as Jewish, meaning that about 2.1 million people with one Jewish parent (or two) do not now see themselves as Jewish.

While the non-Orthodox and Jewishly engaged population is on a path to decline, the Orthodox population is booming. In the country, only 10 percent of Jewish adults are Orthodox, but 35 percent of American Jewish children under five years old are being raised in Orthodox homes; while only 10 percent of Jewish adults, the Orthodox constitute an absolute majority (53 percent) of those who in-married in 2000–2013, setting the stage for Orthodox expansion and non-Orthodox contraction in the coming generation.

True, owing to intermarriage and the social acceptance of Jewish identity, those who are partially Jewish and/or episodically Jewish and/or nominally Jewish may be growing in number, augmenting the total Jewish population. But the key concern—my assimilation anxiety—is with the middle of the Jewish identity spectrum, where numerical decline is visible today among children and young adults. In coming decades, the number of middle-aged non-Orthodox Jews who are engaged in Jewish life is poised to drop sharply.

Aside from an axiomatic, if not primordial, commitment to the Jewish identity of every child of a Jewish parent, why should we care if thousands of children of Jewish parents are raised as non-Jews

or barely Jews? Of what consequence is it that coming generations contain far fewer engaged non-Orthodox Jews?

The critical concern is that a large Jewish middle is vital to the sustenance of so many major institutions in Jewish life. Most engaged non-Orthodox Jews feel that being Jewish is very important to them, as they say in response to questions on numerous surveys, including the Pew study. They manifest their commitment in affiliative behavior that directly and indirectly benefits the institutions they populate and support. Clearly, Conservative and Reform synagogues depend heavily on these moderately to highly affiliating Jews. So too do Federations, JCCs, numerous Jewish organizations, Jewish cultural events, museums, periodicals, and publications. All these features of contemporary Jewish life—and more—depend on hundreds of thousands of Jews who, while not Orthodox, nevertheless display high rates of Jewish engagement however measured.

American Jewry is contending with the forces of porous boundaries, hybrid identities, and malleable group definitions. Never have American Jews been so accepted, appreciated, and admired. Indeed, of all sizable Diaspora Jewries past or present, they may well constitute not only the most successful and influential Jewry, but also the most romantically loved and most socially desired. If anything, both the internal dynamics of American Jewry and larger cultural forces continue to foster greater and greater integration and, yes, assimilation over generations.

Now think of the sharply contrasting state of Israeli Jewry—as I do, as we all do. Where American Jews are surrounded by non-Jews who love them, Israeli Jews see themselves as enmeshed and surrounded by Arabs who they think, with some reason, hate them. And, what’s worse, by any standard of historical comparison, Israel today seems more assured of persistent antagonism with its Palestinian adversaries than before. In the period before the Oslo process of the 1990s, one could theoretically hope for moves toward reconciliation. During the Oslo process, one could hope for its eventual success. But, well after the Oslo process—after more than a decade of repeated waves of violent hostilities with Palestinians and others (e.g., in Lebanon) the prospects for Israelis disengaging from

their occupation of the West Bank seem more remote than ever. Nationalist lust, allied with deepening mistrust of Palestinian intentions, is serving to extend Israeli civilian and military control of the Occupied Territories.

With no obvious way—negotiated or unilateral—to leave the territories, and after the years of repeated military clashes, Israel is undergoing several debilitating processes, all of which figure to deepen and broaden in the coming years:

A. Increased antagonism and distrust of Israel on the part of Palestinians.

B. Loss of support and confidence by American political leaders, especially Democrats.

C. Advancing isolation—cultural, political, and economic—in Europe and elsewhere.

D. Increased skepticism among American Jews as evidenced by the pluralities who do not believe Israeli leaders are sincerely seeking a peace agreement—even more so among younger Jews.

