

The
Alumni
Association
newsletter
of the



Yiddish
Book
Center



SPRING/SUMMER 2017

Dear Alumni,

Illustration: Ward Schumaker



In this second issue of *Nu?*, you'll read about what's new at the Yiddish Book Center, hear what your fellow Center alumni are up to, learn about an upcoming alumni gathering in New York City, and find all you need to be in the know about Jewish Detroit.

Earlier this year we sent out a survey asking for your input as we begin to shape our alumni mentoring program. The response to the survey was enthusiastic—and swift. We learned that many of you are interested and eager to mentor

fellow alumni, and the range of skills and professional experience you can share is broad—everything from help with writing and research to advice on career and academic goals. We also learned that many of you are interested in having a mentor to help support you as you pursue your interests and passions.

As we begin the work of creating a pilot program, we're taking your suggestions into consideration. We hope to announce the launch of the program in the fall. Until then, if you haven't replied to the survey, there's still time. If you have further thoughts to share, please send them to us at alumni@yiddishbookcenter.org.

Enjoy this issue of *Nu?*, stay in touch, and feel free to send us your latest news, questions, and suggestions. Don't forget to check out new posts in the alumni section of yiddishbookcenter.org and on our Facebook alumni pages. And get ready to welcome a new cohort of alumni this fall, following our summer 2017 educational programs.

Vareme grusn!

Debra Caplan (Yiddish Book Center intern '04)
President of the Yiddish Book Center Alumni Association

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Have You Heard **The Shmooze?**

The Yiddish Book Center's podcast is the place to hear engaging conversations with some of the most interesting Jewish culture makers today—among them, over the past few months, Eitan Kensky, editor of *The Abandoned Book and Other Yiddish Stories*, our new anthology; Amy Kurzweil, author of the graphic memoir *Flying Couch*; and The Pickle Guys, owners of a Lower East Side specialty shop..

You can catch up on past episodes and subscribe at yiddishbookcenter.org/the-shmooze.



Four Questions for: **Caraid O'Brien**

Caraid O'Brien (Internship '93) is a writer, translator, and actor who appeared in two recent Yiddish-language productions of Sholem Asch's God of Vengeance, whose controversial subject matter (including prostitution and lesbianism) resulted in its cast being arrested on obscenity charges shortly after its Broadway debut in 1923. Previously, Caraid translated the play to English.

What drew you to *God of Vengeance*—as a translator and as an actor?

I first read *God of Vengeance* in Yiddish during a theater class with Ruth Wisse. When I moved to New York in 1997 to become an actor, I saw a production in English that was nothing like the play that I read. I felt the spirit of Sholem Asch rise through the floorboards, look me in the eyes, and say, "You know this is not the play that I wrote." Also, like most Yiddish plays, it has several phenomenal roles for women.

What's the difference between engaging with a work as a translator and engaging as an actor?

Actors are crucial to creating an exciting, living translation. For any play, I work on several drafts, reading it with actors throughout to see what works. It takes about a year from first translation to opening night. Acting for me is a very joyful, freeing experience; I find translation extremely difficult and frustrating. What keeps me going is my reward—a juicy role to play.

Why is this story—and the behind-the-scenes story told in the new play *Indecent*—captivating to audiences in 2017?

God of Vengeance is an important twentieth-century masterpiece of world literature, as well as an important moment in Jewish literature and queer literature and the history of free speech. Sholem Asch's progressive attitudes toward female sexuality, as well as his unflinching spotlight on religious hypocrisy, make this play particularly relevant for this era we find ourselves in.

What play would you be willing to be arrested for? If a play is worth the difficulty of translating, then it's definitely worth a few nights in jail. So for me that would be anything by Sholem Asch, Dovid Pinski, Ansky, and honestly many, many others.



Photo: Ronald L. Glassman

Stay in Touch

CONNECT with other alumni at the Yiddish Book Center Alumni Group on Facebook | **READ** alumni profiles, updates, and news at yiddishbookcenter.org/alumni-association | **EMAIL US** at alumni@yiddishbookcenter.org

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Alumni Updates

After spending a year in Israel at Yeshivat Har Etzion, **ARIEL AMSELLEM** (Great Jewish Books '14) is now an undergraduate at the University of Chicago.

SARAH BUNIN BENOR

(Internship '94) writes: "I am working on a study of Hebrew use at North American Jewish summer camps, as well as an edited volume on Jewish languages. Also, I created a website featuring women born before the Nineteenth Amendment who were excited to vote for Hillary Clinton (iwaitied96years.com). I'm now editing a book featuring the wisdom of many of these women."

