

A blue banner with a lightbulb icon on the right. The text "YU IDEAS" is centered in white, serif font. The background of the banner features a faint, stylized architectural drawing of a building and a lightbulb with rays emanating from it.

YU IDEAS

The Future of the Book

For decades now, a book has stopped being an object contained in pages between two covers carried in a reader's hands and become a part of the digital universe that surrounds us. In *The Future of the Book*, 13 writers, including 12 Yeshiva University faculty members, take on the challenge of investigating the effects of this transformation on how we learn, how we think, how we create and how we believe.





Old Wine in New Bottles: The Future of the Jewish Book

DR. AARON KOLLER, Associate Professor of History, Chair of the History Department



The *past* of the Jewish book is long and complex. We have to go back to tablets, then to a long history of scrolls, first papyrus and then parchment. The introduction of the codex changed little at first, and for sacred use, has still changed nothing at all.

But for Jewish books of study, the codex emerged as the form of choice by the Middle Ages. It has, as historian Robert Darnton has written, “proven to be a marvelous machine—great for packaging information, convenient to thumb through, comfortable to curl up with, superb for storage, and remarkably resistant to damage.” (1) When one looks closer, a very particular form of the book—more precisely, of the *page* of the book—has emerged in the past millennium that reflects, and in turn animates, Jewish learning and mentality.

The quintessential Jewish book is the *mikra’ot gedolot*: each page displays a central text, in this case the Bible, with commentaries, always in dialogue with each other, surrounding it. The page is thus highly self-referential: one paragraph on the page disputes another paragraph a few inches away, and both are discussing the text in the center. The same form is emulated also in the traditional Talmud, the standard printings of Maimonides’ code of law, and even the authoritative law code, R. Joseph Karo’s *Shulchan Arukh*. No text—even as centrally canonical a text as the Torah itself or the authoritative code of Jewish law—is ever allowed to stand alone; the “table” without the “tablecloth” would be bare. It also would not be universally Jewish, because the dialogue and give-and-take is what allows, for example, Ashkenazim and Sepharadim to share the same book of Jewish law.

Jewish texts are fundamentally about the point and the counterpoint encountered simultaneously. Perhaps this is even more deeply embedded in Jewish learning, going back to the “pairs” of Second Temple Sages, the Houses of Hillel and Shammai, and the ever-contending Talmudic colleagues Rav and Samuel, Rabbi Yohanan and Resh Laqish, Abbaye and Rava, and numerous others. Graphically, this takes a new turn with the printings of Rashi and Tosafot, the Rambam and the Raavad, and so on. Now the page confronts the reader—better, the *learner*—with dispute, dialogue and dilemma before one has even begun. The first thing one knows is that there is no consensus on this page but rather an eternal dynamism and continuous hyperlinking, fostering creativity and active engagement, with each text opening up other texts.

The *future* of the Jewish book will take two complementary forms, both already seen in sites now changing the face of Jewish learning. On the one hand, we have the model of Sefaria (www.sefaria.org). The sheer quantity of data available in digital form is stunning. (The Bar Ilan Responsa project did this

earlier but less accessibly.) More striking is the crowd-sourced aspects of Sefaria, most famously the Source Sheets used for lectures and presentations, but actually entire translation projects have been crowd-sourced as well. This is a kind of learning, and contribution to learning, enabled by online technology.

A different model of online publishing was imagined two decades ago by Darnton, who pondered a whole new idea of what the book may be:

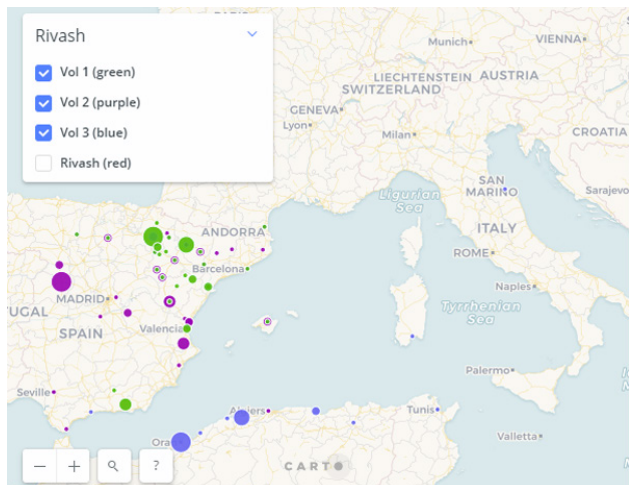
I think it possible to structure it in layers arranged like a pyramid. The top layer could be a concise account of the subject, available perhaps in paperback. The next layer could contain expanded versions of different aspects of the argument, not arranged sequentially as in a narrative, but rather as self-contained units that feed into the topmost story. The third layer could be composed of documentation, possibly of different kinds, each set off by interpretative essays. A fourth layer might be theoretical or historiographical, with selections from previous scholarship and discussions of them. A fifth layer could be pedagogic, consisting of suggestions for classroom discussion and a model syllabus. ...⁽²⁾

This sort of online book, highly curated and yet richer and more multilayered than any traditional book, can be seen in a 21st-century version of the *mikra'ot gedolot* on ALHATORAH.ORG (www.alhatorah.org). Here we can begin, as we have long done, with a page of Torah accompanied by Rashi and the Ramban. But what are Rashi's rabbinic sources for this comment? They can be opened alongside. And how much of Ramban's critique is new, how much was found in slightly earlier commentators from the previous decades (such as Bekhor Shor or Radak)? How about his rabbinic sources? And that challenge to Rashi—how can it best be parried? What have the supercommentaries on Rashi done? These, too, can open alongside. What *does* that word mean in Tanakh, anyway? Where else does it appear? The concordance has a contribution to make. A click could produce concordance results both in words or in graphs, where one can, with a simple highlighting and coloring tool, mark up the text to make a great classroom presentation. Pressing another button provides instant literary analysis. The page is getting crowded, but it's a dignified discussion, not a cacophony, since each window has its purpose and its link. As each voice is heard, its window may disappear, leaving its mark on the discussion and on our thoughts. At last, we are back to the primary text, with our two main expositors.

The ability to pit the texts against each other on the same page is thus much of what our learning is all about. And one thing the history of the book teaches us is that the form of the text matters, in ways large and small. The same is true with digital books, and learning will both always and never be the same.

1. Robert Darnton, "The New Age of the Book," *New York Review of Books*, March 18, 1999, 5-7, reprinted as Chapter 5, "E-Books and Old Books," in Darnton's collection, *The Case for Books: Past, Present, and Future* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2009), 67-77, citation at 68.
2. Darnton, "E-Books and Old Books," 76.