E. Greater Israeli investment—economic, political, psychological, and religious—in the Jewish settlement enterprise.

All of these forces, and more, combine to raise the prospects for continued occupation with the West Bank, more frequent and violent clashes with the Palestinian

people, greater international isolation, and diminished engagement of non-Orthodox American and Diaspora Jews with Israel. The recent spate of articles proclaiming the end to any prospect for a two-state solution signals perhaps the victory of the Zionist right, but certainly the despair of the Zionist left.

Now, most engaged Jews—and scholars of Jewish civilization among them—tend to strongly focus on one of these two anxieties over the other. Those with more conservative religious and cultural inclinations tend to be more alarmed over the sociodemographic trends that threaten American Jewry; in contrast, more liberal religious and secular personalities seem, at times, almost dismissive of the threats posed by late marriage, frequent intermarriage, and low birthrates. On the other hand, thought leaders and activists on the political, religious, and cultural left tend to focus their existential Jewish anxieties upon Israel's antagonistic conditions.

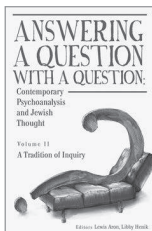
For me, both anxieties emerge out of the same place: A concern for the creative survival of the Jewish People. An American Jewry with a diminished presence of engaged Jews outside of Orthodoxy is, by definition, less vibrant and vital culturally, communally, religiously, and politically. An Israeli state and society (Jewish, Palestinian, and otherwise) that is permanently and deeply mired in

antagonism, alienation, and isolation is—also by definition—less vibrant, vital, and inspiring—both to its citizens and to Jews around the world. Both anxieties derive from circumstances that hold both great peril for Jewish collective life, just as their resolution holds great possibilities for the Jewish future.

The Jewish public and its leadership—somewhat predictably and even understandably—prefer to distort or disregard the threats of assimilation in the American context and antagonism in the Israeli context. Accordingly, the urgent and necessary role of scholars of the Jewish condition, as public thought leaders, is to direct, focus, and shape the thinking of the public and influential persons around these and related matters. Indeed, failing to do so, and even contributing to complacency about the threats to the Jewish People in the Diaspora and in Israel, verges on a failure of professional and moral mission.

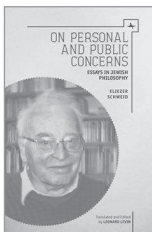
*Steven M. Cohen is research professor of Jewish Social Policy at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion and director of the Berman Jewish Policy Archive at the Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service, New York University. He was lead researcher on the Jewish Community Study of New York: 2011 and a consultant to the recently conducted Pew study of American Jews.*

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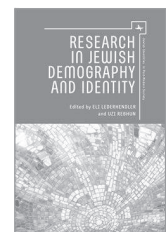
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# The Questionnaire

## What film do you find most relevant to Jewish Studies?

### RESPONSES

#### Nathan Abrams

Professor of Film Studies, Bangor University

##### *Lolita*

In a previous questionnaire I recommended organizing a graduate seminar around the Coen brothers' *The Big Lebowski* (1998). Of course, I could simply rehash the answer I gave there for it is still relevant today. However, this would be far too easy. It would also be far too easy to suggest one alternative film here. It would be even easier to suggest a film that is explicitly Jewish in its plot and/or characters, whether *The Jazz Singer* (1927) or *Schindler's List* (1993). Instead, I want to argue for a new approach to Jewish Film Studies—one that makes scholars and students work harder. Rather than pick yet another obviously Jewish film, why not select one in which the Jewishness is not explicit but in which it inheres beneath the surface of the text? Maybe such a film has a Jewish director or screenwriter or creative personnel or identifiably Jewish actors and actresses, which make a Jewish reading possible. Maybe none of these exist but it is still possible to read the film in a Jewish fashion. Let us reach back into Jewish history and use the tools of playfulness, intertextuality, inter-referentiality, and midrash to elicit a Jewish meaning, which may strike us as apparent in the first place. I have been applying such an approach productively to the films of Stanley Kubrick and each of his films, particularly those from *Paths of Glory* (1957) to *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999). My particular concern at the moment is his *Lolita* (1962), which, in its adaptation of Vladimir Nabokov's 1955 novel, and casting of Shelley Winters and Peter Sellers, tackles such issues as the Holocaust, postwar American anti-Semitism, the Jewish American Mother, and Hollywood's history of stereotyping. Perhaps, then, my answer to the question is: Kubrick's *Lolita*.

