

2025

Schwartz Reisman Graduate Student Conference in Jewish Studies



Anne Tanenbaum Centre for Jewish Studies
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

מרכז למדעי היהדות

“Jewish Problems”

Featuring presentations from
students in the **Granovsky-Gluskin
Collaborative Program in Jewish
Studies**

Anne Tanenbaum Centre for Jewish Studies

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Schedule

10:00

Opening Remarks

Tracey Lemos, Graduate Director

Anne Tanenbaum Centre for Jewish Studies

Jacob Hermant, PhD Candidate & Co-organizer

Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures

10:15

Panel 1: “Problems of the Body”

Chair: Virginia Shewfelt, PhD Student

Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures

Eli Jany, PhD Candidate

Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures

Gaia Malnati, PhD Candidate

Centre for Comparative Literature

Miriam Borden, PhD Candidate

Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures

11:30

Break

11:45

Panel 2: “Problems of Community”

Chair: Ori Gilboa, PhD Student

Department of Sociology

Alison Cleverly, PhD Candidate

Department of Classics & Department for the Study of Religion

Elliot Fonarev, PhD Candidate

Department of Sociology

Sterling Stutz, PhD Student

Dalla Lana School of Public Health

Schedule



13:00

Break

14:30

Panel 3: “Problems of Identity”

Chair: Miriam Schwartz, PhD Candidate

Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures

Martin Pinckney, PhD Candidate

Department for the Study of Religion

Julie Sharff, PhD Candidate

Department for the Study of Religion

Matthew Shih, PhD Candidate

Department of Musicology

15:45

Break

16:00

**Keynote Lecture, “Hidden in Translation:
The (Gendered) Politics of Translating Polish
Language Diaries Written by Youth into English”**

Dorota Glowacka, Professor

University of King’s College

17:30

Closing Remarks

Marissa Herzig, PhD Candidate & Co-organizer

Department of English

Co-organizers



Jacob Hermant

Jacob Hermant is a PhD candidate in the Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures and the Anne Tanenbaum Centre for Jewish Studies. He received his BA in 2020 from the University of King's College in Halifax, with combined honours in Contemporary Studies and Theatre, and a minor in Early Modern Studies. He completed his MA in 2021 at the University of Toronto's Centre for Comparative Literature and the collaborative program in Jewish studies. Jacob works on Yiddish literature of the 19th century with a focus on themes of land and Jewish diasporic life in Eastern Europe.

Marissa Herzig

Marissa Herzig (she/her) is a third-year English PhD candidate at the University of Toronto whose SSHRC-funded dissertation focuses on the female golem in contemporary retellings of Jewish folklore from the lens of disability studies. Marissa is currently a Junior Fellow at Massey College, co-president of the Centre for Jewish Studies Graduate Student Association, and a consultant at the Writing Centre. In her spare time, Marissa enjoys listening to audiobooks and making three cups of tea a day.

Panel 1

Problems of the Body



Eli Jany

“Nowadays I wouldn’t cry in a situation like that”: A Disabled Socialist’s Yiddish-language Autobiography from 1932 Vilne”

Abstract

Scholarship on disabled Eastern European Jews has tended to focus on their marginalization, instrumentalization, and allegorization by broader society, while portraying disabled individuals as objects of inconsistent and inadequate communal benevolence. This is partly a matter of sources; few researchers focus on texts written by disabled Jews themselves. My talk highlights the importance of considering disabled perspectives via an analysis of the autobiography of Tshernigov (a pseudonym), a young woman from Vilne, in which she describes her experiences – familial, educational, social, and political – as a young milliner with a chronic illness and visibly exceptional spinal curvature.

In defiance of a widespread Yiddish joke that “a hunchback can’t be a socialist,” Tshernigov is one of three Bundists with exceptional spinal curvature that I have identified in the archives. I argue that socialist organizing provided some disabled Jews with a sense of empowerment in the difficult social and economic context of 1930s Poland, as well as offering a satisfying narrative for the onset of impairment that acknowledged the role of poverty. Tshernigov’s text challenges historical narratives that depoliticize disability and presuppose a passive role for disabled people. It illustrates both the stigmatization of disability in everyday contexts and the tactics a disabled person employed in crafting a positive self-image.