Data-Driven Torah

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RABBI ELLI FISCHER, Independent Writer and Translator



Rabbi Elli Fischer



Dr. Joshua Waxman

Since the introduction of the Bar Ilan Responsa database a generation ago, much discussion has focused on how accessibility and searchability change the landscape of Torah study and halachic [Jewish legal] decision-making, for better or worse.

More recently, a new model has emerged, according to which texts are *data*, vast sets of individual pieces of information linked in different ways. This is not an incremental change to the database paradigm but something qualitatively different: applying quantitative analytical tools to our sacred texts to produce fresh and novel insights.

Two projects can help illustrate where this is headed.

The Mi vaMi project, under development by Dr. Joshua Waxman, focuses on an oft-neglected but critically important aspect of Talmud study: the people mentioned in the Talmud and why they appear. Although the significance of this biographical information was acknowledged by scholars as early as the *Tosafot* [medieval French-German commentators on the Talmud], traditional study focuses on arguments and ideas, not on who articulated them. Ironically, students rarely remember that it was Rabbi Elazar, in the name of Rabbi Hanina, who said, “Whoever cites a statement in the name of its speaker brings redemption to the world” (*Megillah* 15a)!

Mi vaMi draws upon biographical information about when and where these Sages lived and their scholastic relationship to one another. It identifies, across the entire Talmud, who is speaking in a given discourse and how the participants interact (e.g., citation, inquiry, objection, support) to build a graph database of interactions. Within a given page, it marks up the Sages by color to highlight their scholastic generation and displays graphs to show the scholastic relationships. This sort of knowledge, not typically accessible, now jumps off the page and provides a qualitatively different experience to the Talmudic student.

In 2017, Elli Fischer and Moshe Schorr (a computer science student at the Technion) began HaMapah in order to map, through responsa (*she'eilot u-teshuvot*), the reception and authority of different *poskim* [arbitrators and adjudicators of Jewish law] across space and throughout their lifetimes. Their studies

provide general insights into the nature of halachic authority, the personalities of individual *poskim*, and sometimes even insights into specific responsa. Their goal is to eventually produce a comprehensive tool for analyzing, mapping and comparing responsa according to any number of variables.

When complete, the project will incorporate citations of earlier texts, and each *teshuvah* [responsum] will be categorized by topic. Users will be able to run queries such as “Show me every *she’eilah* [inquiry] about *eruv* [a ritual enclosure] that arose in Lithuania between 1850 and 1900”; “Show me every instance of an Ashkenazic *posek* between 1500 and 1650 quoting Rambam”; or “Show me every *teshuvah* that quotes both Rabbi Shlomo Kluger and Rabbi Moshe Sofer.” The possibilities are limitless.

These projects will not and cannot replace the direct encounter with the text or with a teacher; on the contrary, they highlight that the human encounter between teacher and student or between peers forms the very basis of those very texts. While harnessing contemporary approaches of computational linguistics and machine learning, these projects are not about what comes *after* the book but about what came *before* it: a debate in a Talmudic-era study hall, a thorny question that a small-town rabbi decides to forward to a trusted authority or any other encounter between our greatest Sages and the unique conditions of both time and place. The projects seek to enhance our fulfillment of the words of Rav Gidel: “One who relates a statement in the name of its author should envision the author of the statement as though he is standing before him” (*Yerushalmi Shabbat* 1:2).



GRAPHICS FROM MI VAMI

ואי סלקא דעתך סבר רבא ורבינא נתיבני רביעי בתרומה וחמישי בקודש

The Gemara returns to its previous point: And if it enters your mind that **Rabbi Yosei** holds in accordance with the opinion of **Rabbi Akiva** that non-sacred objects can assume third-degree impurity status, let him also teach the *halakha* of the fourth degree of impurity with regard to *teruma*, and the fifth degree with regard to consecrated items, on the basis of that same *a fortiori* inference. The fact that he does not extend the *a fortiori* inference to include these *halakhot* proves that **Rabbi Yosei** does not agree with **Rabbi Akiva's** opinion on this issue.

אלא רבא ורבינא לא סבר רבא ורבינא מנלן

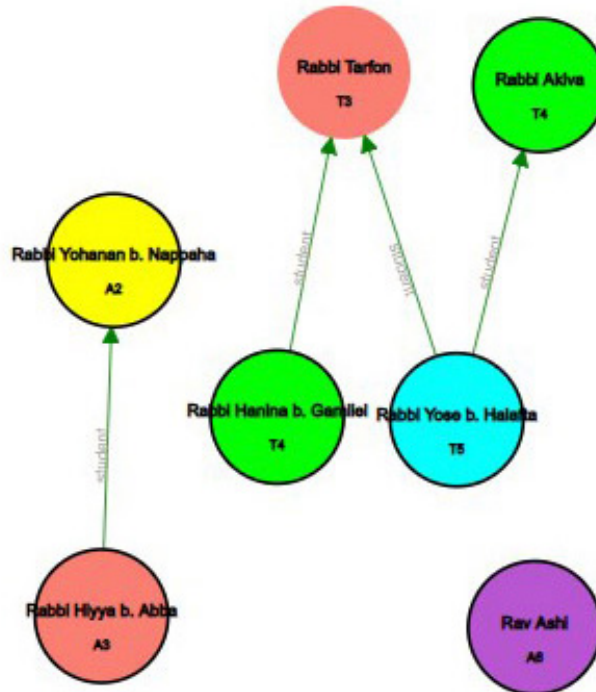
However, with regard to the fact that **Rabbi Akiva** does not hold in accordance with the opinion of **Rabbi Yosei**, from where do we derive this? Perhaps he accepts **Rabbi Yosei's** *a fortiori* inference and holds that *teruma* assumes fourth-degree impurity status and consecrated items assume fifth-degree impurity status.

אמר ליה דלא לישתמיס תנא וליתני רביעי בתרומה וחמישי בקודש וימא רבא ורבינא היא ואנן אהכי ניקום ונסמוך

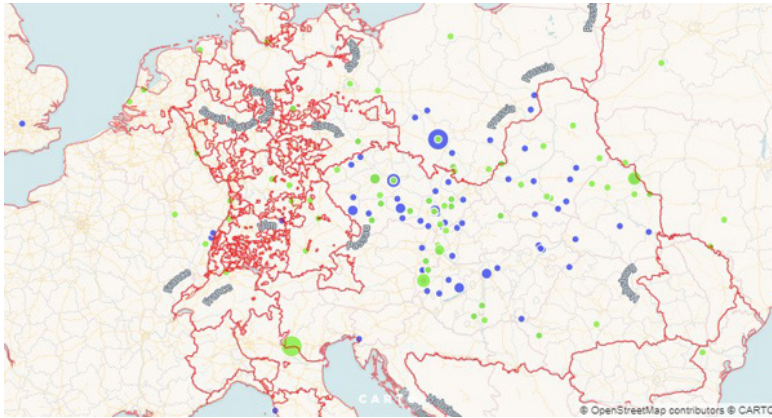
Rav Kahana said to **Rav Ashi** that there is indirect proof that this is the case. As it is not possible to avoid finding at least one *tanna* who teaches fourth- degree impurity with regard to *teruma* and fifth-degree impurity with regard to consecrated items, and says that this is the opinion of **Rabbi Akiva**, who derived it from the *a fortiori* inference of **Rabbi Yosei**. In response to this claim, the Gemara asks: And will we stand and rely on that proof? Can proof for **Rabbi Akiva's** opinion be cited from the fact that no such *tanna* was found? Perhaps there is some source for that *halakha*.