CLAUDIA CHAHOR

(Steiner '13) writes: "I am now on my family leave with my small daughter while looking for new job opportunities or professional retraining."

EVA ROSE COHEN

(Tent: Museums '14) draws and writes a bimonthly comic series for Mn Artists, a program of the Walker Art Center. The comic focuses on the lived experience of being an artist and touches on topics ranging from the creative process to artistic engagement with Black Lives Matter. She's also the school director and bat/bar mitzvah prep teacher for the Jewish Cultural School at Or Emet: Minnesota Congregation for Humanistic Judaism and teaches in the afternoon school at Talmud Torah of St. Paul. Eva recently co-taught a Holocaust art-focused class for Jewish teens in St. Paul and is excited to be showing work along with them in [Re]Telling, an upcoming exhibition at the Minneapolis Sabes JCC.

JENNIE CRICHLAW

(Tent: Museums '14) and Tyler Zimmer became engaged in November while visiting the Longwood Botanical Gardens. Jennie is a project manager at Dom & Tom, a digital product development agency specializing in emerging technologies including web, iOS, and Android.

EMMA EISENBERG

(Tent: Creative Writing '13 and Journalism '14) has started a website, fullfatties.com, whose mission is "consuming, promoting, and reviewing small-batch high-fat ice cream in the United States and beyond."

RACHEL KUNSTADT

(Tent: Theater '13) is working as the program assistant for the Center for Jewish Living and Center for Israel at JCC Manhattan. Outside of the JCC, she writes musicals and plays, produces theater, and is

the artistic director of LezCab, a nonprofit theater company for queer women. She lives in Manhattan with her shih tzu, Bernie.

RACHEL LIBMAN

(Tent: Museums '14) and Gerald Lazar welcomed Ella Zoe (Ella Zipporah) Libman-Lazar, born January 14, 2017, in Toronto.

Vilna My Vilna: Stories by Abraham

Karpinowitz, translated by **HELEN MINTZ**

(Translation Fellowship '14), was published by Syracuse University Press in 2016. The book received the 2016 J.I. Segal Award for Translation of a Book on a Jewish Theme, as well as the 2016 Canadian Jewish Literary Award for Yiddish.

TANYA PANOVA

(Fellowship '15-16) was recently married and now lives in Moscow, where she leads tours of a house museum of the Russian writer Korney Chukovsky, who,

she notes, is as well known in Russia as Dr. Seuss is in the United States; her experience leading tours at the Yiddish Book Center helped prepare her for that work, she adds. Tanya is a field fellow for the Wexler Oral History Project. "I am also illustrating a children's magazine from time to time and some fairy tales," she writes. "I hope that will be my primary occupation and really wish to illustrate children's books more. And on top of that, my husband was accepted for a post-doc Humboldt Stipendium at the University of Hamburg, so we are moving to Germany."

JONATHAN

ROTSZTAIN (Tent: Comics '14) continues to publish *Self-Loving Jew*, a series of autobiographical comics claiming a secular, cultural Jewish identity, through the Koffler Centre of the Arts and the *Forward's* Scribe platform.

ANDREA SCHLOSSER

(Tent: Comedy '14, Comics '14) has received her degree, summa cum laude,

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Four Questions for: Naomi Seidman

Naomi Seidman (*Internship '86*) is the Koret Professor of Jewish Culture at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley and was a 2016 Guggenheim fellow. Her newest book, *The Marriage Plot: or, How Jews Fell in Love with Love, and with Literature* (Stanford University Press), looks at how Jewish readers in a modernizing world—one in which the traditional arranged marriage was replaced by the notion of the “love match”—turned to literature to understand new concepts of love, courtship, and marriage. But Jews were ambivalent about these notions, which were rooted, she notes, in Christian tradition—and that ambivalence continued to play out in works by modern Jewish writers, from Sigmund Freud to Philip Roth and Erica Jong.



Why did Jews need to learn the “rules” of romantic love? Traditional Jewish practices, especially among the elite (poorer people, with less at stake, were freer to choose their own mates), dictated that families and matchmakers arrange marriages, and European courtship practices were foreign to Jewish culture.

Why did the novel play such a major role in that transformation? Traditional Jews lived far away from the bourgeois circles in which modern courtship was practiced, so they learned about courtship not from what

they saw around them but rather what they read in novels. Romantic novels swept not only young girls off their feet (as in other cultures) but also young boys.

