“Jewish Culture in Kids TV” – Jemima Loveys
Congratulations…

- to former undergraduate student Magdalena Luszczynska, who has been awarded the Gay Clifford Bursary for female undergraduate students.
- also congratulations to Magdalena Luszczynska, whose paper on Father-Son Relationships in Medieval Ashkenaz has been selected as a co-winner of the 2011 Patai Prize for an outstanding student paper on Jewish Folklore and Ethnology. The same paper was also awarded the undergraduate prize with special distinction by the BAJJS Committee.
- to research student Agnieszka Oleszak who was granted the Leo Baeck Fellowship
- to research students Helen Bartos, and Azriel Bermant for passing their PhD vivas.
- To Toby Green for being awarded his PhD
- to Dr Francois Guesnet, who has been promoted to the Sidney and Elizabeth Corob Readership in Modern Jewish History.
- to the 2010/11 Departmental Prize Winners:

  | Michael Weitzman Prize: | Alexander Nathan | Hollier Scholarship in Hebrew: |
  | Alexander Nathan | Magdalena Luszczynska |
  | Harris Prize for Effort: Sophie Barry | Hashimoto Rose Prize: Zeev Duckworth | Margulies Prize for Yiddish: Tsivia Morrison and Deborah Wacks (joint) |
  | Raphaël Loewe Prize: Joseph Farchy | Hester Rothschild Scholarship: Rosa Speers |
  | Ben Yossef Prize: Alison Jackson and Ari Lamm (joint) | Sessional Prize: Maria Woncisz |
  | Samuel Bard Memorial Prize: Katarzyna Leszczynska | Jews Commemoration Travelling Scholarship: Hannah Watkins |
  | Jews Commemoration Scholarship: Jemima Loveys |

  to the following students who have been awarded the Ian Karten Scholarship: Lida Barner, Cristina Bedolla Gonzalez, Thomas Wilson and Wojtek Tworek.

- to Yoni Birnbaum for being awarded the Hebrew and Jewish Studies MA Scholarship
Alumni News

Katharina Michael (nee Goldberg) BA Hebrew 2004, currently runs her own business offering tours in and around Dresden in German, English and Hebrew. She is very much involved with Jewish life in Dresden and recommends the online journal Medaon - Journal of Jewish Life in Science and Education, which seeks to connect research by both scholars and non-professional local researchers with students of Jewish life. [http://medaon.de/index-en.html](http://medaon.de/index-en.html)

News from Sir Moses!

The new academic year has brought a new dynamic to the Montefiore Testimonials Digitization Project. At a volunteers’ event in November, a substantial group of graduate students signed up to join forces with more senior volunteers. The first tasks are to bring to conclusion the transcription of the scanned testimonials, to start editing the transcriptions, and to arrange for a translation of those documents that are not in English. The objective of the project is to set up an internet exhibition of all the testimonials, and thus to enhance their accessibility. The Montefiore Endowment has agreed to extend the area of responsibility of one of the volunteers, and we are very happy to announce that Noëmie Duhaut, M.A, who has recently graduated from UCL SSEES with a Distinction, will devote some of her time to administering this project. This is all the more welcome, as out of the materials held at UCL’s Special Collections, eight volumes containing thousands of documents sent to Sir Moses Montefiore on the occasion of his 99th and 100th anniversaries, which have now been examined more closely, between a quarter and a third may qualify as testimonials. This is a very important new resource for further research on the significance and impact of Sir Moses. Dr Francois Guesnet has been invited to present the 2012 Maccabean Lecture at King’s College London, which will take place on February 1st, 2012, entitled Envisioning Jewish Community in the 19th Century: the Tributes to Sir Moses Montefiore.

Dr François Guesnet
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NEWSLETTER EDITED BY:
Jemima Loveys - BA Hebrew and Jewish Studies
Kasia Leszczynska – BA Modern Languages
IN MEMORIAM
by Ada Rapoport-Albert

Chimen Abramsky 12.9.1916 - 14.3.2010

Goldsmid Professor and Head of Department 1974-1981

Chimen Abramsky – historian of European Jewry, of Marxism and the international Labour movement, book collector and bibliographer of world renown – embodied a turbulent chapter of the history he studied and taught. He was born during World War I in Minsk, then in Russia (now in Belarus), within the region that Jewish culture had traditionally termed ‘Litvak’. His father, Yehezkel Abramsky, while still a young man, acquired an international reputation as a distinguished rabbinic scholar. In 1929 he was arrested in Moscow, accused of treason for his involvement in Jewish religious activities, but thanks to international lobbying on his behalf, he was eventually released and allowed to leave the Soviet Union. The family arrived in London as exiles in 1932, and two years later, Yehezkel Abramsky was appointed Head of the London Rabbinical Court – a powerful position he invested with fresh rigour and held until his retirement and immigration to Israel in 1951.

His son Chimen never attended any school. As a child he was taught at home by private tutors in Yiddish, Hebrew, and Russian, secretly cultivating what was to become a life-long interest in Karl Marx. On arrival in London as a teenager, he enrolled in a beginners’ English class at Pittman College, and soon mastered the language (without ever losing his Litvak Yiddish accent) enough to read avidly on history and Marxist economics, while at the same time being drawn to a circle of émigré Jewish intellectuals – Yiddish authors, literary critics and artists – whom he encountered in London’s East End. In 1936, with his parents’ reluctant blessing, he traveled to Palestine to enroll in the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He studied history, Jewish history and philosophy while forging life-long friendships with a numbers of fellow-students, all of whom eventually became prominent Israeli academics, most notably the late Shmuel Ettinger – future Head of the Hebrew University’s Jewish History department, with whom he shared a passionate involvement in left-wing campus politics. On one occasion, as he later recalled with relish, he was beaten up by future Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, then a leading figure in the right-wing...
underground military organization known as the Irgun.

In the summer vacation of 1939 he returned to London to visit his parents. Trapped by the outbreak of war, he was unable to return to Jerusalem to complete his studies. He found employment in Shapiro Valentine – the oldest Jewish book shop in the East End, where he met, and a year later married, the proprietor’s daughter, Miriam Nirenstein, who had been a member of the Communist Party since 1937. He soon joined the Party himself, despite his family’s bitter experience of persecution by Stalin. “If you were against fascism at the time”, he would later say, “This was the place to go”. Within a short time he became one of the Party’s prominent Jewish activists, while also founding, from his modest Highgate home, a small left-wing publishing company. In 1956, in the wake of the Soviet invasion of Hungary, Miriam Abramsky, alongside thousands of others, left the Communist Party, but Chimen remained steadfast for another eighteen months, which he deeply regretted in subsequent years, resigning only in 1958 after ongoing disagreements with the Party line.

His academic break came in the late 1960s. While still a bookseller, and with a growing reputation for his exceptional expertise in rare books and manuscripts, he was hired by Sotheby’s as a consultant on Hebrew and Judaica, a position he was to retain for over three decades. During the same period he came in contact with a number of eminent British academics, including Sir Isaiah Berlin, who discovered in him an intellectual curiosity and erudition matched only by his own, becoming his academic champion and personal friend. On Berlin’s recommendation, and without any formal qualifications, he was elected in 1965 Senior Fellow of St. Antony’s College, Oxford, and in 1966 was invited to take up a Lectureship in Jewish history at UCL’s newly expanded department of Hebrew and Jewish Studies. To facilitate this, he had briefly to appear before an examining board at the Hebrew University, which awarded him retroactively a cum laude MA. Eight years later he was made Head of Department. Although he published relatively little, his academic impact was large: he trained a whole generation of Jewish Studies scholars at a time when the field was only just emerging as an academic subject in its own right, not only in Israel but also in a growing number of universities in Europe and the USA.