נסק רבא ורבינא ורבינא דק ואשכח הא דתנן הכלי מצרף את מה שבתוכו לקודש אבל לא לתרומה והרביעי בקודש פסול והשלישי בתרומה

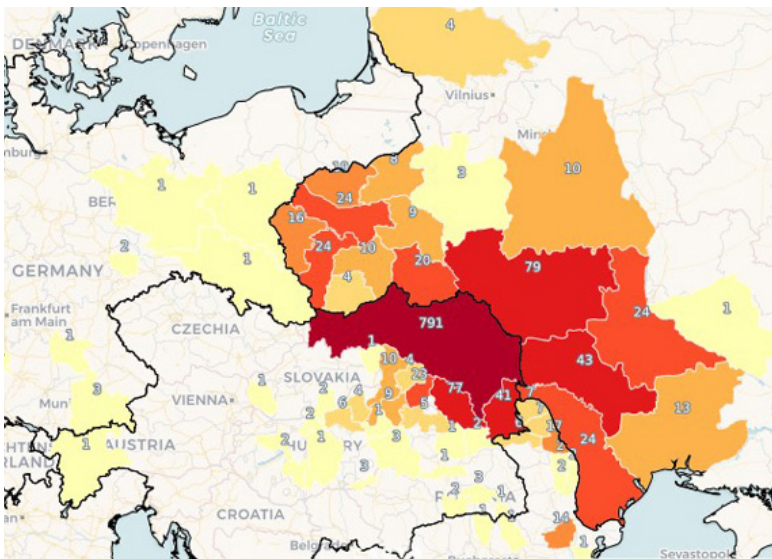
Rav Ashi, and some say it was **Rav Kahana**, left the study hall to examine this matter. He analyzed the issue and found proof positive that **Rabbi Akiva** does not hold that there is fifth-degree impurity with regard to consecrated items. He proved this from that which we learned in a mishna: A vessel joins that which is in it into a single unit. For example, if there are fruits in a vessel between which there is no contact and one of them became ritually impure, all of the fruits are impure, as they are joined by the vessel. This principle applies with regard to consecrated property, but not with regard to *teruma*. And the fourth degree of impurity disqualifies consecrated items but does not transmit impurity, while third- degree impurity disqualifies *teruma*.



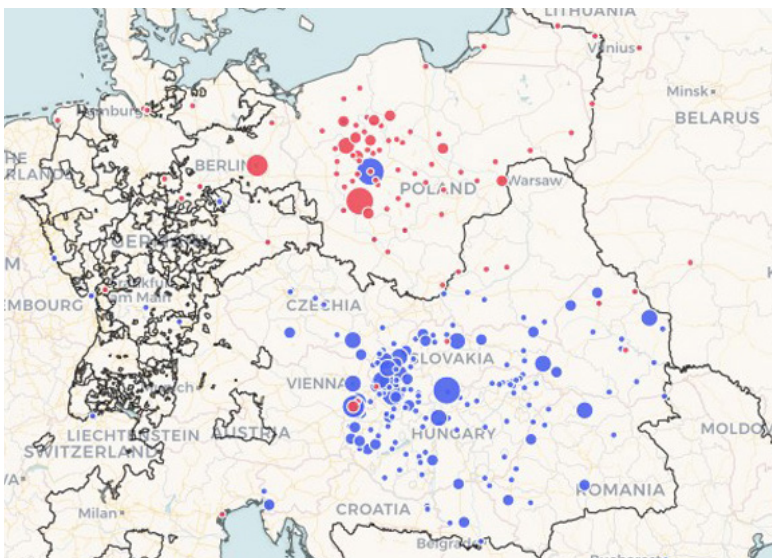
GRAPHICS FROM HAMAPAH



Responsa Noda BiYehuda vol. 1 (green) and vol. 2 (blue)



“Heat map” of Responsa Maharsham, by province



Geographical reach of Responsa Hatam Sofer (blue) and Responsa Rabbi Akiva Eger (red)



Novels, Screens and the “Self”

DR. NORA NACHUMI, Associate Professor, Department of English, Stern College for Women



What is the worth of the novel in a world that revolves ever more around screens? This question lies at the heart of several courses I teach. One way to address it is to think about the qualities that belong to the novel: what is it, if anything, that makes the novel unique?

While the answers are various, mine has to do with the novel’s manipulation of the reader’s perspective. In the mid-1700s, when the novel began to be recognized as a distinct literary form, the quality that set it apart was its commitment to “formal realism,” a term coined by Ian Watt in *The Rise of the Novel* to describe the idea “that the novel is a full and authentic report of human experience” (32). Instead of classical models, novels took their inspiration from contemporary life. Their settings were concrete, specific and recognizable and

their characters individuals instead of representative types. Films, of course, do this as well.

Novels, however, have the capacity to place the reader’s perspective *inside* the protagonist’s head. Passages that do so create the illusion that the reader has direct and unmediated access to the protagonist’s private thoughts and emotions. For a moment, the perspective of the character and the reader are close, if not one and the same. Frequently, these passages ask readers to register the difference between a character’s private, internal experience and the way that character appears in that particular scene. Film cannot invite viewers to experience this sense of “inside” and “outside” in quite the same way because it conveys all information through *external* signs.

This difference is evident if we compare a scene from the 1995 film adaptation of Jane Austen’s *Persuasion* (1818) with the original scene in the novel. In the film adaptation, the heroine, Anne Elliot, unexpectedly encounters her former fiancé, Captain Wentworth, while breakfasting with her sister, Mary. The sequence begins with short shots that convey the sudden, abrupt nature of the encounter. The camera then zooms in on Anne’s face before it pulls back to her standing beside Mary who is speaking to Wentworth. Finally, it gives us an extremely tight shot of Anne’s hand slowly tightening its grip on a chair.



This is a powerful sequence, one that signals Anne's distress despite her wooden demeanor.

In the novel, however, Anne's inner turmoil is much more immediate. Austen achieves this effect through "free indirect discourse," a literary technique that creates the illusion that we are somehow inside a character's head.* In the following passage, the shift to free indirect discourse makes Anne's confusion—her inability to do anything but feel her emotions—perfectly clear.