#### Uri Cohen

Professor of Literature, Tel Aviv University

##### *A Serious Man*

The best reply I can think of is trite: The Coen brothers, and forced to choose—*A Serious Man* (2009). The film offers a bleak and compassionate examination of Jewish existence and the protagonist is an academic. Professor Larry Gupman is on the cusp of tenure, when a Job-like sequence of events drives him to moral turpitude. He has a lot of *tsures*, and is simultaneously bribed and extorted by his family and surroundings, Jews and Goyim alike. One underlying sense appears when the Japanese father of a failed student seeking to bribe him sternly pleads: Please, accept the mystery (and the money).

The questions in the film are many as are the layers of suffering, reference, and allegory. Seeking answers, Gupnik, trying to be a serious man, turns to the rabbis in order of seniority. He meets a clueless junior rabbi (Wollowitz of *The Big Bang Theory*) in May or June 1967—the calendar on the wall shows both. The 1960s for the Jews it seems to say, are six days, when the old kind of Judaism died, moved from faith to platitudes. He then meets the senior rabbi, who replies to the search for reasons kindheartedly: “Well, we can't know everything”—and Gupnik retorts: “It sounds like you don't know anything”. When finally the elderly rabbi appears, he is a vision out of Kafka, his wisdom summed in the adage: “be a good boy.”

The film, like Jewish Studies, offers more questions than answers. Not a morality play, it is a play, declaredly one just like the *meises* of old. The film ends with tenure being granted (less joy than expected) as the hesitant Gupnik changes the grade, effectively accepting the bribe. As the pencil traces the new grade, a very disturbing call arrives from the doctor, a tornado approaches, and the film ends facing God's wrath from behind the adolescent's head, sound merging with his earphone: “Better find somebody to love.” Well, as the rabbi says—“can't hurt, but won't save you from what's coming.”

#### Olga Gershenson

Professor of Judaic and Near Eastern Studies, University of Massachusetts Amherst

##### *The Dybbuk*

Film is a time machine—a window into a different world. This is why I want to talk here about the film that opens windows into a whole lot of worlds—*The Dybbuk* (1937). It tells a tragic love-cum-exorcism story, complete with beautiful lovers, wise tzaddiks, kabbalistic magic, and mysterious rituals. With its haunting score and folkloristic choreography, *The Dybbuk* is a window into the Yiddish cinema, with its own genres, styles, and stars.

Another window opens to its literary source, a famous play by S. An-ski, based on his ethnographic expedition to the Pale of Settlement. Already then, in 1911–14, he noted a sense of culture being lost—and impetus to preserve it. This is our chance to talk about Jewish secularization and revolutionary movement (An-ski's trajectory)—with study and activism gradually supplanting the living, breathing tradition.

And then there are the iconic productions of the play—most notably by Habima, a Moscow theater of Hebrew language enthusiasts that would ultimately run away from Stalin's Russia and become a national Israeli institution, with tethers to Zionist ideology and history.

Another window is to the historical moment of the filmmaking. *The Dybbuk* was made on the brink of destruction of eastern European Jewry, in Yiddish, which was then still a language spoken by millions. (An-ski wrote in Russian; Habima staged in Hebrew). *The Dybbuk* gives us a chance to consider transnational Jewish culture—shot in Poland by international talent, the film was circulated anywhere Yiddish was spoken. What happened to the crew and the actors after the war? We can talk about death, survival, emigration, and triumphs and failures that come with it.

I can go on and on about this film and the ways to talk about it: gender relations,

Hasidism, shtetl life, ritual, and practice. . . . One thing is inescapable: watching the film after the Holocaust, its meaning grows sinister—the entire culture captured on film is a Dybbuk haunting us.