Why did Jews hold on to traditional notions of love and marriage while also adopting a modern model? Because Jews were latecomers and outsiders to the ideologies that underlay modern romance (which are based on Christian and chivalric ideals), they never adopted them wholesale. For instance, the ideology of romance rules that parents are irrelevant to the all-important and sublime love that unites young couples. Chava in the Tevye stories converts to Russian Orthodoxy, but prior to that converts to this ideology of love. For some Jews, this ideology increasingly seemed to demand too high a price—the deterioration of extended kinship ties and ultimately of the community itself. That rendered traditional marriage practices, in retrospect, as more attractive and even erotic.

What’s your favorite Jewish love story? I do love the Tevye stories, but for me they’re “heretical” love stories, since they feature the love that is ruled out in modern romance, which is to say, the love between father and daughter.

Alumni Updates, continued from page 3.

in North American studies, part of a double-major BA program. She recently founded her own proofreading company, called SCRIPTORIUM ANDREA SCHLOSSER. This year she will present her academic research on African American studies at the International James Baldwin Conference in Ankara, Turkey.

EMMANUELLE SMITH (Tent: Journalism '14) published her first children’s book, *Park Life* (Fisherton Press), last year. “It charts a day in the life of a London park and of the people and animals that come through it,” she writes. “I am currently working on two new books—one is for young adults, and the other is a story about Jewish

meditation and mindfulness for young children. My ‘day job’ (which actually takes place in the evenings!) is as a community manager for Mumsnet, a UK-based parenting forum. I’ve also started a volunteering role I’m really excited about. It’s at Maytree, a charity that offers sanctuary and support to people in suicidal crisis. Finally,

I’m working on a project to turn a disused caretaker flat at my synagogue, South London Liberal Synagogue, into a home for a refugee family.”

RI J. TURNER (Translation Fellow '14) is in her second and final year of coursework at the Israeli Inter-University MA Program in Yiddish Studies; her

home campus is Hebrew University in Jerusalem. She also works as a research and translation assistant at the Dov Sadan Publishing Project of Hebrew University, under the direction of professor Yechiel Szeintuch.

Nosh: Scallion Pancake Challah



Photo: Molly Yeh

Molly Yeh (Tent: Food NYC '14) is an award-winning food blogger (mynameisyeh.com) whose first cookbook, *Molly on the Range: Recipes and Stories from an Unlikely Life on a Farm* (Rodale), offers a peek into what it's like to be a Jewish-Chinese, Juilliard-trained percussionist living on her husband's family farm in the Midwest. Here she shares one of her favorite recipes from the book.

Scallion Pancake Challah (Makes 1 loaf.)

This is me in bread form! Chinese, Jewish, and pretty doughy, whether I can help it or not.

1/2 batch of your favorite challah dough, made through the first rising (or use a whole batch and double the following ingredients to make two loaves instead of one)

1 tablespoon toasted sesame oil

3 scallions, minced

Kosher salt and black pepper

Crushed red pepper

Egg wash: 1 large egg yolk, beaten with 1 tablespoon water

Toasted sesame seeds

Preheat the oven to 375°F. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper.

Divide the dough into 3 equal parts and roll each part into a 12-inch log. Gently flatten each log so that it is about 3 inches wide. Brush each with sesame oil and sprinkle with scallions, salt, black pepper, and crushed red pepper. Roll the logs up lengthwise like a jelly roll and pinch the seams to seal. Lay the logs seam-side down next to one another and pinch them together at one end. Then braid the logs and pinch them at the other end. Place the loaf on the lined baking sheet. Cover and let rise for 30 minutes.

Brush the loaf with the egg wash and sprinkle with sesame seeds and black pepper.

Bake until the loaf is golden brown and has an internal temperature of 190°F. Begin checking for doneness at 28 minutes.

Let cool slightly and enjoy.

MENACHEM WECKER

(Tent: Comics '14, Museums '14) recently married Nachama Soloveichik—who, he believes, speaks a fine Yiddish. He published an investigative feature about the CIA's art collection (with a Jewish angle) in the January/February 2017 issue of *Playboy*.

MAX WEINREICH

(Steiner '16) writes: "I've been teaching a Brooklyn family Yiddish as a way of introducing them to the depth and diversity of Jewish history. I'm also several chapters into the Yiddish text of the *Fellowship of the Ring*, and I'm participating in the Great Jewish Books Book Club online forum."

DANIELLE WINTER

(Fellowship '13-14) is a K-to-5th-grade librarian for Hamilton Township School District, the fourth-biggest school district in New Jersey, where she leads story times and teaches information-literacy skills to more than 400 students each week.

DAVID WINTER (Tent: Creative Writing '15) is a 2016-18 Stadler Fellow

at Bucknell University, where he is finishing his first book while working part time as a literary editor and arts administrator at the Stadler Center for Poetry.