Mary, very much gratified by this attention, was delighted to receive him, while a thousand feelings rushed on Anne, of which this was the most consoling, that it would soon be over. And it was soon over. In two minutes after Charles's preparation, the others appeared; they were in the drawing-room. Her eye half met Captain Wentworth's, *a bow, a curtsey passed; she heard his voice—he talked to Mary, said all that was right, said something to the Miss Musgroves, enough to mark an easy footing; the room seemed full, full of persons and voices—but a few minutes ended it.* Charles shewed himself at the window, all was ready, their visitor had bowed and was gone, the Miss Musgroves were gone too, suddenly resolving to walk to the end of the village with the sportsmen: the room was cleared, and Anne might finish her breakfast as she could. (85; emphasis mine)

From the moment Wentworth enters the room, the narrative focuses solely on Anne's thoughts and sensations. It also conflates our experience with Anne's. Like her, we receive information in fragments. Nor do we know what the others are saying. Meanwhile, the rhythm of the passage creates a sense of urgency. Nothing so dramatic exists in the film.

The ability of narrative to wed our perspective to others is, I think, is the reason novels matter, even in a world dominated by screens. As the 18th-century philosopher Adam Smith observes in *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), empathy is not automatically engendered by observation:

Though our brother is on the rack, as long as we ourselves are at ease, our senses will never inform us what he suffers. . . . it is by the imagination only that we can form any conception of what are his sensations. . . . By the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body and become in some person the same person with him, and thence form some idea of his sensations, and even feel something which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them (9).

As viewers, our capacity to empathize with others depends on our willingness to go beyond what we see and hear: we must imagine both what characters feel and what we ourselves would feel were we in their position. As readers, we have less of a choice. Novels can manipulate our perspective so that we know what characters think and feel a semblance of what they themselves feel. The moral and practical possibilities engendered by these moments are enormous and hopeful.

I also like to think that novels give us a way to conceive of ourselves and our world that is a useful alternative to the one provided by screens. Novels tell us that what we see—not only in films and television shows but on sites like Facebook and Instagram—is only the tip of the iceberg, that there is more to people, families and situations than meets the eye. As such, the perspective offered by novels may serve, if not as an antidote, at least as an alternative for those teenagers (and adults) whose self-esteem and connection with others largely depends on responses to their Instagram posts.

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* “A hybrid form of direct and indirect discourse” free indirect discourse employs the past tense and the third-person pronoun of indirect discourse as in “he was glad.” Like direct discourse however, free indirect discourse is syntactically independent and implies the speaker’s attitude as in “OH! He was glad” (Dussinger 98).





When More is Less: Talmudic Methodology in the Information Age

RABBI DANIEL STEIN, Rosh Yeshiva, Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary



In recent years, one of the most impactful additions to the Talmudic library has been the Mesivta edition of the Talmud. The Mesivta Talmud provides the most thorough and annotated Hebrew translation of the Talmud to date, complete with diagrams and charts as well as a line-by-line explanation of every comment of Rashi and every observation of Tosfos.

Surprisingly, this is in fact the Mesivta Talmud's least appreciated and significant contribution. The real innovation of the Mesivta Talmud is a topically arranged synopsis of every one of the classical commentaries from the medieval period through current day roshei yeshiva [professors of the yeshiva]. This is augmented by a section of longer essays which explore and summarize the larger and deeper topics and all of their permutations and ramifications. Just

for good measure, the Mesivta Talmud also includes an expanded list of the halachic [Jewish law] decisions and homiletic elucidations culled from and concerning each respective page of the Talmud.

Even in the era of the internet, where we have instant and unfettered access to all kinds of literature and have become accustomed to an incessant onslaught of information, the Mesivta Talmud is truly a groundbreaking, thoughtful and organized reference, worthy of recognition and deserving of a prominent place in every *beit midrash* [study hall].

Nonetheless, if the objective of Talmud study is to emerge with a conceptual and pragmatic conclusion regarding the range of acceptable opinions, we must consider the proper function of the Mesivta Talmud. Simply put, will continued exposure to the diverse assortment of approaches and positions presented by the Mesivta Talmud enhance clarity and dispel confusion or will it, more often than not, produce a disoriented and muddled mayhem of convoluted Talmudic discourse? How can the Talmud student utilize and navigate this valuable resource while retaining some measure of pace, direction, and purpose?

For this reason, despite the plethora and panoply of information available at our fingertips, or perhaps precisely because of it, now more than ever, there is a dire need for the discerning guidance of an experienced teacher and mentor. I often encounter students who would like to “know how to learn” Talmud without much of a grasp for what that means or looks like. In its most basic iteration, one who “knows how to learn” Talmud, refers to one who has been trained how to identify and marginalize tangential or peripheral questions and details while consistently zeroing in on the core and fundamental themes of each Talmudic issue. Therefore, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik once compared the process of learning Talmud to

identifying and taming a looming elephant while disregarding the flies buzzing overhead. Similarly, Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik once remarked that the primary responsibility of a Talmud teacher is not to present new information and ingenious explanations but to dismiss and filter out mistaken ideas and impressions.

In endeavoring to use the Mesivta Talmud productively, one must be knowledgeable and experienced enough to scan for salient sources in order to identify the diamonds in the proverbial rough. More often than not, this process demands the courage and competence to carefully exclude fringe material. Undoubtedly, this too is part of the mitzvah [obligation] of learning Torah. The *tanna* [Jewish sage] Shimon Ha'amsuni had a unique methodology of deriving halachos [laws] from the words of the Torah. However, after deliberately ploughing his way through four of the five books of the Torah, he encountered what appeared to be an insurmountable challenge to his operating premise. At which point, he unabashedly proclaimed, "Just as I have received reward for proposing the derivations, I will also receive reward for eliminating them" (*Pesachim* 22b). Rabbi Avraham, the son of the Rambam, extrapolates from the statement of Shimon Ha'amsuni that the mitzvah of Talmud Torah entails not only introducing new and innovative explanations of the Torah but also expelling that which is mistaken.

Rabbi Avraham Pam once shared that before presenting material to students, he would not only review the subject matter he had planned to discuss but would also regularly edit out items he decided not to examine. He subsequently reflected that the latter was much more valuable than the former.

Students as well must be trained not only to collect sources and perform independent analysis but also to quickly recognize the crux of an issue while simultaneously cultivating the bravery and sensitivity to weed out extraneous sources and complications. Indeed, this will increasingly become an indispensable tool for learning Torah successfully in the information age.





How Much Reading Does a Human Being Need?

RABBI SHALOM CARMY, Assistant Professor of Jewish Philosophy and Bible



Online, I can access thousands of Torah books. I can read or confirm a citation in thousands of classic works of literature, philosophy and history. Innumerable scholarly journals, once available only in specialized libraries, appear on my screen with the tap of a few keys. On a good day, one feels like a child let loose in a candy store with an unlimited allowance. What can be more democratic? The only unfairness, it seems, is to the valuable work that is not yet easily obtainable and gets lost or is known, if at all, only through random, often misleading paraphrase.