### Liora R. Halperin

Assistant Professor of History and Jewish Studies, University of Colorado Boulder

#### *A Film Unfinished*

What is historical truth and how can documentary sources deceive us? For years after World War II, museums, chronicling the horrors of the Holocaust, displayed a series of documentary images from the Warsaw Ghetto in 1942. These stills, depicting Jewish suffering, seemed the truest visual evidence of Nazi horrors and the wartime Jewish experience. But, *A Film Unfinished* shows, these images were taken from a Nazi propaganda film, *Das Ghetto*, intended to harness a very different “truth”—Jewish cruelty, depravity, and lack of mutual concern—by meticulously staging scenes, since overlooked, of supposed Jewish excess

and wealthier residents ignoring their dying brethren. Yael Hersonski, building on research undertaken at the Yad Vashem Film Archive and drawing on a combination of diaries, letters, and German archival documents, as well as two late-discovered reels of outtakes, pieces together both the mechanisms of deceit and the historical experience of both Jews and Nazis who experienced the process of filmmaking. Some of those sources had a stunning lineage of their own: they had been hidden in a set of milk canisters dubbed the Oneg Shabbos Archive, a desperate and prescient attempt at documentation by those who knew they would not survive the war. *A Film Unfinished* is a film about the Holocaust, the Nazi regime, and the manipulation of the Warsaw Ghetto as a symbol. But I find that it is also a stunning and pedagogically rich introduction to the craft and challenges of writing Jewish history: the process of sifting through multiple types of documentation from a variety of sources and the work of understanding the ideologically laden and sometimes intentionally deceptive ways in which some of those sources were constructed in the first place.

### Rachel Harris

Assistant Professor of Comparative and World Literature, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

#### *Crossing Delancey*

*Crossing Delancey* offers a view into the changing world of modern Jewry, providing a powerful heroine who, along with her friends, highlights both the incredible opportunities available to contemporary women and the price that such freedom affords. Her aging grandmother remains linked to a Jewish traditional world of the New York Lower East Side, even as waves of new immigration have displaced the Jewish dominance of the area. Her parents have fled to Florida, where they live in an idyllic retirement world, suggesting the affluence of middle-class suburban expansion that started to occur for Jews during the 1950s, while Isabelle Grossman is making her own contemporary life in a world where her close childhood friends are still Jewish but her work colleagues orbit in other worlds, offering her a glimpse into societies that generations of earlier Jews from her social class would never have seen or imagined.



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*fresh ways of thinking about jews and gender worldwide*

Made in 1988, the film's questions remain relevant for young Jewish women today. What is the balance between a traditional Jewish domestic family life and our work lives; can women raise Jewish children alone; to what extent can Jewish women own their sexuality, and is the pickle merchant really what he seems? In a world of JDate, speed dating, surrogacy, Birthright, and alternative prayer services some questions remain the same: can a Jewish woman have it all?

### Gil Hochberg

Associate Professor of Comparative Literature, UCLA

#### *A Serious Man*

The film captures the drama of “American Jews becoming white,” and it does so with just the right amount of nostalgia and the kind of self-deprecating humor that Jews (pardon the essentialism) appreciate so much. The Coens manage to bring back to life the haunting memory of the shtetls and Yiddish, which for some American Jews is of course still a very much living reality; and to do so with cynicism, but also with love and true affection. The film lends itself perfectly to class discussions about modernity and the promise of the “new world” in relation to modern Jewish history. Though humorous, the film serves as a great platform through which to discuss some very serious tensions between the history of Jews as Other and the present Judeo-Christian reality created as a master narrative in the United States after World War II. It also touches upon tensions between the idea of a Jewish messianic time and the reality of the present (Christian?) world we inhabit as American modernized citizens.

While several critics have accused the Coen brothers of producing a self-loathing film full of anti-Semitic caricatured representations of Jews, I would argue on the contrary that the film demonstrates just the right amount of self-criticism, which is necessary to assure the humanist impact of what Hannah Arendt calls “the Jew as Pariah.”