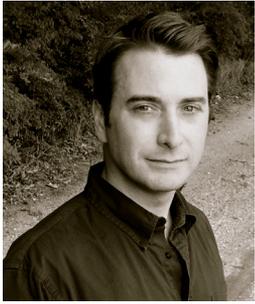
SARAH ZARROW

(Internship '01) received her PhD in Hebrew and Judaic studies and history from New York University and is now

a research fellow at New Europe College in Bucharest, where, she tells us, she's turning her dissertation (on Polish-Jewish ethnography from the 1890s to 1939) into a book, hanging out in the archives, and eating all the mamaliga.

Four Questions for: Peter Manseau

Photo courtesy of Peter Manseau



Author Peter Manseau's (*Internship '96*) books—including *One Nation, Under Gods*; *Killing the Buddha: A Heretic's Bible*; *Vows*; and *Songs for the Butcher's Daughter*

(a National Jewish Book Award winner that drew from his experience as an intern at the Yiddish Book Center)—often focus on issues of religion and faith, from diverse and sometimes surprising perspectives. Last year, he joined the Smithsonian as curator for American religious history.

What do you do in your new position? I collect objects and tell stories related to the influence of the endlessly diverse group of beliefs and practices that have called the United States home. And I'm heading up the Smithsonian's broader Religion in America initiative, which engages audiences through exhibitions, performances, lectures, and publications. The guiding principle of my work is that every story has a religious dimension. Whether it is a story of acceptance, transformation, or rejection, engagement with religious traditions is a vital part of the American experience.

What are the most surprising or moving objects you've uncovered in your work so far? Not too long ago I came across a snake handler's box—a wooden crate used by Appalachian preachers who take the biblical command to "take up serpents" literally as a way of showing they are safe from danger because of their faith. And an early-twentieth-century knife-maker's sign that once hung on Canal Street in New York. The sign came into the museum's collection as an illustration of immigrant business activities, but this knife maker specialized in blades for use by the *shohet* for ritual slaughter and the *mohel* for circumcision, so it is related to religion as well as business.

Your first exhibit, *Religion in Early America*, opens this summer. What can visitors expect? Visitors will come away with an appreciation of religious diversity, religious freedom, and religious growth in the Colonial period and the early republic. Many will be surprised by how diverse the nation was at the moment of its founding. There are many objects in the show related to the country's Christian majority (including George Washington's christening robe, which he wore when he became part of the Anglican church as an infant in 1732), but there are also intriguing hints of what it was like to live as a religious minority at that time, such as a Torah scroll damaged during the Revolution and the only known Islamic religious text written by an enslaved Muslim in America.

What topic do you plan to tackle next and why? It's likely we will next explore intersections of religion and science in American history to show that religious ideas never exist in isolation but are always in conversation with the other concerns of the cultures in which they are found. The Smithsonian's religion initiative will continue to tell compelling stories related to the varieties of American religious experience. The most important part of this effort is locating objects with which to tell these stories—a task for which I feel well prepared thanks to my time collecting books for the Yiddish Book Center.

News from the Yiddish Book Center

■ **Alumni Reunion in NYC** Pulitzer Prize-winner Paula Vogel's play *Indecent*, which tells the story of the controversial 1923 Broadway debut of Sholem Asch's *God of Vengeance*, is one of the hottest tickets on Broadway—and we're pleased to offer a limited number of tickets to Yiddish Book Center alumni to attend the play on July 6 with our 2017 Steiner Summer Yiddish Program students. Balcony seats for the 7 p.m. performance are available for \$20 per person on a first-come, first-served basis. We also hope to arrange a small Yiddish Book Center mixer after the performance.

For more information or to buy tickets, please email us at alumni@yiddishbookcenter.org.

■ **Job Opportunity** We're excited to announce a new, yearlong fellowship program for recent college and master's program graduates interested in development and fundraising. Fellows will gain hands-on, paid experience and professional training. Our goal is to mentor the next generation of fundraising professionals interested in working in the Jewish cultural space. A commitment to the mission of the Yiddish Book Center is required, and a background in Jewish studies is preferred. If you enjoy interacting with people, have good communication and writing skills, and are eager to learn about the development profession, learn more at yiddishbookcenter.org/development-fellowship. Applications are due July 1.

An Alumni Expert's Guide to: Jewish Detroit

I "can't forget the Motor City" for a couple of reasons: its people and places are dear to me, and Martha Reeves warns me not to in "Dancing in the Street." That you may also follow the Vandellas' advice and know what to do with your dancing feet when they take you to that curious city due north of Canada, I present these suggestions, customized for your personality type.

—Michael Yashinsky

If you are a . . .