Nevertheless, the exponential increase in printed words poses a problem for democratic, egalitarian readers. What deserves to be read and how carefully should it be read?

Take an example: I am currently studying R. Yisrael Gustman's *Kuntresei Shiurim* on the Talmudic tractate *Bava Kamma*, which deals with the laws of damages. R. Gustman, the youngest rabbinic judge in 1930s' Vilna, survived the war, and his books are based on the lectures he gave in Jerusalem decades later. His *Bava Kamma* is over 400 double-columned folio pages. Unless you are blessed with R. Gustman's erudition and analytic acuity, his work is best read in small doses, a couple of pages at a time, preferably with pauses to consult, as necessary, the Talmudic, medieval and modern authorities he interprets and argues with. Online libraries make it much easier to call up these sources when they are not at hand.

But the real work requires careful reading, not efficient scrolling. Are the volumes of *Kuntresei Shiurim* online? If so, I'd be grateful to use them for reference but not for intensive study.

Although the Yeshiva University library catalogue lists hundreds of commentaries on *Bava Kamma* along with much more scholarship devoted to the topic of damages in Jewish law, few advanced Talmudists would criticize my decision to spend countless hours studying R. Gustman. The elite have endorsed the high and probably enduring quality of his contribution; most of the other volumes I could have picked off the shelf have not met that standard. Those lesser authors also labored mightily, and reading them demands serious concentration. Uninitiated, well-meaning internet browsers would not readily distinguish the best from the mediocre. That's the problem: the more you can get your hands on, the greater the advantage accruing to

the readers who are “plugged in,” that is, those who know what of this vast primary and secondary literature is most worth studying and how to study it and when to close the books and do your own hard thinking.

What is true in Talmud is true for other disciplines I am familiar with: philosophy, history, creative literature, criticism and so forth. Therefore, the explosion in printed material may make it even more urgent for readers to be well-informed and selective about what they choose to read. Such discrimination is a function of education and the thoughtful appropriation of informed, sophisticated opinion. The internet cannot be relied on to do this. To the contrary, it may even encourage the illusion that everything out there is equally trustworthy and valuable.





The Future of the...Book?

DAVID LAVINSKY, Associate Professor, English



Writing at midcentury, Marcel Thomas, keeper in the Department of Manuscripts at the Bibliothèque nationale, surmised that “the new media of our age, broadcasting and the cinema, may help us grasp how ideas and works can be transmitted without passing through the medium of print.” (1) Scarcely six decades later, written culture seems even more contingent than Thomas had imagined. The “new media of our age” now includes digital simulations of what we once only experienced as textual objects.

Because reading has almost always presupposed a sensory and tactile relationship to language and written form, it makes sense to ask whether we’ve arrived at a major turning point in the history of the book. Perhaps the digital present has relegated the codex to a mechanical past, just as the introduction of movable type to early modern Europe occasioned a radical shift away from medieval forms of textual production, such as the bound manuscript book, an object encompassing the skilled labor of scribes, artisans, and craftsmen.

Indeed, early studies of the printing press singled out its role in the emergence of modernity. Although scholars now criticize the teleological assumptions behind this argument, the pervasive changes brought about by revolutions in book production and printing technology are undeniable, even if those changes seem abstract from the standpoint of digital culture. One obvious result is of course the very notion that the early modern world was materially distinct from previous historical periods. For some humanists, it was precisely the vicissitudes of medieval manuscript production that made premodern texts and documents appear inauthentic, deceptive, or corrupt. Renaissance philological and historical criticism enabled the recovery of classical learning but also helped expose medieval forgeries, as the Italian humanist Lorenzo Valla famously demonstrated in his systematic deconstruction of the so-called Donation of Constantine, a legal document recording the decision by emperor Constantine to grant the papacy dominion over the western provinces of the Roman empire.

First published in 1506, Valla’s critique of this notorious eighth-century forgery went beyond his immediate concern with the political power of the medieval church. By complicating the assumption that Constantine’s reign had been “a crucial turning point in history,” to quote Robert Black, Valla also framed his own era as a legitimate instance of cultural change, different if no less significant in its long-range potential; this is perhaps most evident in his focus on the material contingencies of manuscripts, and the authority naively ascribed to them by medieval audiences. (2) Citing Josephus, he recounts the story of

Jobal, the inventor of music who emblazoned his teachings on twin columns, one brick and the other stone, impervious to all change and decay. “Did Constantine really sign a donation of the world only on papyrus and with ink?” Valla asks incredulously. (3)

In fact, rather than a radical break from the past, the fifteenth century, when Valla flourished, was an era in which it was difficult to imagine the printed book without reference to its antecedent material forms. Many early printed books were fashioned to resemble manuscripts, employing typefaces that meticulously approximated handwritten script; or leaving select letters, such as initial capitals, to be ornamented by hand at a later stage of the production process; or even occasionally using vellum rather than paper (see, for example, the Gutenberg Bible on display at the Pierpont Morgan Library, in midtown). In some cases, especially in reformist circles, printed documents were copied by hand and transmitted in manuscript form, only to be converted at a later point back into print; many works circulated in both forms simultaneously, and in roughly equal numbers. Nor was manuscript culture entirely removed from the standardized production methods typical of the print era; the rise of guilds in late medieval urban areas meant that professional scribes and illustrators could readily collaborate in meeting customer demand. The boundaries between historically specific technologies of writing and material form are not so easily discerned as our models for periodization sometimes assume—even less so, perhaps, from a modern vantage point that exalts technological innovation as the driving force of all social and cultural change.

Likewise, medieval ideas about the materiality of books and writing have profoundly shaped how we comprehend the digital present. Premodern epistemologies of the written artifact supply concepts such as “searching,” “copying,” and “pasting,” all of which evoke the immersive experience of codex literacy, along with the material supplements authors and scribes devised to aid readers in navigating large or densely scripted volumes (e.g., paste-ins and other visual or textual cues). These terms link modern reading practices to much earlier notions of matter, form, and substance.

This is not the first time in history, then, that the future of the book seems predicated on the eclipse of its material precursors. But however disjunctive such changes may feel to those whose literacy was shaped under different circumstances, and to whatever degree all this might warrant thinking in terms of decisive historical “turning points,” it’s worth remembering that our dominant systems of representation and knowledge inhere in the concepts, terms, and categories of written culture—which, for the time being at least, still means the book.

1. L. Febvre and H.-J. Martin, *The Coming of the Book*, trans. D. Gerard, ed. G. Nowell-Smith, D. Wootton (London, 1976), 23.
2. L. Valla, *On the Donation of Constantine*, ed. G. W. Bowerstock (Cambridge, Mass., 2008), vii.
3. Valla, *Donation*, 32.