Bio

Eli Jany is a PhD candidate in Yiddish in the Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures. His dissertation focuses on the lives and life writing of disabled Jews in interwar Poland.

Panel 1

Problems of the Body

Gaia Malnati

“Voice as Embodied Memory in Paul Celan’s 1952 and 1969 Poetry Readings”

Abstract

In 1952, Bukovinian Jewish poet Paul Celan visited Germany for the first time to read his poetry at a meeting of the German literary circle Gruppe 47. Among the poems he read was “Count the Almonds” (German title here), which he also selected for his reading at the Beit Agron House in Jerusalem in 1969. “Count the Almonds” alludes to the popular Yiddish song “Rozhinkes mit Mandlen”, which was documented to have circulated in different variants and adaptations in ghettos and concentration camps. Celan alluded to this song with a memorial function in mind, much like the collectors who, in the aftermath of the Holocaust, began recording and documenting folk songs and oral culture from ghettos, camps, and the Jewish communities destroyed by Nazi mass extermination. I argue that the memorial function of the folksong in Celan’s poetry comes alive through his vocal delivery of “Count the Almonds” for the German audience in 1952 and the Israeli audience in 1969. Reading this poem for these audiences while physically sharing the room with them was, in Michael Rothberg’s words, a performance of migrant memory—one that allows for a different notion of collective memory, based on shared space rather than ethnic origins. Yet, the proximity of bodies also brings to the surface a tangible sense of estrangement: the perception of oneself or others as foreign, the realization of embodied experiences that separate one’s body from other bodies. Celan read his poems in German, but with neither audience did he share the same embodied experience of speaking German as an exile living in France. How did Celan’s vocal performance confront estrangement in his proximity to these audiences? How did his voice enable his poem to embody a community of remembering?

Panel 1

Problems of the Body

Gaia Malnati

Bio

Gaia Malnati is a PhD candidate at the Centre for Comparative Literature at the University of Toronto, where she is also enrolled in the Jewish Studies Collaborative Program. Her research intersects Holocaust studies, migration studies, oral literature and oral history. Her dissertation project, entitled *Oral Literatures Displaced: From Holocaust Testimony to Migrant Songs*, considers how poetry readings, songs, and storytelling have served as modes of presentation of the self for Holocaust survivors in the aftermath of the war and for refugees in recent times in Italy.

Panel 1

Problems of the Body



Miriam Borden

“Yiddish Lullabies: Singing the Unspeakable in the Maternal Voice”

Abstract

Lullabies are generally assumed to be comforting songs tenderly crooned by mothers to their infants. Yiddish lullabies sung in a language affectionately called *mame-loshn* (mama-language), even more so. However, Yiddish lullabies—the largest genre in the entire corpus of Yiddish folk songs—are rarely comforting; in fact, they are deeply discomfiting. These are songs defined structurally by aesthetics of maternal affect—sighs and cries of singing mothers in the form of addresses to the child (“shlof, mayn kind,” “sleep, my child”) or soothing repetitive vocables with no meaning (“ay-lyu-lyu)—both, of which represent an interruption in the song’s narrative flow and signal to the listener tragic or vulnerable moments in the lullaby. Yiddish lullabies are songs that sing the unspeakable, admitting inadmissible, difficult truths about life and society. Scholars of folk songs have largely understood lullabies as songs sung to infants, neglecting to consider how the immense power of the form expanded the boundaries of its use far beyond the cradle. Bringing together lullabies sung cradleside with those sung by street singers and theatre performers, I show that by harnessing the Yiddish lullaby’s particular rhetorical techniques—the aesthetics of maternal affect embedded in the maternal voice—poets turned the lullaby into a powerful vehicle through which to channel collective voices of discontent. Ultimately, the Yiddish lullaby is not only a song sung in the maternal voice by the maternal body. Rather, the lullaby illuminates one of the essential ways Yiddish functions as *mame-loshn*: by speaking tenderly, but also frankly. Yiddish lullabies do offer comfort, I argue—but not in the ways we might expect

Bio

Miriam Borden is a PhD candidate in the Yiddish stream of the Dept. of Germanic Languages and Literatures. She is currently completing a dissertation on the phenomenon of relating to Yiddish as the familiar, folksy, and feminine *mame-loshn* (mama-language), exploring the history of that relationship through the sexual politics of language, the idea of the nation, and the construction of the modern Jewish self. Her work has been published in the journals *In geveb: A Journal of Yiddish Studies*, *Canadian Jewish Studies / Études juives canadiennes*, and the Jewish pop culture blog *Hey Alma*.