The Abramsky home was for many years a magnet for socialist and Jewish intellectuals – a latter-day ‘salon’, full of warmth and a genuine sense of camaraderie. Distinguished Professors would mingle with students, freely engaging in heated discussions until the small hours of the night, sustained by a constant flow of food and drink from Miriam’s legendary kitchen. Several generations of Marxist scholars and Jewish historians from all over the world were initiated to this circle, drawn to Chimen who never failed to astonish them with his own command of their fields of expertise, and to his remarkable collection of rare books and manuscripts, which he would readily display, often inviting his visitors to reach for them when – at little over five feet – he could not reach them himself.

Although he led a secular life, he was deeply attached to the Jewish tradition, and maintained a strong – albeit not uncritical – commitment to Zionism and the state of Israel. Following prolonged physical decline, he died peacefully at his home in London, clutching a small leather-bound Hebrew
Bible, which he always kept within reach in the last few years of his life.

**Raphael Loewe** 16.4.1919-27.5.2011

Goldsmid Professor and Head of Department 1981-1984

Raphael Loewe was descended from a distinguished Anglo-Jewish family of Hebrew scholars. His great-grandfather, Dr. Louis Loewe (1809-1888), a German-born, rabbinically-trained, university-educated Orientalist, settled in London in 1833 and became Sir Moses Montefiore’s personal secretary and his interpreter in Hebrew and other Oriental languages. In this capacity he accompanied Sir Moses on his visits to distressed Jewish communities in Eastern Europe and the Levant, and towards the end of his life, he edited the *Diaries of Sir Moses and Lady Montefiore*. His grandson, Herbert Loewe (1882-1940), Raphael’s father, was trained as an Orientalist in Cambridge, where he became Reader in Rabbinics while also teaching Rabbinic Hebrew at the universities of Oxford and London. In collaboration with Claude Montefiore, he edited *A Rabbinic Anthology* – a large collection of classical rabbinic texts in English translation, which was for many years a widely used and highly regarded source book.

Raphael was born in Calcutta, where his father was serving in the British army. He was educated at the Dragon School in Oxford and the Leys School in Cambridge, winning a major Classics scholarship to St. John’s College, Cambridge – the institution he regarded as his academic home and cherished to the end of his life. He was deeply moved when at the age of 90, in 2009, he was made an Honorary Fellow of the College.

In 1940 Raphael enlisted in war-time military service, and was posted as an intelligence officer to the Royal Armoured Corps in North Africa, where in 1943 he was awarded the Military Cross, granted in recognition of “exemplary gallantry during active operations against the enemy”. He had apparently run through enemy fire to rescue the crew of a burning tank, and again risked his life to inform his commander of an impending enemy attack. He later served in the Italian front, where he was wounded, this leaving him with a permanent and pronounced limp.

With the war over, his first academic post was a Lectureship in Hebrew at Leeds. After spending a year as a Visiting Professor at Brown University in the USA, in 1961 he joined UCL’s department of Hebrew, as it was then called, where he remained – eventually as Goldsmid Professor – until his retirement. He taught Classical Hebrew as Greek and Latin were
still being taught at the time, transmitting to his students not only a passive knowledge of the language but also the ability to compose in it, setting them weekly translation exercises from contemporary English poetry and prose into pure biblical Hebrew. This was an art of which he himself was a master, and he used it as an outlet for his own considerable literary talent. He translated prolifically both from and into, while also producing original compositions in the classicist idiom of Spain’s medieval Hebrew poets, whose philosophical and aesthetic sensibilities, he felt, paralleled and thus were best rendered in the language of the seventeenth-century English metaphysical poets. He displayed a particular affinity with the eleventh-century Neoplatonist Solomon Ibn Gabirol, whose magisterial liturgical poem Keter Malekhut (Royal Crown) he translated into fully metered and rhymed English verse inspired by the sixteenth-century poet Edmund Spenser.

Raphael believed that the language of great literature, such as the English of the King James Bible (already archaic when published in 1611) or the Hebrew of Gabirol’s poetry achieved its timeless, classical status precisely because it was not the vernacular of the authors. In contrast to most linguists who celebrate the ‘revival’ of Hebrew in modern times as a unrivalled success story, he lamented the re-vernacularisation of the language, taking perverse pleasure in exposing its ‘inauthentic’, ‘non-Semitic’ grammatical and lexical features – the product of ‘contamination’ by European languages, above all Yiddish (a position which was long regarded as highly idiosyncratic, but which has recently gained some currency, largely under the impact of the controversial Hebrew bestseller Israeli – A Beautiful Language by linguist Ghil’ad Zuckermann, in whom Raphael came to see something of an ally). Raphael refused to recognize contemporary Modern Hebrew as a ‘legitimate’ language, but he could not resist the occasional challenge of submitting for publication in the Israeli press some of his Hebrew translations and essays. He would not allow editors to modify his Hebrew in any way that would compromise its ‘organic’ timelessness, with the result that on the few occasions when samples of his writings were published in Israel, readers were utterly bewildered by them. Even his virtuoso translation of Omar Khayyam’s Rubaiyyat from Fitzgerald’s nineteenth-century English version into the ‘appropriate’ medieval Hebrew verse, which was published in Jerusalem in 1982 and awarded a Tel Aviv prize, remained a literary curiosity. On the other hand, he attracted an appreciative readership for his annotated English translations of medieval Hebrew poetry and rhymed prose, which accompanied several facsimile editions of illuminated manuscript versions of the Passover Haggadah, and appeared in his monograph on Ibn Gabirol as well as in his two-volume bilingual edition of Meshal Haqadmoni (Fables from the Distant Past) by the thirteenth-century Spanish scholar and kabbalist Isaac Ibn Sahula. In 2010, near the end of his life, he published a large anthology of his poetic compositions and translations, many of which he had previously circulated, over many years, in small bilingual do-it-yourself brochures as New Year greetings to his colleagues and friends.

As a scholar he produced numerous insightful and erudite academic studies of various aspects of Hebrew culture, from Bible through classical rabbinic and
medieval theology to Christian Hebraism, but translation was his passion and most constant creative occupation. At his instigation, a workshop for Hebrew translators was founded in London, meeting regularly for several decades at the home of the late Risa Domb, a former student who taught Modern Hebrew literature at Cambridge. Raphael would bring to the meetings samples of translation not only from his beloved medieval poems but also, from time to time, more whimsical experiments in prose, such as his Classical Hebrew version of Winnie the Pooh. On one occasion he read out his brilliantly witty English translation of a sardonic short story – *Ger Tsedek* (The Proselyte) – by Israeli Nobel-prize laureate S. Y. Agnon, perhaps the only modern Hebrew author whom Raphael was willing to admit into his canon of ‘authentic’ Hebrew literature.

Another life-long passion was the Spanish and Portuguese Jews’ Congregation, of which Raphael was an active and devoted member (despite the Ashkenazi origins of his family), serving it in several senior capacities over many years. He passed away to the sound of his favorite Sephardi liturgical-melodies.

**Ian Karten MBE 14.12.1920 - 8.5.2011**

Engineer and Philanthropist, long-standing supporter of the Department

Ian Karten was born in Vienna to Polish Jewish parents. At the age of three he moved with his family to Germany, where in 1937, following the rising tide of anti-Semitism with the Nazi ascent to power, he was forced out of his German high school and enrolled in a Jewish school near Cologne, which enabled him to follow the Cambridge School Certificate syllabus, in preparation for pursuing further education in England.

During this period he was briefly taught by the young Raphael Loewe, who kindled in him a love for Jewish Studies. Ian managed to obtain a student visa and came to London to study mechanical engineering, but the rest of his family remained in Germany, most of them perishing in the Holocaust, with the exception only of his mother, who survived the war, and whom he eventually managed to bring to England.