The Future of the Book: A Historian's Perspective

DR. JEFFREY FREEDMAN, Professor of History



Predictions of the book's imminent death are nothing new. From the advent of mass circulation daily newspapers in the 19th century to the spread of movies, radio and television in the 20th, the prophets of cultural doom have repeatedly declared the book to be an endangered species. And yet it survived. Is there any reason to think that this time will be different?

As a historian, I study the past. Divining the future is an activity I'm happy to leave to astrologers, palm-readers and "futuurologists" at the Rand Corporation. But while history may not be able to tell us what will happen, it can provide some guidance in identifying the crucial issues to watch. Based on my own work in the field of book history, I would suggest that the real question today is not whether the book will survive but what forms it will assume.

The mutability of the book's form has been a recurrent theme in its history. The technical term for the book as most people know it today (a book consisting of individual pages as opposed to a scroll) is the "codex." Generally associated with the spread of Christianity in the Roman empire, the codex gradually supplanted the scroll in the period of late antiquity and achieved near total dominance in the medieval Christian West (though not of course among Jews, who retained their Torah scrolls).

When, in the mid-15th century, Johannes Gutenberg invented the art of printing with movable type, he reproduced an already-existing form of the book—reproduced it so closely, in fact, that to the untrained eye, an early printed book can seem practically indistinguishable from a late-medieval handwritten codex. Nearly everything about the famous Gutenberg Bible—from the typeface in which it is printed, to the disposition of words on the page, to the red-letting and the decorative flourishes added by hand after the printing—invites comparisons with the finest manuscript Bibles of the same period. Such close reliance on an inherited model was characteristic of the transitional period when print was establishing itself.

Little by little, however, the printed book broke free of its attachment to earlier models. It shed its hand-drawn elements and became purely typographical; it acquired pagination, title pages and tables of contents; its typefaces no longer resembled scribal hands; and a whole new architecture of the printed page, featuring indented paragraphs and chapter breaks, made its appearance.

Today, I would argue, we are still in a transitional phase. Texts are migrating from paper to screen, but like Gutenberg's Bible more than half a millennium ago, e-books remain wedded to an inherited form. They continue to be broken up into discrete pages; in fact, they are designed to foster the illusion of "turning" pages. The Kindle with its leather (or imitation leather) cover looks from the outside like a slender codex.

And to my knowledge, e-books have not incorporated the multimedia features that one might have expected, at least not standard trade books.

Textbooks, however, seem to fall in a different category. Some of them have indeed begun to combine alphabetic text with audio and video. It is too soon to say whether such e-textbooks are in the vanguard of historical change. But one thing is fairly certain: while the book will survive, its form will mutate.

Jeffrey Freedman has published extensively in the field of book and media history and teaches classes at Stern and Yeshiva Colleges on “Media Revolutions: From Scroll to Screen” and “History of the Book: From Gutenberg to Google.” He would like to thank his students for their input on questions pertaining to the future of the book.





Has the Digital Age Made Books Obsolete?

DR. TAMAR AVNET, Professor of Marketing and Chair of the Marketing Department, Sy Syms School of Business



In order to answer this question, one first needs to understand what value a book brings to its readers.

In marketing, we differentiate between a product's features and the value or benefits derived from these features. For example, there is an old saying attributed to Revlon: "In the factory, we manufacture cosmetics. At the beauty counter, we sell hope." Whoever said this knew that customers do not buy features (cosmetic ingredients); they buy benefits (hope). These benefits help users accomplish their ultimate goals and realize certain values or end states.

What might those values or end states be when it comes to a book, and what then is different or similar between the physical existence of the written word versus its virtual twins, the audio book or e-book?

Obviously, both kinds provide information about or a glimpse into an imaginative far-away world since the written or spoken word is the same regardless of its format. What is missing, though, is how our senses experience these words or, more specifically, the vessel in which it is delivered to us. In my research on affect and feelings, I found that the feelings derived from a product are crucial to the evaluation, price and consumption of that product. Can the way a story is consumed influence the reading experience?

The benefits derived from an audio book or an e-book are clear and mostly functional, as they serve the purpose of efficiency: easy to carry (many books inserted into one device), easy to read or listen to (font size is adjustable, screen is illuminated, ear pods are wireless), easy to care for and are immediate (download in a click of a button). The physical book requires a trip to the store or a wait online for delivery, it demands its own personal space and it needs to be cared for and protected. These exact features that make it less efficient are also the ones that make it more lovable and cherished.

The fact that a book is physically there for us and needs our attention, that we can cuddle it in our hands, feel it and bend it are exactly the reasons people feel good about reading a book. It occupies not just one of our senses (hearing in the case of an audio book or vision in an e-book), it occupies our sense of vision, our sense of touch, our sense of hearing (the rustle of the pages) and our sense of smell. By activating these other senses simultaneously, the physical book brings value to the reader that can never be brought on by an audio book or e-book; it evokes our emotional system and through that allows us to experience the story on a higher emotional level.

Going back to the original question, then, the physical book will always be a part of human lives as long as part of being human is to feel and experience emotions.





Can Children's Books Do Better When Talking About Morality?

DR. LISA CHALIK, Assistant Professor of Psychology



We think a lot about how to communicate positive values to our children. We model good behaviors. We reward prosocial actions. We read stories based around positive morals. The list goes on.

All of this is to say that we try to cram as much moral content into our children's lives as we can. Of course, this is a good thing: how else can we raise good people, aside from communicating the right values to them?

However, talking about values is not the whole story. We spend a huge amount of time thinking about the content of what we say and read to our children, but we often overlook the fact that the very structure of our language, independent of content, makes a difference.

When it comes to teaching values, we constantly focus on identities (“you’re a good helper”) rather than behaviors (“you’re good at helping”). At first glance, this doesn’t sound like a big difference or a bad thing: shouldn’t we encourage our children to be among the world’s helpers? Sure. But problems arise when we consider what children do in the face of setbacks.

Setbacks are a normal and inevitable part of childhood. Maybe you’re trying to help Dad set the table for dinner, but you accidentally drop a bowl and break it. Maybe you’re trying to give your baby sister a hug, but you squeeze too hard and she starts to cry. Every well-meaning child, at some point, encounters a situation where he or she accidentally does harm rather than good, despite the best of intentions.

At times like this, if you think that being moral is all about the identity you’ve established (i.e., as a helper or a non-helper), then once you encounter a setback, you’ve run the risk of pushing your identity to the wrong side. As a result, you might be less motivated to attempt those prosocial behaviors again in the future.