Panel 2

Problems of Community



Alison Cleverly

“Social History of Hellenistic Seal Impressions in Maresha”

Abstract

A series of ancient subterranean complexes beneath the buildings in Maresha once held a small documents-archive room. All that remains are just over 1000 seal impressions that held together the long-since-disintegrated documents. This Idumean community of Maresha, which grew into a multi-cultural city in antiquity, was, at the time of this archive's creation, part of the Seleukid Empire. Some of the seal impressions have dates, written in Greek characters for the Seleukid-era dating, and these dates place the archive in the second century BCE.

In this paper, I will discuss the process of analysing these artifacts in order to learn about the historical context of the people who used them. I will do this by first describing the collection and focusing on a couple of specific pieces therein. Then, I will broaden to the archaeological site as a whole and describe how these seal impressions from one cave help us to understand the community as a whole.

Bio

Alison has spent half her PhD in each of the Classics Department and the Department for the Study of Religion. She's an ancient historian, focusing on the social history of temples, festivals, and city-states of the Eastern Mediterranean during the 2nd century BCE to 1st century CE transition from Seleukid Empire to Roman Empire.

Panel 2

Problems of Community



Elliot Fonarev

“Configuration of a Jewish social Field in Unsettled Times”

Abstract

This presentation will outline my doctoral research study, which investigates how Jewish people in Toronto negotiate, understand, and respond to pressures brought on by unsettled times. The project aims to add scholarly knowledge to how people make meaning about their experiences, identities, and sense of belonging in times of disruption and stress. Building on the conference theme of ‘Jewish problems’, the presentation will emphasize how cultural sociological ideas and research methods can contribute to understanding different strategies or solutions that people employ to navigate identity-based concerns, relationships, and community ties.

Bio

My name is Elliot (he/him) and I am a 5th year PhD candidate in the Department of Sociology, with a collaborative specialization at the Centre for Jewish Studies. My research interests are in the cultural sociology of everyday life, social norms and legality, and meaning-making around belonging and exclusion. I aim to bring together field theory with memory studies and with the framework of the cultural politics of the nation to understand collective identity formation and differentiation.

Panel 2

Problems of Community



Sterling Stutz

“Antisemitism after October 7th: Key insights from Developing a Community Research Project”

Abstract

This research project investigates the relationship between antisemitism and the holistic health of Jewish people in Toronto, Canada using a community-driven research methodology. The Canadian Jewish community is the 4th largest in the world with 48% of this population living in Toronto. Since the October 7th attacks by Hamas and ensuing war, antisemitic violence has expanded globally especially in North America and Europe. Existing literature examines antisemitism through a lens of mental health but does not consider the holistic health and wellbeing impacts.

Bio

Sterling Stutz is a PhD student at the Dalla Lana School of Public Health and the ATCJS where her research examines the links between antisemitism and the wellbeing of Toronto's Jewish community. Her work is rooted in Jewish values such as tzedek (justice), tshuvah (forgiveness), and Tikkun olam (repairing the world). Sterling has been teaching Canadian Jewish History at the University of Toronto since 2023 where she recently received the Superior Graduate Student Course Instructor award.