PIOUS MASKIL Satisfy both your inclinations in one Friday night downtown.

Of the many shuls that once stood in the city limits, the **Downtown Synagogue** ❶ is the only one remaining. Catch a lively service there, enjoy the company of young Hebrews who have reversed the decisions of their forebears and moved *back* to Detroit from the suburbs, and admire the patchwork of stained glass windows. Then make like the Yiddish theatergoers of old (Friday nights were big at Littman's People's Theater, Detroit's once-upon-a-time Yiddish playhouse) and catch a show in a different kind of temple: the magnificent **Detroit Opera House**. When I directed there, the splendid surroundings proved a daily inspiration. The ceiling of the auditorium is like a great, star-studded Fabergé egg! And the glorious voices below reach it as to the very heavens. When the final curtain falls, extend the revels with late-night jazz and drinks at the swanky **Cliff Bell's** ❷, a club restored to look as it might have when it opened in the art deco '30s. Imagine yourself a Purple Gang bootlegger as you swill and swoon to the bluesy groove.

HUNGRY YENTE Since 1962, the **Stage Deli** ❸ has been feeding Jewish Detroiters who crave hot pastrami and hotter gossip. Make like the chirruping matrons around you and get the Mark Beltaire salad. If you want to really do as the Romans do, order it chopped and tossed, with dressing on the side; this enables you to drown every forkful in the signature Stage dressing. Next, cross the Jewish thoroughfare of Orchard Lake Road and head to **Diamond Bakery** to order the seven-layer cake, a local Jewish cousin of the Hungarian Dobos torte. Detroiters brag that in Chicago and New York they don't know from seven-layer cake. Come get some frosting on your nose and enter our sweet circle of trust.

SIDEWALK ZADDIK Tread the cobblestones of the city as it looked in the nineteenth century at the **Detroit Historical Museum's** ❹ signature exhibit, *Streets of Old Detroit*, the sort of immersive historical wonderland in which kids romp with great delight; I realize now how much I'd love to see it again with adult eyes. Then get to know the streets of today's Detroit by volunteering with **Heart 2 Hart**. Begun by Larry Oleinick, a suburban Jew with roots in the city, this charity prepares and delivers lunches, hygiene kits, and warm clothes to Motown's homeless (including some who congregate at Hart Plaza, thus the initiative's name).



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Michael Yashinsky is the Applebaum senior fellow at the Yiddish Book Center, where he is collaborating on a new Yiddish-language textbook. He is an alumnus of the Steiner Summer Yiddish Program and several Tent: Encounters with Jewish Culture workshops.

What highlights should visitors to your city ought not miss? We're looking for alumni experts for future city guides. Write us at alumni@yiddishbookcenter.org if you have ideas.



Yiddish Book Center
1021 West Street
Amherst, Massachusetts 01002-3375

Mark Your Calendar



YID-STOCK

July 13-16, 2017
Live at the
Yiddish Book Center
Rain or Shine

**The festival
of new
Yiddish
music**

Yidstock 2017 brings the best in klezmer and new Yiddish music to the stage at the Yiddish Book Center.

Don't miss this festival of music, workshops, and talks.

Tickets are selling fast—find the full schedule and buy your tickets at yiddishbookcenter.org/yidstock.

CONCERT SCHEDULE

..... **THURSDAY, JULY 13**

THE JOAN A. BACKMAN MEMORIAL CONCERT

Eleanor Reissa & Frank London's Klezmer Brass Allstars | 8 PM

..... **FRIDAY, JULY 14**

THE BERNARD & REVA BRODER MEMORIAL CONCERT

Hankus Netsky and Eden MacAdam-Somer Duo | 2:30 PM

Nigunim Trio | 5:30 PM

..... **SATURDAY, JULY 15**

'A Night in the Old Marketplace'

Frank London's Folk Oratorio | 8 PM

..... **SUNDAY, JULY 16**

Ezekiel's Wheels Klezmer Band | 12 PM

THE HELEN & IRVING SUNSHINE MEMORIAL CONCERT

Alicia Svigals and Lauren Brody Duo | 3 PM

Andy Statman Trio | 7:30 PM



On exhibit at the Yiddish Book Center through October 15: Photographer Loli Kantor's *Beyond the Forest: Jewish Presence in Eastern Europe*. Learn more at yiddishbookcenter.org/beyond-the-forest.



THE YIDDISH BOOK CENTER ALUMNI ASSOCIATION
Great Jewish Books Summer Program ■ Steiner Summer Yiddish Program ■ Fellowship
Tent: Encounters with Jewish Culture ■ Translation Fellowship