A new set of studies, published in the journal *Child Development* by Emily Foster Hanson and her colleagues at New York University, supports this idea. In these studies, 4- and 5-year-old children were told a story in which they could “be a helper” or they could simply “help.” Then, they played a game where they were given an opportunity to help someone, but the researchers had rigged the game so that all the children would fail. After this failure, children were presented with opportunities to perform additional helpful behaviors. Would the type of language that children heard at the beginning of the study influence how likely they were to engage in helpful behaviors at the end?

The answer is yes. Children who had heard the story about “helping” were far more likely to attempt additional helpful behaviors after a setback than children who had heard the story about “being a helper.”

Talking to children about adopting the identity of a helper seemed to diminish their future motivation, whereas describing helping as a behavior they could perform didn't.

If we want to incorporate these ideas into the books that we read to our children, we should start thinking beyond content. We should think more about how the language we use might influence children in ways we don't even realize. Encouraging a value-based identity, like being a helper, feels good because it encourages children to join the ranks. In the face of setbacks, however, this strategy can backfire. A more useful approach may be to teach children that there are good behaviors and bad behaviors and that they can rack up moral points by simply trying to perform as many good behaviors as they can, regardless of whether they are always successful.





The Backwash of War: A New Future for an Extraordinary Book

DR. CYNTHIA WACHTELL, Director of the S. Daniel Abraham Honors Program and Research Associate Professor of American Studies



When I think of the future of the book, I think of the past of the book. In particular, I think of one special book: *The Backwash of War*, by Ellen N. La Motte. I have been immersed in researching and writing about this “lost” classic and its “lost” author for the past few years.

In this remarkable collection of interrelated stories, La Motte, an American volunteer nurse who worked in a French field hospital during World War I, offers a profoundly disturbing image of war. Midway through the book, she explains, “Well, there are many people to write you of the noble side, the heroic side, the exalted side of war. I must write you of what I have seen, the other side, the backwash.”

Published in the fall of 1916, *The Backwash of War* was immediately banned in England and France. Two years later, after being widely hailed as America’s most significant work of war writing and going through four printings, the book was deemed damaging to morale and censored in wartime America. Except for an unsuccessful re-release in 1919 and a reissued edition in 1934, the book—once called “immortal”—remained out of print for nearly a century.

My scholarly edition of the book was just published earlier this month, and it includes, along with other added components, the first biography of La Motte, who was a trained nurse, path-breaking public health advocate and administrator, suffragist, journalist, writer, self-proclaimed anarchist, expatriate, and indefatigable leader of an international anti-opium campaign. In other words, I have created a new and expanded edition of a century-old work by an astounding and long-forgotten woman.

My goal is to bring La Motte and her extraordinary book back to light, to rescue *Backwash* from literary oblivion. I envision a bright new future for this book, in which modern readers encounter and heed La Motte’s warning about the physical and psychic costs of war. And I contemplate how those modern readers will engage with the work in ways the original readers did not. They will read it alongside Ernest Hemingway’s World War I writing, which it quite likely influenced. They will read it alongside seminal works about World War II and Vietnam, such as Joseph Heller’s *Catch-22*, Kurt Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse-Five*, and Tim O’Brien’s *The Things They Carried*. They will read it alongside recent works about our long wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, by authors such as Brian Turner, Phil Klay and Brian Castner. (Castner himself read a pre-release copy and writes, “I was blown away by this book. It reads like a Great Book you’ve

always meant to get to, yet it lies in censure and obscurity.”) Most hauntingly, they will read it alongside war works as yet unwritten, about wars as yet unfought.

Then again, maybe if enough people read *The Backwash of War*, those wars will remain unfought. To my mind, that would be a beautiful future for the book.

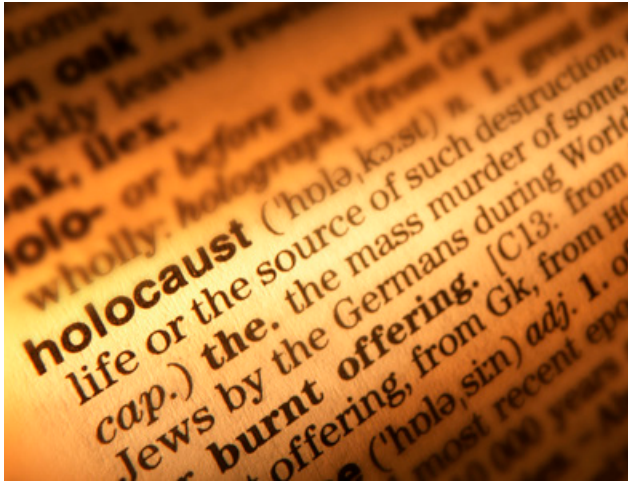
For more information about *The Backwash of War*, see:

<https://jhupbooks.press.jhu.edu/title/backwash-war>



Ellen La Motte





The Future of Holocaust Literature

DR. KAREN SHAWN, Associate Professor of Jewish Education and Administration;
Founding Editor, *PRISM: An Interdisciplinary Journal for Holocaust Educators*



Holocaust literature will continue to serve as a central repository of trauma and memory for the generations who seek to learn the essentials of the Shoah. Narratives, poetry and testimonial literature offer the power and poignancy of a story of an individual, central to knowing that person.

Reading such literature will bring us as close as we can come to uncovering what survivors, whom we will no longer know, wanted us to comprehend.

Some literature offers additional clues, traces of lost lives that can guide readers to a richer, deeper understanding of survivors' experiences and feelings. These traces include a focus on the remnants of an era, the belongings that mattered to the Jews. Such artifacts can illustrate a particular moment, illuminate an individual story and elucidate a specific detail of a broad historical narrative.

Future study, which must seek to make this receding history both tangible and personal if it is to remain relevant, will embrace the literature that describes artifacts and their fates, because such accounts tell us something about the Jews' ways of responding to the tragedy engulfing them when they themselves cannot.

As well, learning about such artifacts in the context of how Jews were trying to survive prompts essential questions that must arise from literature study and will encourage further scholarship, a goal more crucial as the event recedes. Using the tools of historical knowing—the habits of mind and the methods of questioning and close reading that guide scholars of literature as well as historians—we will be able to find in literary narrative the uses, meanings and fates of particular artifacts that would otherwise be lost to us, and, in so doing, find remnants of the people lost to us as well.

In this brief essay, one example must suffice. We can learn more about ghettoization, for instance, from literature about possessions that the Jews took with them when they were forced from their homes: what they thought was most useful and valuable; the torment they faced as the Nazis forced them into ever-smaller quarters, which dictated what belongings they could bring; the manner in which families moved their meager possessions from place to place; and what happened to the things they left behind. Literature offers several such chronicles that will become imperative in a future canon. Here is just one.