Panel 3

Problems of Identity



Martin Pinckney

“Hecuba's Mask: the Iconography of Art in Hermann Cohen's Aesthetics”

Abstract

Masks play a central role within the second volume of Hermann Cohen's *Aesthetics of Pure Feeling*. Appearing in chapters ranging from poetry to painting, the theme functions on both the figurative and literal level. The heroes of the spoken epic, for instance, are masks of an entire people, while those of Greek Drama wear the mask of an affect. The face of painting too, is a mask, with the capacity to both conceal or reveal. The diversity of playfulness with which Cohen employs the theme is united by a common thread. Against the popular characterization of masks as concealers of true identity, Cohen positively construes them as the means of both producing and excavating identity. They serve as a figurative and visual representation of a simile or parable: the drawing of a likeness between two distinct elements through the preservation of their difference. In this paper, I aim to show that this characterization of masks not only serves as a useful hermeneutic key to Cohen's philosophy, it helps us to better grasp the iconographic power of the human face in art. In the dawning of art's masks, alterity finds its aesthetic life, drawing its breath from our feeling.

Bio

Martin Pinckney is a third year PHD Student at the Anne Tanenbaum Centre for Jewish Studies (ATCJS) and the Department for the Study of Religion (DSR). His research focuses on the theme of masks—literal and figurative—in Jewish philosophical interpretations of art. Representing more broadly the roles that art and artifice play within culture, masks may be understood as the means of producing, as well as excavating, subjectivity and identity.

Panel 3

Problems of Identity



Julie Sharff

“Yiddish Literature Goes South: Immigration and Race in I.J. Schwartz’s “Kentucky” ”

Abstract

This paper will examine a selected poem from Israel Jacob Schwartz’s (1885–1971) landmark 1936 epic poem “Kentucky.” Schwartz, an immigrant himself, writes this epic tracing three generations of an Eastern European Jewish family through their immigration, acculturation, and assimilation in the American South. After leaving behind the cloistered Yiddish literary scene in New York City, Schwartz writes the epic after his move to Kentucky. By conducting a feminist close reading of the poem “Jake,” I will demonstrate the modes that the second generation uses to opt into whiteness while the first generation cannot. The family dynamics in “Kentucky” lend to an inevitable multivocality within the ridged iambic pentameter that the poet maintains throughout. Schwartz takes the reader through Jake’s adolescence, ripe with potential, and the somewhat futile process of assimilation, contingent on the established culture of racism. A feminist close reading of the poem’s content and form draws out the dogmatism required to fit in despite and because of an inescapable specter of Jewish difference.

Bio

Julie Sharff is a PhD candidate in the Department for the Study of Religion and in collaboration with the Anne Tenenbaum Centre for Jewish Studies. She holds a BA in Religion with honors from Florida State University and completed her MA in Jewish Studies at Indiana University. Her work primarily focuses on Yiddish with attention to gender and Jewish identity from the late nineteenth century through the mid-twentieth century. Her work is informed by semiotics, psychoanalytic, and critical theories. Julie is a contributor to *In Geveb* and published a guide with Oxford Bibliographies Online on “Yiddish Women’s Fiction” in 2024.

Panel 3

Problems of Identity

Matthew Shih

"The Politics of Remembering the Shanghai Jews: Chinese Statecraft and Twenty-First-Century Musical Works"

Abstract

Between 1938 and 1941, approximately 20,000 Central European Jews settled in Shanghai as they attempted to escape Nazi persecution. Shanghai was one of the last remaining cities willing to accept Jewish refugees, and the Chinese people forged a familiar bond with the Jews as the two groups struggled together to survive in wartime Shanghai. In this paper, I examine how the (hi)story of the Jews in Shanghai has been memorialized in the contemporary Chinese and Jewish imaginations through musical works, such as Aaron Zigman's *Émigré* (2023) and Xiang "Sean" Gao's *Shanghai Sonatas* (2021). I argue that the cooperative Sino-Jewish relationship depicted in these works is consistent with politically motivated Chinese philosemitic discourse (Ainslie 2021; Lee 2020). Drawing on newspaper reviews, social media reactions, and Chinese political rhetoric, I demonstrate how these musical productions mobilize the story of the Shanghai Jews to simultaneously sustain an internal community dialogue between the Jews and the Chinese and present China as a cooperative ally to global audiences. By connecting *Émigré* and *Shanghai Sonatas* to China's broader geopolitical strategy, I demonstrate how shared Sino-Jewish cultural memory continues to be redefined and repurposed in the twenty-first century.

