



Program in Jewish Studies at Rice University

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From the Director

The Program in Jewish Studies continues to thrive. As we did this fall, in the spring semester 2013 we will again be offering over ten classes on all levels and in several disciplines, including Jewish history and religion, language and literature, philosophy and film, among



Professor Matthias Henze at the Centennial Reception with the booklet "Jewish Studies at Rice University: Our History. Our Future"

others. We also hosted student luncheons with artist/ethnographer Leslie Starobin and Israeli pop star David Broza. Our audience was further broadened by two lecture series: "Jesus and Judaism" at the Glasscock School of Continuing Studies and "Reading Between the Lines in Modern Jewish Literature" at the Evelyn Rubenstein Jewish Community Center of Houston. I am particularly thrilled to welcome Brian Ogren to our Program.

As part of Rice's blockbuster centennial celebration in October, the Program hosted a reception for alumni, students, faculty, and administrators, accompanied by an exhibit on "A Century of Jewish Life at Rice." We also published a booklet written by Rice's centennial historian, Dr. Melissa Kean, which traces this Jewish history. It was wonderful to see so many of the Program's friends and supporters on the Rice campus.

Thank you for your continued interest in the Program. My colleagues and I hope to see you very soon at one of our many community events.

Warm regards,
Matthias Henze

Fall Courses Draw New Students

This fall the Program offered two new courses that broadened the scope of its student audience. Prof. Brian Ogren taught "Jewish Mysticism," and post-doctoral fellow Melissa Weininger taught "Sex and Gender in Modern Jewish Culture," cross-listed with the Program on Women, Gender, and Sexuality. Students in Ogren's class traced the historical development of Jewish mysticism from the Hebrew Bible through contemporary trends in Jewish thought. Weininger's students considered how Jewish identity has historically been constructed as gendered, and how that has affected Jewish self-perception and self-representation as well as the representations of others. Her course explored the intersection between gender and Jewishness from several different historical and cultural perspectives, using literature, film, and philosophy.

Welcome, Professor Ogren

Dr. Brian Ogren joined the Religious Studies faculty this fall as the Anna Smith Fine Assistant Professor of Judaic Studies. He specializes in early modern Jewish thought, with a research emphasis on philosophy and kabbalah during the Italian Renaissance. He was raised in California and was educated in Jerusalem, where he lived for thirteen years. In 2008 he earned his Ph.D. from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in Jewish Thought. He has also researched extensively in Europe. Ogren's concentration has been upon the flow and reception of ideas amongst diverse intellectual communities, and has paid attention to intellectual discourse as a means of asserting authority and of forming identity.

Ogren's first book, entitled *Renaissance and Rebirth* (Brill 2009), treats notions of reincarnation in Italian Renaissance Jewish and Christian humanist thought. He is currently researching Jewish ideas of cosmic cycles in early modern mystical texts, in regard to notions of time, space, and self. Ogren's work continually examines issues of center and periphery, as well as continuity and change, in regard to Jewish philosophical and mystical traditions. The Program is privileged to welcome Ogren to its core faculty.



Prof. Brian Ogren

Workshop with Israeli Pop Star David Broza

Students commented on their lunch workshop with Israeli singer-songwriter David Broza, made possible by the Maurice Amado Foundation and the Evelyn Rubenstein Jewish Community Center of Houston:

"David Broza is a legend. For seven summers I bonded with my friends by belting out "Mitachat LaShamayim" on hikes and Saturday nights and marveling at how Broza could make any song a love song. When I got older, "Yihye Tov" became one of the songs I listened to when I was upset. The workshop was amazing because it was so intimate. I got to be feet away from him as he described the process of writing one of the top 25 most played songs on my iPod. I was awestruck to be having such a casual discussion with an icon. I hadn't known much about his upbringing or rise to fame, nor his current collaborations with Palestinian artists. It was great to get to see some of the personal background behind his music."

—Hannah Abrams '16

"I really liked that the workshop felt intimate and candid. Broza attempted to give us a brief personal history but he kept on going off on interesting tangents, sharing stories as they came to him. You could tell he was enjoying himself as he free-associated and remembered new things."