Wladyslaw Szlengel, whom Emanuel Ringelblum called “the poet of the ghetto” (Kassow, 2009, p. 316), wrote about the “Things” (“Rzeczy”) the Jews carried as they left their homes on “three of Warsaw’s best streets” (p. 316), forced into lesser but still serviceable quarters:

From Hoza and Wspolna and Marszalkowska Streets cartloads . . .
Jewish cartloads on the move . . .
furniture, tables, and stools,
small valises and bundles,
trunks, boxes, and featherbeds,
suits, portraits,
bedding, pots, rugs,
and draperies.
Cherry wine, big jars, little jars,
glasses, silverware, teapots,
books, toys, knickknacks
moved from Hoza Street to Street Sliska.
In the pocket, a bottle of vodka
In carts, rickshaws, and wagons
the motley mob rides . . .

When the Germans condensed the ghetto and removed Sliska Street from its borders, then “from Sliska to Niska / again everything moved.” Now the Jews bring fewer things:

Bedding, pots—yessirree—
but already without rugs.
No sign of silverware,
no more cherry wine,
no suits, no featherbeds,
no little jars, no portraits.
All these trifles
left on Sliska

After deportations, again the Germans compress the Jews’ living space, now to “blocks”: “Factories where only those with work permits could live” (Aaron, 1990, p. 47). The poet continues:

No more furniture, no stools,
no pots, no bundles.
Lost are the teapots,
books, featherbeds, little jars.
To the devil went
the suits and knickknacks.
Dumped together in a rickshaw . . .
a valise and a coat,
a bottle of tea,
a bite of caramel.
On foot without wagons

The deportations continue; the Jews walk to Ostrowska Street, “an area of seven blocks into which the Jews were forced on September 6, 1942” (p. 47),

without big or small bundles,
without furniture or stools,
without rugs and teapots,
without silverware and little jars,
a valise in the hand,
a warm scarf . . . that’s it,
still a bottle of water,

a chunk of bread tied to suspenders,
things trampled underfoot— . . . (pp. 43–49).

This literature, through its recitation of Jewish “things” left behind, describes the ever-desperate plight of the ghetto Jews, whose chronicled loss of possessions “symbolized the loss of life’s anchors and ultimately life itself” (p. 47) more poignantly and intimately than could any paragraph in a history book. Our past captured contemporaneously in literature will become an ever-stronger part of our future study.

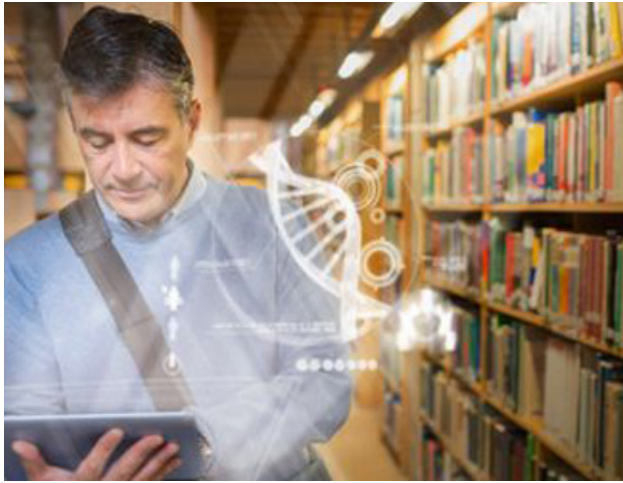
The world will be bereft when the eyewitnesses to this grim history are no longer with us. We may, though, take some small comfort in the knowledge that when survivors themselves can no longer speak, their literature will speak for them.

To give voice to the lost ones, to grant us the means to hear and to learn from them: This is the present of Holocaust literature, and surely its future as well.

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The Age of Anxiety (and Innovation) for the Academic Library

PAUL GLASSMAN, Director of University Libraries



At an annual conference for academic librarians at Rutgers University, James G. Neal, then Vice President for Information Services and University Librarian at Columbia University, spoke on “The Imperfect Storm: The Prospects for Systemic Change Across Academic Libraries.” (1)

Scandalizing his audience, he began by diagnosing us as suffering from a continual state of anxiety about the future—and our organizations as in crisis. The stimuli for these observations, of course, were the cosmic changes the digital universe has brought to the place of libraries in the academic enterprise.

Neal’s prospects for changing library roles included libraries as consumers, aggregators, publishers, educators, R&D organizations, entrepreneurs, and policy advocates. (2) Consumers? Yes, academic librarians are increasingly “educated consumers,” adopting creative methods for negotiating consortial agreements with commercial distributors.

Publishers? Yes, we have launched institutional repositories as an alternative channel for highlighting and disseminating faculty scholarly and creative work.

Educators? Certainly, we collaborate with faculty members in providing instruction in research methods so as to cultivate discerning information-seeking skills in students.

Entrepreneurs? Indeed, adopting an entrepreneurial approach to change is essential for any successful organization, and successful organizations adapt their core competencies to support innovation. (3)

But organizational agility is fraught with ambiguity, and curating materials for teaching, learning, research, and inspiration in the digital age is still more intuitive than data-driven. As digital formats replicate or supersede print publications, we need a better understanding of the cognitive aspects of reading text on the screen in comparison with text on a page. Researchers at the University of Maryland concluded that students are less likely to comprehend and retain complex material read on a screen than on the printed page. (4)

Nevertheless, several academic libraries have jettisoned their print collections. In 2010, Cushing Academy, a small boarding school in Massachusetts, instituted a digital-only library. (5) And in preparation for a major building renovation, Atlanta’s esteemed Georgia Tech has relocated almost all its books to a warehouse five miles from campus, reflecting a paradigm shift that favors digital learning and scholarship. Critics, however, observe that the change eclipses the intellectual serendipity that browsing affords.

Although not universal, these innovations have profound implications for the role of the library in the

academic enterprise, and the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) presupposes this in its recently ratified set of guidelines. (6) Rather than mandate policies and procedures, ACRL suggests a set of performance indicators, from institutional effectiveness to external relations, and advocates an evidence-based approach that aligns with the overarching expectations that accrediting agencies use to assess parent institutions.

Since academic library buildings may be campus centerpieces, what happens to them if their function as information warehouses diminishes? What is the library building of the future? With as little as 15 percent of space devoted to collections, library space allocation models are radically different than they were only 20 years ago. (7) The most successful models view the library building as an academic town square, as a place for student engagement, collaboration and peer-to-peer learning.

If, as John Minogue maintains, the 20th-century university is obsolete, is its library endangered, too? (8)

It is increasingly clear that a student-centered facility and dynamic set of services is the key to a vital and evolving academic library. Is there a mantra—a guiding principle—to help those of us entrusted with reinventing these citadels of learning? Clearly, that mantra, which comes from Lorcan Dempsey, Vice-President and Chief Strategist of the Online Computer Library Center, is that the old model of the “user in the life of the library” is now the “library in the life of the user.” (9)

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