Once war broke out, when his family in Germany could no longer fund his studies in England, he was granted a free place and a scholarship by his London College, which enabled him to complete his studies and graduate. He never forgot what he perceived as a debt of gratitude to British society, and this prompted him, when his own engineering and business career proved to be extremely successful, to
establish in 1980 the Ian Karten Charitable Trust, which opened up educational opportunities to those who, like him in his youth, were in need of financial support. Over the years, the Trust has sponsored over 30,000 students, many of whom subsequently developed successful academic and professional careers. Since 1997 the Trust has also created over 300 technology centres for the disabled in both Israel and the UK, offering employment opportunities to thousands of disabled people.

In 1939, Ian Karten met the Reverend James Parkes – a Christian scholar and activist, who was one of the few alerting the English speaking world to the dangers of Nazi anti-Semitism, and who himself rescued and supported Jewish refugees. As a consequence of this meeting, and in appreciation of Parkes’ life-long inter-faith endeavours, when the Parkes Institute for the study of Jewish-Non-Jewish Relations was established at Southampton University, the Ian Karten Trust was one of its chief benefactors, endowing, since the 1990s, a lectureship, a fellowship, and, most recently, a post in outreach work. The University acknowledged Ian’s contribution by awarding him an honorary doctorate in 1998, and in the following year he was awarded an MBE for his wider “services to charity”.

Ian Karten’s philanthropic involvement with UCL dates back to 1999, when, following a personal visit, his Trust established three annual Hebrew and Jewish Studies postgraduate scholarships in the Department, to which were added in the following years scholarships in Electronic and Electrical Engineering, as well as in Neuroscience, Urology, and Clinical Tropical Microbiology. Subsequently, the funds available for most of these were gradually reduced and eventually withdrawn, with the singular exception of four annual Hebrew and Jewish Studies scholarships, which continue to be awarded, now at $1000 each.

In 2001, Ian attended the departmental prize giving party, and had the opportunity of meeting some of the students who had benefitted from the Trust’s support. In the following year he suffered a stroke, which restricted his mobility, and was no longer able to visit the Department in person, but he continued to receive information on each of the Ian Karten scholarship awardees.

In the words of our Southampton colleague Tony Kushner, author of the Jewish Chronicle obituary for Ian Karten, “He was a gentle and modest man with an impish sense of humour and enormous vision who, at a time of growing xenophobia, shows what we will miss if Britain turns its back on its asylum tradition”.

יִהְיוּ זֶכֶרֶם בָּרוּךְ.
The HJS Department and me
Emma Harris

This is my first opportunity to put pen to paper and officially say goodbye! After almost eighteen years in the Department, these initial words will probably come as quite a shock to some of you. I left UCL in mid-May to join the Woolf Institute, Cambridge (www.woolf.cam.ac.uk) where I joined another HJS alumnus, Lars Fischer.

I joined the HJS Department in 1993 as an undergraduate. I was given an opportunity to study at UCL by Ada’s generosity, in her capacity as Undergraduate Admissions Tutor, to a student coming through the clearing system. (I can now admit to being bitterly disappointed when UCL and other universities stopped participating in the clearing system a few years ago.) I will always be grateful to Ada for taking a chance on me. I trust that I did not disappoint her.

I had a remarkable experience in the Department. I was taught by some extraordinary lecturers. I won’t list them all here but it would be wrong of me not to mention two in particular – the late Michael Weitzmann and the late John D. Klier. Both, in their different ways and styles, allowed me to understand the importance of believing in myself. Their knowledge and wisdom inspired so many. To current and future students, you should devour their books as a matter of course! I will always miss them, value the education that they bestowed on me, and, most of all, feel privileged to have been taught by them. Not only did John teach me but he also supervised my BA, MA, and PHD dissertations and encouraged me to pursue my dream of researching Jewish education in nineteenth century England. We went through blood, sweat and tears together. I graduated just a few weeks before he passed away.

I worked with the best administrator in the business! Working with Lia was an immense honour. We made a formidable team, the most successful job-share administrative team never before seen at UCL. Not only were we professional but we were also welcoming and friendly. Success was achievable with our “open door” policy. I will miss working with Lia. But my heartfelt thanks go to her for making the office such a great place in which to work, for being such a good friend, and for making me a part of her wonderful family. Our working relationship may have ended but our friendship will remain as strong as ever.

To the students who have passed through the Department and to present and future generations, I wish you success in the paths that you choose to take. Always remember that you are extremely lucky to be part of such a unique Department – a small family unit (within a huge university) where everyone knows your name and where you never have to feel alone in any situation that may arise. Cherish these years, make good use of the university’s resources, and, above all else, appreciate the collective wealth of knowledge –
administrative and academic – that is held within the departmental staff body.

A final word. Once an HJS girl, always an HJS girl.

Emma Harris  
eth22@cam.ac.uk

PS. In the March 2012 edition of the departmental newsletter, my article, Cambridge and Me, will focus on my new position at the Woolf Institute
That’s Showbiz?
Michael Berkowitz

Given my position at UCL I am frequently approached by radio and TV programs when their subjects veer into Jewish historical terrain. Reporters, producers, and ‘researchers’ occasionally believe that they might get something they need out of the arcane information at my disposal. I’ll never forget a long and thoughtful conversation with Asad Ahmad, now of BBC London, who earlier was with BBC Scotland. He interviewed me in the midst of the Irving/Lipstadt libel trial some years ago. I appeared on the BBC World Service for the programme accompanying the seventieth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz—given a fair amount of time, in fact, to talk about the historical context. I never knew that so many people listen regularly to that network. I received notes from friends and colleagues around the world. I’ve also been interviewed for a number of shows that deal more generally with Jewish history.

The highlight of this type of activity, so far, is an appearance on the series Who Do You Think You Are, in the episode investigating the background of actress June Brown which aired in August. For those who are unfamiliar, June Brown has been a mainstay of East Enders for decades, playing the character Dot Branning (also Cotton). A media maven friend tells me that June was in one of the greatest TV shows of all time, in a format known as a ‘two-hander’. That is, for an entire EastEnders show June and another actress reminisced (in character) about their experience in London’s East End during the Blitz. Although they obviously weren’t telling their own stories, it was close enough to be deeply moving for millions of viewers. Apparently it remains a model for aspiring actors and TV directors. At age 84 June looks terrific. She has a wonderful sense of humour and I found her to be very engaged and sharp. What a pleasure to meet her.

If you missed the show, you may be wondering at the connection. June Brown is not widely known as Jewish. She did not grow up with anything but the most marginal Jewish connection. But she had a famous Jewish ancestor—a boxer named Isaac Bitton. Bitton was not one of the most famous Jewish boxers from the generation of Daniel Mendoza, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries—but I had written about him. In 2007 I was the academic advisor for a Jewish Museum London exhibition called ‘Ghetto Warriors’, on Jewish and other minority boxers in Britain. I co-edited a book on the subject with the guest curator, Ruti Ungar, who was affiliated with our department while doing research for her PhD in London.

When they first called I spoke to the lead researcher, Luke Wales. Compared to some of the other researchers with whom I’ve dealt, Luke had done his homework. I agreed to talk to him again and in principle to meet with him and the producer. He came up with some very interesting material. But because of some previous experiences with TV shows—when I put in a great deal of effort, received no pay and did not appear on air, I was hesitant to make a great investment (yet again) for Who Do You Think You Are. I was informed, though, that they intended to have me meet June on-air. (No, I was not paid.)
Besides the main event—the meeting and talk with June which took place the summer before last—I was responsible for two notable things about the segment. I suggested the venue—the Joe Cribb pub—which was first owned by a boxer from around Isaac Bitton’s time, and is filled with vintage prints and boxing memorabilia. What better place to talk about one’s long-lost pugilistic ancestor? I also brought a good prop: a boxing annual, Pugilistica, that had a substantial item on Isaac Bitton. I made a special effort to borrow it from the Senate House Library. As an old and rare book it is not normally allowed out. I’m grateful that they made an exception. As opposed to the photocopies of newspaper articles, fascinating as they are, there is something to be said for seeing and holding an old book. Even though it was not quite as old as Isaac himself it was produced within a few decades of his death. The crew and June really appreciated seeing it.