Bio

Matthew Shih is a PhD candidate in Musicology at the University of Toronto. His dissertation examines how musical spaces shared by European refugees and Chinese natives in twentieth-century Shanghai cultivated new understandings of national belonging, musical modernism, and gender identity. Matthew is a Vanier Scholar, and his work has also been supported by the Fulbright Program, the American Musicological Society, the Association for Asian Studies, the American Academy for Jewish Research, and the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture.

Keynote Lecture

The Anne Tanenbaum Centre for Jewish Studies

Keynote Lecture of the Schwartz-Reisman Graduate
Student Conference in Jewish Studies,
"Jewish Problems"

"Hidden in Translation: The (Gendered) Politics of Translating Polish Language Diaries Written by Youth into English"

Dorota Glowacka
(*University of King's College*)



Date: Monday, April 21

Time: 4:00 PM

Location: Room 100,
170 St. George Street

All lectures are free and open
to the public.

Seating is on a first come
first served basis.

Keynote Lecture

“Hidden in translation: The (gendered) politics of translating Polish language diaries written by youth into English”

This lecture focuses on the (gendered) politics of translating into English the diaries written in Polish by young people in the ghettos and in hiding. Considering the factors that precipitated the translation of these particular texts (but not others), I draw attention to the differences in historical, discursive and gendered contexts occupied by the original texts and their English-language translations. I am interested in the role of translation in either entrenching, negotiating, or transforming different modalities of memory politics in North America and in Central and Eastern Europe. The diaries, especially those written by youth, elude categorisation, dwelling in the liminal space between a historical document and a literary artefact. I ask about the role of translation in refashioning a private record into a work of Holocaust literature, and, in the case of diaries written by young women, into products of popular culture. I also consider intertextual translatory dynamic of the diaries (whose authors were multilingual), arguing that they anticipate what I'd like to call the “translatory turn” in Holocaust studies.

I primarily focus on four diaries: Dawid Sierakowiak (Łódź ghetto), Rutka Laskier (Będzin ghetto), Rywka Lipszyc (Łódź ghetto), and Melania Weissenberg/Molly Applebaum (Dąbrowa Tarnowska ghetto/in hiding). I aim to re-signify Walter Benjamin's injunction that the task of the translator “is to release in his own language that pure language which is under the spell of another” in the context of post-Holocaust “ecologies of witnessing” (Hanna Pollin-Galay). I suggest that the increasing attention to the role of translation in shaping the postmemorial landscape is related to the emergent awareness of the Western-centric dynamic that structures relations between cultures. I postulate a move toward decolonial modes of translating Holocaust texts, which are intersectional, emplaced, and fundamentally relational.

Keynote Lecture



Dorota Glowacka

Bio

Dorota Glowacka is Professor of Humanities at the University of King's College in K'jipuktuk/Halifax, Canada. Glowacka is the author of *From the Other Side: Testimony, Affect, Imagination*, 2017, and *Disappearing Traces: Holocaust Testimonials, Ethics, and Aesthetics*, 2012. She coedited *Imaginary Neighbors: Mediating Polish-Jewish Relations after the Holocaust*, 2007, and *Between Ethics and Aesthetics: Crossing the Boundaries*, 2002. Most recently, she co-edited, with Regina Mülhauser, a special issue of *Journal for Holocaust Research* on gender-based and sexual violence during the Holocaust. Glowacka has published numerous book chapters and journal articles in the area of Holocaust and genocide studies, continental philosophy, and gender and memory studies. Her current research focuses on gender and the Holocaust, the intersections of the Holocaust and settler colonial genocides in North America, and the politics of translating Holocaust diaries and memoirs. She is a member of the Academic Committee of the Mandel Center for Advanced Holocaust Research at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and a participant in the international research consortium *Thinking Through the Museum*.

Acknowledgements



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We would like to give special thanks to Professor Tracy Lemos, the Graduate Director at the Anne Tanenbaum Centre for Jewish Studies, and the co-organizers, Jacob Hermant and Marissa Herzig, for putting together this conference. We would like to thank the staff at the Anne Tanenbaum Centre for Jewish Studies, Galina Vaisman, Natasha Richichi-Fried, and Constance Chan, for their support with the logistics. We would like to also extend our gratitude to the work-study students for volunteering their time to help during the conference.