### Hartley Lachter

Associate Professor of Religion Studies and Director, Berman Center for Jewish Studies, Lehigh University

#### *Ushpizin*

So many high quality films relevant to the field of Jewish Studies have been produced that it's hard to pick just one. However, I have also noticed that excellent films are not always the most effective teaching tools. Students often need more background in order to be able to appreciate a particularly ambitious and nuanced film dealing with a subject of relevance to Jewish Studies. This is probably why one of the films that I have had the most success with for the purposes of teaching undergraduates is by no means my favorite. But, when used carefully, I have found Giddi Dar's *Ushpizin* to be a helpful teaching tool for survey courses on Judaism.

Set in a religious Jerusalem neighborhood, this at-times humorous film follows a series of unlikely events that happen to a married couple, Moshe and Mali, over the holiday of Sukkot as they attempt to reconcile their newly adopted religious identity as Bratslav Hasidim with their struggle to conceive a child. The lighthearted but earnest plot line of the film provides countless points of reference for discussing traditional Jewish religious practice. The film also provides many, albeit filtered, allusions to the tensions between secular and religious Jews in Israel.

The obvious problem with using a film like this is that it depicts one particular kind of Judaism, set in a specific time and place, as *the* authentic model. The vast diversity of Jewish life across time and space is not visible in this film. But, these limitations are in fact the reason why the film can work so well as a teaching tool. It gives the students a place to start. Jonathan Z. Smith argues that effective college teaching often entails what he calls “the necessary lie,” or “disciplinary lying,” where students are given a stable starting point for study, which is subsequently destabilized. *Ushpizin* works well as an initial frame of reference, which can then be problematized from a variety of directions. The students are able to recognize how much they have learned by comparing their first impressions of the film with their more informed perspective at the end of the semester.

### Lisa Lampert-Weissig

Professor of English Literature and Comparative Medieval Studies and Katzin Chair in Jewish Civilization, Literature Department, UC San Diego

#### *Le Grand Rôle*

The Yiddish reading of Shylock's “Hath Not a Jew Eyes?” speech is among the most memorable scenes in *Le Grand Rôle* (2004). The performance lands actor Maurice (Stéphane Freiss) the role of a lifetime. When the role is then given to a Hollywood star, Maurice takes on another even greater part, hiding his loss from his wife, Perla (Bérénice Bejo), who is dying of cancer. *Le Grand Rôle* is a tearjerker, but also an exploration of Jewish-Christian relations in Europe. Maurice's audition follows a speech by an elderly Holocaust survivor (Clément Harari). In the spirit of “all the world's a stage,” the old man asserts that everyone plays roles, even that of survivor. And, perhaps, he suggests, survivors can write Shylock better than Shakespeare.

I teach early English literature and I am eager to encourage students to think not only about how Jews have been represented in works like *Merchant*, but how Jews have responded and continue to respond to this tradition. Some of the most engaging new research on medieval and early modern Jewish-Christian relations addresses interaction between cultures, studying not just “the Jew that Shakespeare drew,” but how Jews played a role in shaping early European cultures. Maurice can play his “great role” because he is supported by a loyal group of friends, who, like him, navigate life in Paris as Jews. The film opens in a restaurant, where a powerful director pokes fun at Maurice's Jewish identity, provoking a spirited response from Perla. The film closes with a widowed Maurice on his way to another restaurant meal, this time buoyed by his Jewish friends. He stares at a poster for the film he almost starred in, remarking that he has dubbed Shylock's Yiddish lines instead. Jewish life in France seems more precarious now than when *Le Grand Rôle* premiered a decade ago; the question of the survival of Jewish voices in Europe is more relevant than ever.