What June seemed to enjoy most, though, was hearing about Isaac. I informed her that he was very much a “Jewish Jew” and could have been described as the very heart and soul of the East End. One of the lines she repeated was that he was quite comfortable “in his own skin” as a Jew. This is very different from those who are more detached about their Jewish identity, more in the style we have come to associate with Anglo-Jewry. She loved making the connection between her career as an EastEnder and the fact that her own ancestor was one of the characters who helped to originate the very notion. Although it was difficult to read some of the tiny and indistinct print in the newspapers nearly two hundred years old, she could barely get enough of her immersion into Isaac’s world.

Isaac lived large and was immensely popular for years. He made and lost a lot of money. And boxing, especially in an era when bouts could last most of a day, took its toll. Like many boxers he was in the ring for too long, and his health deteriorated. He became ill and obese. It was a rather sad end to a colourful life. No matter the tragic dimensions, June was keen to gather all the information possible.

Unfortunately I did not appear on air for the other Who Do You Think You Are programmes for which I was consulted. These included the family histories of Boris Johnson, David Suchet, and Nigella Lawson. Oy, would I have liked to be squeezed into the corner booth of a pub with Nigella! But that wasn’t to be.

I’ll save the tale of my experience with these shows for the next newsletter.
This was a Reading Week with a difference. I was on a UCL fact-finding mission to Paris - to try and assess the methods and practice of Yiddish teaching there. To see how Yiddish teaching elsewhere compares with what we do at UCL and whether wider lessons could be learned. The benefit of doing any work in a foreign country is that irrespective of the work one is undertaking, there is an accompanying alertness to new surroundings.

I was based at La Maison de la Culture Yiddish (henceforth Yiddish Centre), which I consider to be the most interesting, all-encompassing hub of Yiddish in the modern world. It strives for excellence, maintains Yiddish as its language of communication and achieves a balance of academic rigour with an ordinary daily Yiddish culture. This perpetuates a 'Yiddish way' that was commonplace in pre-war Eastern Europe when there were millions of Yiddish speakers and a number of vibrant Yiddish cultural cities/centres.

The core of people who teach at the Yiddish Centre numbers about ten individuals; both native speakers and others who have learned Yiddish to a very high level. Some have completed PhDs; a couple are in the process of doing so. Besides teaching, these same individuals are immersed in the other activities of the Centre such as running classes for children, conversation classes, maintaining the library (the largest Yiddish library in Europe), producing 'Der Yidisher Tam-Tam'; a publication for students of Yiddish (5 times a year), writing and publishing books and dictionaries. Four of the teachers also teach at the Sorbonne, at INALCO (Institute for the Study of Oriental Languages) and at Ecole Normale Superieure (for bright young things). If students at these institutions wish to attain a higher level of Yiddish, they would however, need to supplement their studies with extra courses at the Yiddish Centre. As well as the above-mentioned activities, there are also regular cookery lasses in Yiddish, song workshops and a theatre group which mounts regular productions (initially inspired by our 2002 UCL production of Jacob Jacobson at the Bloomsbury).

So, my visit to Paris consisted of attending every available class which was taking place, holding a long meeting with the cohort of teachers and giving a seminar to the monthly all-day Sunday literary seminar (always a pleasure because of the high level of Yiddish of the participants). On one day, I attended 7 hours of classes and found myself feeling huge sympathy for high school students who do this on a daily basis!!

On a completely different note, I can't resist recounting some extra-curricular details about my visit to Paris. I was staying in a small hotel, not far from the Place de la Republique. One enters the hotel lobby immediately spotting strange, elongated wooden figurines, large plastic dwarves, paintings on the walls. My room was on the third floor and I was guided to the lift, with one of my French colleagues. The bright red lift stipulated that it could house a maximum of 2 persons. The lift door opened to reveal the smallest space ever designated as a lift. One had to stand on the horizontal as the lift had no depth. There was a danger that if one stood incorrectly (?), the interior lift door may close, slicing off a nice shikt of Tukhes or tummy, depending on which way one was facing. Imagine a small cupboard.

Once on the third floor, I entered my room and fell straight onto the bed. The hotel with it overarching theme of music, had placed me in
the “Prince Suite” as over my bed was a graffiti-styled mural of Prince and the word Prince painted onto another wall. Walking down the three flights of stairs back to the lobby, the musical theme was consolidated. Paintings and photos of David Bowie, Blondie, Amy Whitehouse, Beatles, Mysteryman, Scarface and a nice bull-terrier sporting a crown. Not to mention Liz Taylor, Marilyn Monroe, Madonna, with Che Guevara thrown in and an old poster advertising a “Successful method of removing tattoos”. For some inexplicable reason, I felt strangely at home in this funky hotel despite not being a Prince fan, nor seeking the removal of tattoos.

Refreshing in this little part of Paris is the smallness and ordinariness of everything. Small shops, family-run businesses, a profusion of languages, wonky parking, nothing fancy, worn-out shop facades, cafes and patisseries. And the tiny restaurant opposite my small hotel, Le Magicien. The restaurant is crowded and as multi-cultural as can be. My colleague and I are brought our meals by the Nepali cook with the most delectable smile. Some music is heard over the clatter and chatter. At the next table, a man removes a saxophone from its case, a guitar appears. A striking young woman joins the two musicians, she starts singing beautifully. It’s the same voice as on the recording. People wander about; waiters and cooks, working, mingling and chatting. The ambience takes me back to my late teenage years when I was smitten by my highly romanticised notions of Parisian cultural life in the 1920s.

The following evening, I return to Le Magicien, wondering whether it will feel strange to be dining alone. I needn’t have worried. Within five minutes, the singer from the previous evening appears and asks if she can join me. We chat about her maternal Ivory Coast culture and her paternal Parisian one (and about my Yiddish culture). We speak of her nervousness when performing in public and her day job in an office, where the boss tells her to stop singing at work. Suddenly all goes quiet and a middle-aged man begins to mime expertly, then to tap-dance amazingly and launches into one magic/illusionist trick after another. He joins us briefly. I compliment him on his amazing skills and versatility whereupon I am treated to my own personal magic trick! He transmutes the salt and water in the palm of his hand into a large ‘diamond’ which duly disappears into his left eye!

Alongside the intensive and fruitful engagement with Yiddish Paris that my ‘mission’ generated, my brief encounter with a tiny patch of the city felt warmly reassuring in our globalised world. Lots of culture with a capital C and spontaneous, human warmth and communication. The Paris Yiddish Centre also plays its part in all of that.

Helen Beer in a tiny lift, crying with laughter
Research Initiative Religion and Society
François Guesnet

When this Newsletter reaches its audience, the first big event organized under the auspices of the recently constituted Research Initiative in Religion and Society, based at the UCL Grand Challenge of Intercultural Interaction is already history. In the moment when I write these lines, however, the workshop Negotiating Religion: European Legacies, European Challenges is still a couple of days and a paper to write away... This research initiative is a significant development for UCL as a university, but also for the Department of Hebrew and Jewish Studies. Those who are involved in the initiative propose to overcome UCL’s age-old reluctance to acknowledge more publicly the impressive expertise of UCL academics in matters pertaining to the relationship of religious attitudes to society. The initiative is a cross-faculty informal group of academics from Arts & Humanities, Social and Historical Sciences, Geography, the Faculty of Laws, and even the Sciences. During the academic year, four workshops will investigate the relationship between religion and society more deeply, addressing such questions as the constitutional establishment of religion, the negotiation of religious life in the urban space, and the complex legal issues involved in defining the place of religion in education. In addition to this initiative, the UCL European Institute supports lectures and events focusing on religious issues. Thus, the International Graduate Seminar on The Traditions of Post-Secular Europe, which I organized in cooperation with colleagues from the Jagiellonian University in Kraków, is one of the initiatives supported by this scheme. The event will host a lecture by Prof David Sorkin (Graduate Center, City University of New York) on May 30, 2012, as well as discussions about secularization theory and post-secularism, the religious enlightenment of the 18th century, and the relationship between the religious and the secular community-definition of Eastern European Jews in the 19th century, all of which will take place on May 30-31. Participants in the seminar will be able to take part in other activities organized in collaboration with the London-based charity Three Faiths Forum. A second part of the seminar will take place in Krakow on 11-12 September 2012, addressing, among other issues, the question whether Holocaust remembrance can be understood as a post-secular phenomenon. Another event, still in statu nascendi, will undertake a comparison of the tectonic shifts in Europe 1989-91 and the events of the Arab Spring in 2010/11.

