

University of Toronto Symposium
JEWISH LITERATURE BEYOND BORDERS
October 18, 2012

The Yiddish literary critic Baal Makhshoves famously declared that Yiddish and Hebrew literature represent “one literature in two languages.” As this remark suggests, the bilingual roots of Hebrew and Yiddish burgeoned into a diasporic literary culture that transcended territorial boundaries. Yet the assumed parting of ways of Hebrew and Yiddish letters during the twentieth century is both driven and matched by the division of these languages and cultures within the field of modern literary studies, a division that betrays a broader tendency to separate literary cultures according to existing physical, political and linguistic borders of nation-states.

The recent “transnational turn” in literary and cultural studies furnishes new possibilities for the study of modern Jewish literature. Transnational theory takes as its starting point the recognition that in a world increasingly defined by migration, Diaspora and globalization, collective identities can no longer be defined solely in terms of geopolitical location, language and ethnicity. Thus, transnationalism favours a comparative perspective that stresses interaction, overlap and intermixing among cultures. This symposium is dedicated to exploring modern Jewish literature(s) within a context of shifting affiliations that transgress normative borders of space and culture. Does the transnational approach encourage us to reclaim the bilingual literary culture that Baal Makhshoves described, or challenge his formulation by bringing the study of Hebrew or Yiddish into relation with other languages and cultures? How might this approach complicate a geography of Hebrew and Yiddish cultures, traditionally confined to the Ashkenazi realm of Central and Eastern Europe, to include Sephardic and Mizrahi writing, as well as Yiddish and Hebrew writing from North America and beyond? To what extent does transnationalism require us to re-think the familiar conception of the Jew as the marginalized “other” of modernity? And how might such questions help bring forth a new definition of “minority” literature? These are among the many questions to be explored.

The symposium will take place on October 18, 2012, in the Hart House Debates Room, 7 Hart House Circle, at the University of Toronto. Over the course of the day, speakers from various universities who will present their recent research. Paper topics range from German-Hebrew bilingualism, to the relationship between African and Yiddish diasporas, to traces of Yiddish and Arabic in Hebrew literature, to Montreal’s “Yiddishland.” The day will conclude with the annual Dr. Max Gianna Glassman Israel-Exchange Scholar Lecture by the illustrious scholar of modern Jewish literature and Israel Prize recipient, Dan Miron (Hebrew University, Columbia University), entitled “Centres and Peripheries in Current Jewish Literary Studies.” All events are free and open to the public, and are presented by the Centre for Jewish Studies, with the support of the Posen Foundation, the Centre for Diaspora and Transnational Studies, the Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures and the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures.

Organizer: Rachel Seelig
Ray D. Wolfe Post-Doctoral Fellow
Centre for Jewish Studies, University of Toronto

SCHEDULE

Hart House Debates Room, 7 Hart House Circle
Thursday, October 18, 2012

9:00-9:30am, Welcome & Opening Remarks

Jeffrey Kopstein (Director, CJS) and Rachel Seelig (Ray D. Wolfe Postdoctoral Fellow, CJS)

9:30-11:00am: Panel 1, Jewish Literature in Comparative Perspective

Chair: John Zilcosky, (Department of Germanic Languages & Literatures)

Respondent: Leonid Livak (Department of Slavic Languages & Literatures)

Na'ama Rokem
(University of Chicago)

The Earthly Effect: Erich Auerbach and Leah Goldberg on Dante and Comparative Literature

Marc Caplan
(Johns Hopkins University)

Baroque Echoes and Surrealist Genealogies: Reb Nakhman, E.T.A. Hoffmann, and the Yiddish Symbolism of Der Nister

Dror Abend-David
(University of Florida)

"Scorned my Nation": The Silent Version

11:00-11:30am, Coffee Break

11:30-1:00pm: Panel 2, Translating/Transgressing Linguistic Borders

Chair: TBA

Respondent: Keren Rubinstein (Department for the Study of Religion)

Shachar Pinsker
(University of Michigan)

"The Language that Was Lost on the Roads": Discovering Hebrew through Yiddish in Aharon Appelfeld's Fiction

Deborah Starr
(Cornell University)

Traces of Arabic as a Jewish Language

Rachel Seelig
(University of Toronto)

Unsettling the Land: Ludwig Strauss's Journey from German Romanticism to Neoclassical Hebrew

1:00-2:00pm, Lunch Break

2:00-3:30pm, Panel 3: Remapping Jewish Literary Space

Chair: Markus Stock (Department of Germanic Languages & Literatures)

Respondent: Neil ten Kortenaar (Department of Comparative Literature)

Rebecca Margolis
(University of Ottawa)

Yiddish Montreal: Transitions from Minor to Major Centre

Anna Shternshis
(University of Toronto)

From Gulag to Ghetto: The Yiddish Poetry of Moyshe Teyf, 1904-1966 (written by Anna Shternshis and Shirley Kumove)

Ato Quayson
(University of Toronto)

Postcolonialism and the Diasporic Imaginary

3:30pm-4:00pm, Coffee Break

4:00-6:00, Dr. Max and Gianna Glassman Israel-Exchange Scholar Lecture

Dan Miron
(Columbia University,
Hebrew University)

Centres and Peripheries in Current Jewish Literary Studies

For details, visit: <http://www.cjs.utoronto.ca/jewishliteraturebeyondborders>