## Jess Olson

Associate Professor of Jewish History,  
Yeshiva University

### *Secrets of a Soul*

Many films relate directly to my work in Jewish Studies, but I would like to point to one a bit less obvious: G. W. Pabst's 1926 film *Secrets of a Soul* (*Geheimnisse einer Seele*), the first serious cinematic representation of the psychoanalytic process. From the fertile cultural scene of Weimar Germany, psychoanalysis, like film, burst into the public consciousness, and captivated arbiters of popular culture around the world. One of these, Hollywood mogul Samuel Goldwyn, even approached Sigmund Freud himself, offering him \$100,000 to consult on a psychoanalytically themed film. Freud turned down the offer ("We do not want to give our consent to anything insipid"), but two in his "inner circle," Karl Abraham and Hans Sachs, proved more willing, and with screenwriter Hans Neumann they helped create a minor masterpiece. [1]

The film opens on a domestic scene, in which a middle-aged professor, Martin Fellman (Werner Krauss, of *Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* fame) is startled by a scream and accidentally cuts his wife. That evening, he has a frightful dream, portrayed in a fantastic surrealist cinematic sequence, the brainchild of Hungarian Jewish artist Ernő Metzner. After the dream, Fellman develops an acute neurosis: he cannot touch knives and is irrationally afraid of returning home to his wife. He is discovered in his sickened state by a kindly stranger, who turns out to be none other than Dr. Orth, an expert in a "new method for treatment of such illness," psychoanalysis. "There is no reason to despair!" the doctor declares. For the rest of

the film, we follow, in abridged form, the ups and downs of 1920s therapeutic process, portrayed once again in Metzner's brilliant surrealism, until at last Dr. Orth effects his cure through a triumphant interpretation of Fellman's first, troubling dream.

Like psychoanalysis, *Secrets of a Soul* is not "Jewish." But also like psychoanalysis, it has an organic connection to the particular world of pre-World War II central Europe, one impacted so deeply by the varied expressions of cultural and intellectual contributions of its Jewish community. To me this makes the film, in addition to its beauty, a powerful spotlight on an important moment in Jewish German cultural history.

(1) Eli Zaretsky, *Secrets of the Soul: A Social and Cultural History of Psychoanalysis* (2004), 145–146. I am indebted to Professor Zaretsky for the factual content (including quotations) of this paragraph.

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### *Seekers of Happiness*

Towards the end of *Seekers of Happiness*, which is set in Birobidzhan—a territory designated for Jewish colonization in the Soviet Far East—Natan, a collective farm chairman, detects a footprint of a shoe he proclaims to be "foreign." On the trail to capture a man accused of beating another Jewish settler, Natan inadvertently hints at the metacontext of the film. Namely, the film aims to showcase a family of Jewish migrants, who had left the shtetl

for Palestine but then moved to the Soviet Union. The film's main goal is to sniff out a "foreign" element resistant to the ideology that settling Jews on the land would help cure the degenerate economic condition typical of the newly defunct Pale of Settlement.

This film about Birobidzhan, though once dismissed as mere propaganda, can, in fact, teach us a lot. How to detect the codes of an ideological work of art, for example, is itself an important interpretative skill. Like many Socialist Realist works, *Seekers of Happiness* skillfully performs its ideology through a rather conventional plot: Natan is in love with Basya, who is married to Pinya Kopman, the film's "foreign" villain who is resistant to Soviet innovation. Natan is frequently depicted in proximity to a portrait of Stalin—and so, ridding Basya of Pinya allows for Stalin to enter the familial structure by proxy.

But the film is, at the same time, a terrific exhibit of how an intended ideological message shows its cracks when odd details of the work are examined. For example, on the train to Birobidzhan, Pinya and his family meet and are greeted by a strange man playing "Israel's Lament on the Banks of the Amur River." The name of the song evokes the words of Psalm 137, thus presenting the river demarcating one of the borders of the Birobidzhan region as a replacement for "the rivers of Babylon." Birobidzhan here is the newest exilic topos in a long chain of Jewish displacement—rather than the "Red Zion" it was supposed to be.

Readings such as this one ask us to reconcile the film's intended ideology with details that chip away at the same message from the inside in order to produce a complex cultural artifact of the Soviet Jewish experience.

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