For more details, and to sign up for the workshop series Negotiating Religion events:
http://www.ucl.ac.uk/european-institute/events/religion

For more details, and to sign up for the International Graduate Seminar:
http://www.ucl.ac.uk/european-institute/news-repository/post-secular
WHO WANTS TO BE AN ENTREPRENEUR?

Ada Rapoport-Albert

As if university departments were not already distracted enough from their ‘core activities’ (the bureaucracy’s term for what has traditionally constituted academic work, namely research, teaching, and learning) by the call to embark on ‘knowledge transfer’ (affectionately known as KT) and ‘public engagement’ (PE) activities (which are not easy to distinguish from one another, but apparently KT is ‘one-directional’ – from academics to the public, while PE is ‘interactive’ and includes not only the kind of questions from the floor that we normally take at the end of a public lecture, but e.g. – and I am quite serious – the performance of select bits of our research as stand-up comedy routines at an Islington pub, which some UCL colleagues have apparently been doing with considerable success), or to create, and above all to demonstrate the ‘impact’ of our research on some notional communities of non-academic members of the public known as ‘the beneficiaries’, we are now also being harnessed to UCL’s ‘enterprise agenda’, driven by a newly created ‘Vice-Provost [Enterprise]’, with the assistance of a five-strong team of business directors and consultants. To quote from his published Enterprise Strategy for the next five years, UCL intends “to become the leading UK University supporting university entrepreneurs”, and to this aim will do the following:

- Establish a portfolio of entrepreneurship training that meets the needs of all UCL staff and students
- Stimulate and support the creation of at least 500 new commercial and social enterprises founded by UCL students and staff
- Increase by 100% the income derived from commercialization of UCL intellectual property for investment

Now the commercialization of intellectual property has long been part and parcel of academic research in pharmacology, medicine and the other applied sciences, in engineering, and perhaps also in architecture and town planning or in business studies and law, but it has never played a part in the traditional Humanities, even though I have often fantasised about the prospect of setting up a lucrative departmental consultancy in e.g. Jewish magic, Yiddish or Aramaic dialects, or any
one of our more arcane fields of scholarly expertise. Still, it is with mixed feelings that I now greet the opportunity to be trained and presumably acquire the skills that would enable me to make this fantasy a reality. The truth is that if I had even a few entrepreneurial bones in my body, I would most likely have been ‘out there’, making my fortune in the market place rather than sheltering in the proverbial ivory tower of the academy. But the days of the ivory tower are well and truly over. Universities are now operating within a highly competitive commercial environment, where their ‘product’ must prove to be ‘good value’ – as cheap as possible to make, and as expensive as possible to buy, while still being perceived as being useful and attractive enough to sell well on the international market. As a Humanities department, we are told that the value of our ‘product’ need not be measured in purely material terms; it may offer our customers ‘cultural’ or ‘social’ enrichment, but we must identify these customers and penetrate our target market.

I am therefore appealing to the entire departmental community – students, staff, alumni, benefactors and friends: if you can come up with any idea that would bring us closer to accomplishing our entrepreneurial mission without requiring too great an investment of our limited manpower and financial resources, please get in touch with me as soon as possible!

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**Lipa Schmeltzer: The New Voice of Yiddish**

Wojtek Tworek

In spite of voices proclaiming the end of Yiddish, the Yiddish culture thrives, not only in relatively small circles of secular Yiddishists, but most of all in the Yiddish-speaking Hasidic communities. In the framework of the departmental Yiddish Seminar we looked closely at this sector of Yiddish culture, somewhat underestimated by Yiddish scholarship. After an insightful guest presentation by Lena Watson on nuances of Hasidic Yiddish, I had an opportunity to give a presentation on the creation and personality of Lipa Schmeltzer, probably the most popular Yiddish poet and singer of the 21st century.

Lipa Schmeltzer was born in 1978 in a Yiddish-speaking family of Skverer Hasidim. Although Lipa grew up in a musical environment, he did not plan to be a singer, and after completing his studies in a yeshiva Lipa found a job in a butcher shop. Fortunately, his school friends remembered him, the boy who often got reprimanded by teachers for singing and rhyming instead of focusing on study, and started inviting him to perform at their weddings. Soon he became popular enough to leave the slaughter house and devote himself...
entirely to Hasidic showbiz. Since then Lipa has published eleven albums, performed hundreds of times all over the world, and most importantly – created his own style of Yiddish poetry.

While discussing Lipa’s creative gift it is hard to avoid comparisons to the famous Hasidic bard, Yom Tov Ehrlich (1914-1990), who gained some attention of secular circles thanks to his remarkable ballads celebrating Hasidic Williamsburg. However he was not considered a part of modern Yiddish culture, nor did he feel a part of it. After having survived World War II he moved to the United States, only to find out that the broad American culture was as foreign to him as everything else he had experienced. Ultimately, he found some peace in ultra-orthodox enclaves in Israel, but in his writings he poured scorn on the ‘isms’ of the twentieth century, among which particularly his vehement attacks on Zionism could not grant him popularity among non-Hasidic audiences.

Unlike Erlich, Lipa Schmeltzer was born and grew up in the United States, and feels at home in the American culture and lifestyle. Let’s not be misunderstood here – Lipa is far from tearing down the walls separating Hasidic Jews from the outside world and in his songs he often displays his loyalty to ultra-orthodoxy. For example, in the song “Sheloy Usani Goy,” [“For not having made me a goy”], he encourages listeners to proudly display their Jewishness in a non-Jewish environment. Nevertheless, Lipa continues his open flirtation with the general culture, which finds its most conspicuous expression in his music, lyrics, and publicity.

Borrowings from non-Jewish music are Lipa’s trademark, and his early song “Abi Me Leibt” is an excellent example of this. In this song he takes the melody of the worldwide hit “When the Lion Sleeps Tonight,” and through his lyrics expresses the idea of being just one man against the world, when the simplest task becomes mission impossible. What can you say then? Abi me leibt! Which is a Yiddish version of the American: don’t worry, be happy, or the Hebrew: Gam Zi Letoyvo! However, if this is not example enough of the influence of pop-culture on Lipa, and does not make you laugh, check out another song, in which Lipa sends his fans on a diet.

The most interesting songs of Lipa are those that speak to the Hasidic youth in their language about problems that bother them – from having occasional problems with getting up for morning prayers (‘Wake up’) to the inability to adapt to life in a close-knit society (‘Yener’). He raises the issue that even in supposedly spiritual communities, money has become the hottest issue (Gelt), and that the more the community members become engrossed in money matters, the less they care about their fellow Jews (A Git Vort, Vus Tut Dir Vay).

Lipa’s status of the voice of the young Yiddish-speaking street was confirmed when he spoke out after the terror attack in Mumbay in 2008, which claimed lives of, among others, Chabad emissaries – Rivka and Gavriel Holtzberg. Lipa flew to Israel to meet the couple’s surviving son, Moyshele, and presented him with a letter and a song, written “in the name of Klal
Yisroel.” Remarkably, many people accepted Lipa’s self-nomination as the emissary of the whole Israel, and expressed their gratitude in vast numbers of posts and comments on the Internet. Similarly, in the summer of 2011 Lipa published a tribute song to nine year old Leiby Kletzky, brutally murdered in Boro Park, NY. The song was met with criticism: some accused Lipa of building his popularity on the tragedy of the Kletzky family. Nevertheless, all the criticisms ceased when the father of the boy publicly stated that the song helped him to come to terms with the tragedy.