—Charles Danan '13

Student Reflection: My Study of Holocaust Commemoration, Part I

This summer I traveled to Poland and Germany to study the cities of Warsaw, Krakow, Berlin, and Munich, and the camps of Treblinka, Majdanek, Auschwitz I, Auschwitz II-Birkenau, Ravensbruck, Sachsenhausen, Buchenwald and Dachau to investigate Holocaust memorialization. I set out to analyze how these preserved Holocaust concentration camps reflect on the past and perpetuate their memory into the future. As a Religious Studies major, I am interested in how the concentration camps are inculcated into the collective memory so characteristic of the Jewish culture. Though Jews have a distinct connection to the Holocaust, the Holocaust has functioned to pluralistically relate to all people in the larger context of overcoming all types of prejudice and discrimination through the education of its atrocities.



Farrah Madanay '13 was a recipient of the *Desirée and Max Blankfeld Fellowship*

In Warsaw, I witnessed the anniversary of the 69th Warsaw Uprising. The entire day had citywide events beginning with a commemoration of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. On my way back from the museum, at 5 p.m., known as the "W" hour, cars on the street stopped regardless of traffic light color, and men on the sidewalks removed their hats. All at once car and bus drivers pressed on their horns, creating a siren effect. The city originally wanted to sound a siren and have planes drop flyers about the Uprising but the mayor vetoed the idea, citing insufficient funds. For about two minutes, everyone in Warsaw stood and sat still, listening to the sirens of the W-hour.

I visited the memorial to Janus Korczak and the children of his orphanage. This year in Poland is dubbed Janus Korczak year because it is the 70th anniversary of his death in Treblinka. The Poles love Korczak, an assimilated Polish Jew, because of his decision to accompany his orphans to Treblinka when he could have been hidden. My tour concluded with the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising Memorial, the Jewish Cemetery, Korczak's Orphanage and the Wall of the Ghetto. The Memorial, in the middle of a residential area, is made of black marble from Sweden. The Germans meant to use the marble for a monument to the victory of Hitler, so it is a bit of poetic justice that instead the marble was used for the Uprising memorial. On one side is a relief of the heroes and on the other a relief of the elderly and children that could not resist. Many of the Holocaust memorials, like this one, have been paid for by the City of Warsaw and the State of Poland.

I took a minivan to Lublin, two hours outside of Warsaw, to visit Majdanek. Only one information board I read mentioned the cruelty of the Poles. Otherwise, I observed many Poles, like my tourguide, greatly downplayed the role of Poles as perpetrators. They preferred rather to see their family members as victims and highlight the few Poles that were resisters or righteous gentiles. From the moratorium atop a hill at the end of the camp, I had a view of not only the entire camp, but also the town of Lublin. I could not help but think the Lubliners must have seen the dark smoke from the chimneys of the crematorium.

I took a group tour of Auschwitz. I had two immediate reactions to the camp Auschwitz I. First, the camp was eerily beautiful, with its manicured green

lawns, large brick barrack facades and the flowers of summer in bloom. Second, there were an incredible number of visitors. Like many other museums, camps and memorials, Auschwitz remembers the Holocaust victims collectively. However, the shoes forced me to think about the individuals; each shoe was so different in size, design and color. The luggage also presented an element of individual memorialization.

Poland confronts the Holocaust head on, and for Krakow, Holocaust tourism seems to be its main industry. In Krakow, the sites of the Holocaust are easily accessible through tours offered by electric carts, private guides, and group vans. Today, Krakow's Jewish quarter seems to be a lot more vibrant than Warsaw's. However, in spite of the open discussion of Holocaust memory in Poland, I quickly learned that the chief goal of the Poles was to compel visitors to appreciate their culture and recognize how they had grown from the past.

Part II on Germany in Spring 2013

The Program in Jewish Studies:

Matthias Henze, director and undergraduate advisor
Watt J. & Lilly G. Jackson Professor of Biblical Studies
Professor of Religious Studies

Shira L. Lander, undergraduate advisor
Anna Smith Fine Senior Lecturer of Jewish Studies

Melissa Weininger, postdoctoral fellow

Ryan Bell, program coordinator
Manager of Academic Affairs, School of Humanities

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J.D. *University of Texas School of Law*
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B.A. *Candidate 2013 Rice University*

Tracy Friedman Stein
B.A., M.A. *Emory University*
J.D. *University of Texas School of Law*

To support Jewish Studies at Rice, please contact Jeanette Zey at 713-348-4669 or jzey@rice.edu.



Rice University Jewish Studies Program
MS-340 P.O. Box 1892
Houston, Texas 77251-1892

Visit our website!
jewishstudies.rice.edu