Regardless of whether both the tribute songs were purely an expression of Lipa’s concern and compassion, or – as his critics state – an opportunistic move intended to gain him public attention, Lipa has revolutionized the publicity strategies in the Hasidic world, mostly by introducing tools considered, especially by the elder generation, as impure and forbidden. The Hasidic music scene before Lipa resembled to a great extent the punk rock scene of the nineties: artists played on cheap instruments, recorded tracks in half-amateur studios, and sold cassettes and CDs in ugly covers. The popularity of an artist was mainly decided through whispered propaganda. Although Lipa’s career kicked off in precisely such an environment, he was to turn it upside down. Lipa took full advantage of the fact that despite the resistance of the rabbis, the Internet was rapidly conquering Hasidic neighbourhoods. Lipa’s first video clips started to appear on the Internet, and soon after his albums were released. Currently, Lipa has a professional website www.lipaschmeltzer.com (where samples of his songs are available), a channel on Youtube, and he keeps his fans updated via Twitter and Facebook. Just to put his popularity into some context: Lipa has reached already almost five thousands friends, whereas Zackary Sholem Berger, a witty, talented and relatively young American-Yiddish poet, has barely managed to hit five hundred, and the biggest Yiddish poet of the twentieth century, Avrum Sutzkever, has stopped on only 52 fans. The scale of Lipa’s popularity can be most accurately measured by his fans’ activity on the net. They are constantly posting hundreds of amateur video clips and short films showing Lipa performing at concerts and simches. An example of this would be the blog ‘it’s unbeLIPAble!!!’. Lipa also collaborates with the old stars of Hasidic music, such as Avreml Fried, MBD or Michael Schnitzler, and the new wave of artists, including the Lubavitcher hip-hop artist DeScribe.

Lipa’s growing popularity has also impacted on his image as an artist. One will not find among his songs such sharp attacks on certain aspects of Jewish society, as in the case of Yom Tov Ehrlich. Quite the contrary, Lipa is willing to sing for almost every audience in every venue. His past performances include singing at Satmar weddings, at a ceremony welcoming a new Torah scroll in the Israeli army, and for the litvishe youth in Yeshiva University. All is appropriate as long as it brings joy to the Jewish people and brings them closer to God.

Unsurprisingly he was looked upon with suspicious eyes by more conservative circles in the Haredi community, and it was only a matter of time before confrontation arose. The clash took place in 2008 when a group of rabbis published an open letter in the Haredi press, banning Lipa’s planned concert: “The Big Event” in Madison Square Garden. Afraid of the consequences of the ban Lipa cancelled the concert, yet a few months later he responded to his opponents with a new album, “A Poshiter Yid” (a simple Jew). This song was a kind of personal manifesto, in which Lipa proclaimed that against all odds he would continue to walk his own way. Three years
after the ‘Big Event’ incident it seems that Lipa lost the battle and won the war. Not only has he published two more albums – “Meimke deLipe” (2010) and “24/6” (2011) and performed hundreds of gigs, but he has also expanded his activity. In 2010 he published his first book: “Hagude shel Lipe”, and a year later he became a rabbi of a synagogue he built in Airmont, designed for everyone, no matter “what colour shirt or type of hat one wears.”

Meanwhile, Lipa’s fame continues reaching well beyond the borders of the Haredi world, crossing many boundaries and bridging cultural differences that for some people were unbridgeable, as I happened to experience first-hand during my visit to New York last summer. One day I took a trip to a Hasidic neighbourhood of Boro Park. Walking in my jeans, jumper and a baseball cap through streets bustling with bearded men in long black coats and hats and women wearing long skirts and sheitels, I hardly could have passed for a local. I entered a store selling Jewish music.

Inside there was only a young Hasid behind the counter, playing around with a computer. I asked him about Lipa’s latest album and he pointed to a shelf filled entirely with Lipa’s CDs and DVDs. Then he raised his eyes, glanced at my goyishe clothes and asked rhetorically in his Yiddish-inflected English: “Another fan of Lipa, ah?”

Some thirty minutes later I went to buy Lipa’s album and a few other pearls of Jewish music dug out from the piles of CDs of Hasidic pop. This time not only my clothes, but also my accent betrayed me. “Where are you from?” – He asked, handing me the change. “Poland” – I replied. He smiled and turned back to his computer. Walking out I heard him saying to himself: “Pshshsh, they’re listening to Lipa even in Poland.”

1 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eCqYHRULLBE
2 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0aFTm-NeLmA&feature=related
3 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DGn5HXRTdYg&feature=related
4 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kx5cQsVVknI
5 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XzRS6YXAsM
6 http://www.lipaschmeltzer.com/
7 http://www.youtube.com/LipaSchmeltzer
My Four Months at UCL

Anna Rosner

(a PhD Student at the University of Warsaw, recipient of a scholarship in East European Jewish History at the UCL Department of Hebrew and Jewish Studies 2009-10)

Dealing with Jewish migrations from Eastern and Central Europe to London in the 19th century is not an easy task for researchers living outside of Great Britain. However, I have chosen this topic for my PhD research because this topic seems to be a very rarely researched field in Poland even though a considerable part of these migrations had their origins in its territories.

In the beginning of my second year as a PhD student at the University of Warsaw I faced the problem of accessing the documents required for my further work. Thanks to the scholarship I received it was possible to spend four months in London. I worked on the documents and collections in the UCL Main Library, the British Library, Senate House Library, the London Metropolitan Archive as well as the University of Southampton Archive. I managed to read many books strictly on the subject of my research as well as on related topics. I discovered many publications on the migrations themselves, the position of the Jews in nineteenth century London, the development of the East End as well as the inner and foreign politics connected with the problems of massive migrations. Apart from this variety of secondary sources, I got a chance to read some very important documents and works, for example, the works of Charles Booth and Henry Mayhew accessible in the UCL Main Library, the documents of the United Synagogue in The London Metropolitan Archive and the annual records of the Jewish Board of Guardians which can be accessed only in the University of Southampton Archive. I should also mention that during my two very successful visits in Southampton, I was able to discuss my research and the further steps I should take with Prof. Tony Kushner (who was my tutor in 2007-2008 when I did my Master’s Degree in Jewish Studies at Southampton University) and Prof. Joachim Schloer.

During my stay in London I also presented my research topic to the postgraduate seminar. My presentation ended with an interesting discussion and I was asked many additional questions which shows that the subject of my work, although well-researched in British history, still brings out many emotions. I also had several interesting consultations with the members of staff in the UCL Department of Hebrew and Jewish Studies. The most important ones were meeting with Dr. Francois...
Guesnet, who was my research supervisor during my stay at University College London.

The scholarship I received allowed me an important freedom. Not only did I get a possibility to access primary and secondary sources which I could not get hold of in Poland, but I also got a chance to actually go and see the remaining parts of the East End, its synagogues and Jewish graveyards, as well as other places featuring in my PHD.

Anna Małgorzata Rosner

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**Kaunas Modern Lithuanian Yiddish Literature at the Margin**

Marie-Louise Schmidt

Yiddish literature between the two World Wars (1918-1940) is an interesting centre of reference for studying literature because it is a time of change, of continuity and of disruptions reflecting the past, creating the present and designing the future. The Yiddish cultural discourse is governed by questions of identity, of defining oneself in the smaller Yiddish and in the Jewish world, but more importantly, also in the whole literary world. Kaunas, the capital of interwar Lithuania, offered its Jewish population even for a short time (1918-1924) complete national-cultural autonomy but it never became an important center of Jewish culture.

Alexander Mukdoni, who spent 4 years in Kaunas after World War I, wrote that although Kaunas became the new capital, “Kovne iz farblibn provintsyel, vi ikh hob zi gekent mit yorn tsurik”¹, the population was Jewish but there were many more Lithuanian peasants. Because of this provincialism and the lack of an alternative culture, the Jews held on to the Yiddish culture as part of the diaspora existence. For the Russian Yiddish writers for whom Kaunas was a place of transit to Berlin, which became with their influence a major place of Yiddish literature in the beginning of the 1920s, Lithuanian “iz geven a min sanskrit vos keyner fun unz [e.g. Dovid Bergelson, Moshe Nadir, A. Mukdoni, Der Nister] hot nit gekent”.² Many Yiddish writers of Lithuania, too, left in the 1920s and 30s, started writing Hebrew in Palestine, quit writing completely or never received recognition. With a closer look at Yiddish publishing in Kaunas in the interwar period, the existence of a vivid Yiddish literary scene

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¹ Mukdoni, Alexander: A yor in der ltvisher melukhe. In: Lit. Tel Aviv 1951, p. 1077. (“Kaunas remains as provincial as I knew it years ago”. All translations by the author)

² Mukdoni, p.1078. ("...was a kind of Sanskrit which none of us knew.")
becomes obvious, even if it was much smaller\(^3\) than that of Warsaw or New York.

As a center of the Musar-movement and rabbinical Judaism, the example of Kaunas shows how Yiddish writers who had no backing in their spiritual home in the periphery struggled for recognition in a wider space. Important testimonies of their search for recognition are the “Zamlbikher” published by small groups of young writers between 1920 and 1940. These, in the majority of cases, had a circulation of approximately 1000 copies. They were sold for 2 Litas a copy, too little to earn more than the printing costs. As is true for other literatures, it is necessary to consider Yiddish publishing in terms of earning one’s living.

Like their colleagues, the Kaunas Yiddish writers published in the Lithuanian Yiddish newspapers, but could not even earn a sufficient income. Most of the writers had a profession as teacher, lawyer etc. Instead of profit they were aiming to a much wider

\[^{3}\] There was a time in our modern Jewish Lite, when literary creation overflowed like a river after ice drift. […] Our young capital Kovne “the faithless town,” as Bal-Makhshoves aptly defined her, is going to become a kind of Jerusalem of Life, and our province, the modest litvish provincial town, which has for hundreds of years provided Jewish communities all over the world with the widely known “tselem kep” and “litvakes”—those dry, intellectual scholars, cold minagdishe Rabonim and other clerics – is about to leap ahead with the youthful fire of devotion, khasidisher ecstasy and idealism, rebellion and the urge for renewal.

audience than that of Lithuania. So literature seems here to be more independent from everyday life than in New York or Warsaw, where writers were more pragmatic and made a living from writing, even by selling works to newspapers in a great amount. In Lithuania these publications show the efforts of a young generation in the periphery to present their works and their talent to a more central audience.

They are exclusive to a high degree. Their writings are expressions of a new self – consciousness as Lithuanian Jews. Their target audiences were critics in the centers, who knew the translations of world literature, who were supposed not to be interested in translations from Lithuanian literature, because the writers themselves perceived it as minor in comparison to their own. The design of most of these publications is ambitious, trying to reach modern standards, but with a low budget. They wanted to be in and out, to be the same but different. They wanted to be modern, but in Yiddish. That is the most important feature of Yiddish modernists in the interwar period.\(^4\)

Interview with director Joseph Cedar about his latest film, *Footnote*  
(Hebrew: שעורת שלולים)

Charlie Fleming

Joseph Cedar was born in NYC in 1968 but made Aliyah to Israel with his family aged six. He served as a paratrooper for the IDF and thereafter received his undergraduate degree in philosophy and the History of Theatre from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He continued to become a graduate of the NYU Tisch programme and has been an active director since 2000 with his first film *Time of Favour* (ההסדר/ha'hesedar). Since then, Cedar has directed four successful works, including the internationally acclaimed *Beaufort* (בופור) in 2007. Cedar has won numerous prizes including a German International Film Festival award, an Israeli Oscar, and earlier this year, as *Footnote* premiered at the Cannes Film Festival, it won best Screenplay.

*Footnote* is a dark comedic fable about a very strained father-son relationship and the inner workings of the academic world at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, where both father and son are Talmudic scholars. The son Uriel excels in his career and whole-heartedly embraces the accolades of the establishment, whilst in contrast, his father Eliezer maintains his profound stubborn revulsion of it. The solitary Eliezer remains cut off from the rest of the world, until one day he receives a phone call, informing him that he has won the prestigious Israel prize for his life’s work. Unbeknown to him, there was a terrible mix up. His son is actually the real recipient, and the rivalry develops further. The result is an intriguing exploration of rivalry, complicated emotions, and above all, a great demonstration of the thirst for recognition that lies within us all.

I met with Joseph in mid-October during his visit to the UK for the BFI London Film festival.

*Over coffee we had a brief chat about Footnote.*

**Q.** Where did your interest in film making develop and what was the biggest challenge in making *Footnote*?

**JC:** It started from a young age, during high school. I knew that I was going to be in some branch of the entertainment industry. The first job that I got was in a TV studio, and it felt like that is where I wanted to stay, in a studio. The biggest challenge is always the writing. There are external challenges, like finding the financing, getting actors or the right location, but all of these things do not come near to the challenge of putting together a story that makes sense. This screenplay didn't take long to put together, about eight months, but during that period, if you don't know that it is good enough, then nothing around you feels good. So that’s the only real challenge.

**Q:** Whilst watching the film, I found that the score played a very important part. I felt that it seemed to be influenced by Shostakovich with its sharp punctuations and dissonant sounds. Was the music a representation of the father/son relationship in the film?
JC: It is hard to talk about what music does. No interpretation or commentary can really reflect what a note can do and how you experience something. But for me, there is always a tension between a melody and a sound. A melody seems an easy way to manipulate an audience into a certain emotion. On the other side of that spectrum is just a monotone, which feels very close to the picture that you are seeing on screen. I think that somehow is linked to the conflict between the father and son. The son is all about melody and the father is very one toned, harsh, a screeching kind of sound.

Q: It is easier for the audience to identify more with the son, Uriel than the father, Eliezer. Uriel says “I’ve no idea who this man is and he’s my father”; there is that distance between him and his son as well as between him and the viewer. Why is he such a mystery and perhaps a slightly less developed character than Uriel?

JC: For me, he is one of the richest people I have had the opportunity to put on screen. He is someone who ends up betraying everything that he stands for. The first part of the film presents what those things are. The second part shows how he compromises that. He is not a lovable character but I think he is someone who I can feel compassion for because life did not treat him well, but he does cruel things to the people around him in the name of a truth that I don’t necessarily subscribe to. So it’s not easy to identify with him. He has this flaw that is very human and I am forgiving towards him.

Q: All of your films to date have been set in Israel, so you have quite a limited audience. Do you think that you could make a film that is not set in Israel?

JC: I hope so, I do not have one right now in mind, but it is something that I am considering. My life is in Israel and most of the things that interest me happen there. I’m not sure if that is good for my career but it is what it is.

Q: Many films that make it out of Israel are those which deal with the Arab/Israeli conflict. What do you think you and other Israeli directors can do to reach a wider audience?

JC: Well footnote isn’t about the conflict, and for me, I want to go into a theatre and watch something that I haven’t seen before, which is genuinely better, smarter, more entertaining and more thrilling than the rest of the movies that are being made. That is very hard to do. That’s what I’d like to do and if that happens once or twice in my lifetime it would be great.

There seems no doubt Cedar is more than capable of achieving some of his above mentioned goals, if his latest film is anything to go by. It is a truly unique and engaging depiction of relationships and self-images, that some critics say ends rather abruptly. This viewer believes otherwise, as in the world beyond the camera, not many conflicts can be as neatly tied up as many directors would have us believe. Cedar’s production is powerful and intense, a well recommended cinema experience!
Experiences at Cumberland Lodge

Constanta Fieraru

What another great year up at the lodge! Well.. I say that with the assumption that the previous years have been as successful as ours, why wouldn’t it be?! Freshly prepared food, beautiful bedrooms, breathtaking grounds and what’s more, an open bar and array of ‘all you can drink’, teas, coffee and biscuits!! Making a change from regular microwave meals and Tesco value tea! Oh and did I mention the lectures? Oh yes the lectures, superb lectures on everything Jewish, from the history of UCL to questions such as, what composes a Jewish language? And even the history of Jews in photography! Are you waiting for the catch? Surprisingly there isn’t one!

All was set in a non-academic environment which influenced much vibrancy to both the lectures and of course the bonding objective. For us ‘First Years’, the idea of a non-academic retreat away with the department came as quite a contrast to our normal activity, especially as we had just been preparing ourselves mentally and physically into routine for the term ahead, none the less it was definitely a much needed get away. We all felt that Cumberland Lodge broke down the barriers between students and teachers. Dedicating time to get to know each other individually over a glass or two has, ironically, benefited our rapport as a group. We believe that without the help of the services provided at the lodge and also the lectures we may not have had such a relaxed and swift transition into relationship within our year group and department! From what I gathered, the teachers thoroughly enjoyed the idea of a ‘much needed’ retreat. I had to ask twice if Michael Berkowitz and Francois Guesnet, were actually serious when they retired from the dinner table to smoke cigars! Michael’s classic response, that it was ‘the heart of Jewish culture’, was the highlight of my stay and confirmed that I was involved in the right department!

It was great to see our department, which I now regard as a ‘mini family’, interacting with one another on the same level, discussing topics that were covered either in lectures or just general debate.
We are a bunch of individuals with tremendous character and backgrounds; this is only the beginning of an incredible journey. We do feel, however, that more of these types of events are needed in any way possible, in which more staff members can also participate and join in with the scholarly banter! Twenty four hours really did make all the difference, and on behalf of the ‘First Years’ I would like to give thanks to both Cumberland Lodge and all the staff that were involved in enabling this to take place.

Events Happening Soon:

* Jews and their Neighbours in Eastern Europe *A History of Endless Conflict?*
A One-Day Conference of the Institute for Polish–Jewish Studies in association with the Polish Cultural Institute and the Institute of Jewish Studies, University College London

Thursday 15 December 2011, 9.30 a.m. to 7 p.m. at the Hallam Conference Centre, 44 Hallam Street, London W1W 6JJ and the Polish Embassy, 47 Portland Place, London W1B 1JH
A poem and fantasy

Shed 1992 -1492
By Katriel

1

hark, hearer, hear what I say, lend a thought,
makes believe we are stonewhelmed
somewhere specific in the pastures of an old
stone city

city of candles, golden lights, traceries, looping
Moorish arches
great white earings of stone and plaster, their
column heads embossed with brownstone
pomegranates
symbols of Canaan and fertility

hear what I describe, see what I recite
tetragram of then now and to come

for I bring you news of old ceremonies and our
special day
two spits and several curses below that
yearning-
towering el Greco grey gothic spire –
vertexian aspirations, spiky notes of cruelty
and fanaticism

see an old square building
formed of baked brick horizontals
plain outside: deceptive
storehouse of old scrolling words,
precepts, delusions dangerous
and which have led us
ultimately to our exiles and several slaughters
can you see her
(well that is good, you are then
perceptive in your histori – city)
see her veiled, steady, contained
climbing the steep to our building
and maybe you intuit, erring
that this bride comes from old ashkenaz
no, this is a Spanish girl through and through
not fiery though, with castanets,
but sombre midnight eyes

processing now up from the river bank
dwellings
below, suppressed, inferior, darkened
up the narrow cobbled stony streets and
winding alleys to the airy courtyard
at the new synagogue
new then
whose bride shall she be
and why
what dress does she wear for this, shall it (as
one bard says)
be “quaint, graceful, fine and excellent”
or rather “cloth o’gold, and cuts and laced with
silver, set with pearls, down-sleeves,
side-sleeves, and skirts underborne with a
bluish tinsel”
be patient, all will be shown in time
for we rehearse something not just memorable
but important

2

inside our synagogue
dark-panelled ceilings curving upwards
of mahogany carved and painted between the
beams with golden half-circles
upper gallery cream and green-tinted
outer wall pierced by several arched windows
patterned with lead lines
shapes of david’s star
let daylight white-mooned and starry flood and
splash the richly carved shapes, bosses
and arches with their pink-marbled and dark-
green flecked miniature columns
scooped out with seven cream scallops each
and all the dividing horizontals
are curved hebraic legends
walls in brail for the blind

looking up
we are dazzled and amazed
can such a bejewelled interior embrace us
across the centuries
boxed up in jewish wonder, we are
joyous but mystified and hushed
a touch alarmed by the question of sensations
for here the sight and touch and language of
stones
tiles and wood and light
make a symphony of holiness exquisite

old square building
of baked-brick horizontals
its plain outside deceptive

3

ready now
we see everything more clearly
hear their music coming up from the lower streets
approaching in dances with flutes and small drum
lutes guitars and singing
a mixture of religious and secular
going to the doorway
we look for her amid those throngs and dancing children
sparkling eyes ebony hair
carried aloft like an Indian princess
or goddess of fire and ash
light-blue bands dipping from her floating sleeves
veil edged with cold
she steps down
small girls hold edges of her light-puffed cream gown
skipping along to the music
her father, robed, head covered
moves slowly
solemn at this great giving away
inside coming beneath the canopy of deep blue white and gold
the scroll is unwound
veiled yet she must speak before the marriage chant the old words in Hebrew and Spanish embellishing them in her deep-throated voice, gutturals and nightingale notes of grace offer her own prayer and a blessing for the community of Israel adding in the custom a private explanation for her family for those who love her most of all

4

the hush now is total
mellow voice – one would not think it in a girl just fifteen –
breaks up the separate thoughts into welcome simplicities of breath and modulation

speaks to the heart
“friends, my people, my mother, my father
my four little sisters
today I shall leave you all
yet in another way shall stay with you all for ever
in memory in love in joy in deep sadness
in love and in duty
this is my choice, willingly I go for you
for me
a-meyn ”

lifting the veil
heaped lush arabesques
her hair
cascading on to her carved neck
bending slightly forward
her face streaming tears from deep-caved eyes
washing, shining
slightly trembling lips

now from above sudden trumpets rip
cymbals smash
the waited Seraph comes announced clasps her, though not in love-passion will lead her to another land taking the people’s sorrow to rainy windswept plains and forests where houses will be of wood not stone cold places, frozen, dim, impaled to bear her children saved from the third catastrophe

5

a long bitter while was it bitter refuge yet even bitterness ended when time came

farewell old square building
with baked-brick horizontals
plain outside deceptive
the great synagogue
persistent desolate
amid old Toledo’s narrow-minded streets keeps the story after the tourists go home old square shed striving to amend puts on again its decorations the sleeves, the ornaments, the jewels she bore of Spanish jewry in 1492

6

Light another candle please
Off Allenby Street

Pictures of old Tel Aviv, 1994

Taken by Joseph Shub
Snapshots of our students’ adventures in Israel:

Taken on one of the last days of the year, friends from all over the world come together and promise, despite the distance, to reunite very soon.

Succoth in the Old City in Jerusalem

Deep in the Judean desert, a 5 hour long walk from Jerusalem to Jericho, interesting encounters

Ahuva Dotan, Hebrew teacher at the Department from 2008-2010, visited by Kasia Leszczynska and Ela Szubarczyk in Haifa, January (!)

Just casually floating in the Dead Sea. It would be boring alone

Sometimes you just have to gather everyone for a little fancy dress party
And A Very...

happy

☐ Chanukah
☐ Chanukkah
☐ Channukah
☐ Hanukah
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From the Hebrew and Jewish Studies Department of UCL