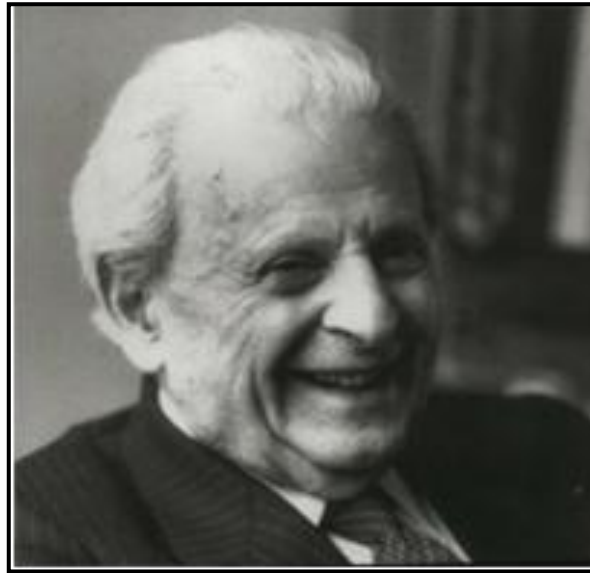


**LEVINAS, BIBLICAL EXEGESIS,  
AND LITERATURE**



**2012 Corcoran Chair Conference  
March 18-19, 2012  
Boston College**

Center for Christian-Jewish Learning  
[www.bc.edu/cjl](http://www.bc.edu/cjl)

## Levinas, Biblical Exegesis, and Literature

2012 Corcoran Chair Conference

Boston College

March 18-19, 2012

### RATIONALE

This interfaith and interdisciplinary conference gathers together philosophers, theologians, and literary scholars. Its purpose is to study how the newly expanded Levinas corpus can help us be better readers of the Bible and literature in general.

Emmanuel Levinas as Biblical Exegete and Writer? While his reputation as philosopher and Talmudic scholar continues to soar, other interests remain unexplored. The philosopher himself puts forth these two different and quite new directions in Levinassian studies. The previously unpublished *Carnets de Captivité* (2 volumes to date, Paris: Grasset, 2009) documents his early and ongoing desire to be a **writer** in addition to a philosopher, especially a novelist and literary critic. He hints at a second new direction in the preface to his major treatise *Totalité et Infini*, where his interest in language takes an unexpected turn:

*It is of the very essence of language, which consists in continually undoing its phrase by...exegesis, in unsaying the said, in attempting to restate without ceremony what has already been ill understood, in the inevitable ceremonial in which the said delights...*

In short, he sees exegesis as natural to language itself, as necessary to any act of writing and understanding as to the Talmud or philosophy or, indeed, the Bible.

Jean-Luc Marion highlighted the timeliness and importance of this literary question in the following way:

*One day—one would hope soon—we shall have to proceed to a stylistic study of Levinas' literary corpus, living proof that one can think in French, at least in that French made of breaks in syntax, ellipses, metaphors, elisions, allusions, implicit quotations, indeed neologisms or changes of meaning from their usual sense, etc.: in short, a French foreign to French and thus all the more intimately faithful to its genius, a writer's French, not a professor's or a philosopher's.*

One intriguing aspect of the philosopher's literary endeavor—as expressed abundantly in the *Carnets* but seldom in his published works—is his fascination with metaphorical expression. Just as Descartes famously posited that one cannot do math without believing in God, Levinas puts forth the theory that God is to be seen as the “metaphor of metaphors.” Our purpose is to unpack some of the implications of this and similar Levinassian theories, in particular as they relate to his practice of literary criticism and, potentially, biblical exegesis.

## CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

### SUNDAY, MARCH 18

**GASSON HALL 100, CHESTNUT HILL CAMPUS**

#### **2:00 p.m. - WELCOME**

**Dr. James Bernauer, SJ**, Director of the Boston College Center for Christian-Jewish Learning and Kraft Family Professor of Philosophy

#### **2:15-3:30 p.m. - KEYNOTE ADDRESS**

##### **“The Voice and the Book”**

**Dr. Catherine Chaliar**, Professor of Moral Philosophy and Jewish Thought at the University of Paris

#### **3:30-3:45 p.m. - BREAK**

#### **3:45-6:15 p.m. - SPEAKER PANEL**

*Session Chair:* **Dr. Claire Katz**, Associate Professor of Philosophy and Women’s Studies at Texas A&M University and 2011-2012 Copeland Fellow at Amherst College

##### **“Whose Pain? Levinas’ Critique of Job”**

**Dr. Theodore Perry**, 2011-2013 Corcoran Visiting Chair in Christian-Jewish Relations at Boston College

##### **“On Seeing With *Two* Eyes: Universalism and Particularism in Levinas’ Philosophical Appropriation of The Hebrew Bible and Talmudic Tradition”**

**Dr. Jacob Meskin**, Academic Director of Adult Learning, and Assistant Professor of Jewish Thought and Education, at Hebrew College

##### **“Metaphor in Levinas’s Unpublished Writings: Implications for a Biblical Hermeneutic”**

**Dr. Annette Aronowicz**, Professor of Religious Studies and the Robert G. and Patricia F. Cohn Weis Chair of Judaic Studies at Franklin and Marshal College

##### **“Beyond Haverut: Towards an Inter-Faith Hermeneutics”**

**Dr. Abigail Doukhan**, Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Queens College

### MONDAY, MARCH 19

**MURRAY FUNCTION ROOM IN YAWKEY CENTER, CHESTNUT HILL CAMPUS**

#### **8:30-10:30 a.m. - SPEAKER PANEL**

*Session Chair:* **Dr. Andrew Kelley**, Associate Professor of Philosophy at Bradley University

**“On Holiness - Through the Lens of Levinas: A Phenomenological Approach within the Context of the Jewish Commentary Tradition”**

**Dr. Richard Sugarman**, Professor of Religion and Director of the Integrated Humanities Program at the University of Vermont

**“God, Metaphor and Trace”**

**Dr. Jeffrey Bloechl**, Associate Professor of Philosophy at Boston College

**“Literary Levinas: Between Word and Image”**

**Dr. Richard Kearney**, Charles B. Seelig Chair of Philosophy at Boston College

**10:30-10:45 a.m. - BREAK**

**10:45 a.m.-12:00 p.m. - KEYNOTE ADDRESS**

*Session Chair:* **Dr. Ruth Langer**, Professor of Jewish Studies at Boston College and Associate Director of the Center for Christian-Jewish Learning at Boston College

**“Salvation through Literature: Reading, Writing, and the *Carnets de captivité*”**

**Dr. Seán Hand**, Professor of French at the University of Warwick

**12:00-12:45 p.m. - BREAK**

**12:45-2:45 p.m. - SPEAKER PANEL**

*Session Chair:* **Dr. David Vanderhooft**, Associate Professor of Hebrew Bible at Boston College

**“Oral Discourse is the Plenitude of Discourse”: Emmanuel Levinas' Philosophy of Language Applied to Reading”**

**Dr. Olga Kuminova**, Postdoctoral Researcher at the Foreign Literatures and Linguistics Department of the Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Beer-Sheva

**“On Levinas and the Question of Cardiology”**

**Dr. Alan Udoff**, Professor of Philosophy and Religious Studies at St. Francis College

**“Ethical Modulations: Reconciling the Infinite Face with the Unique Face”**

**Dr. Martin Cohen**, Adjunct Associate Professor in the Honors Program at Boston College

**2:45-3:00 p.m. - BREAK**

**3:00-4:15 p.m. - KEYNOTE ADDRESS**

*Session Chair:* **Dr. Peter Machinist**, Hancock Professor of Hebrew and Other Oriental Languages at Harvard University

**“Moses’s Encounter with G-d and G-d’s Encounter with Moses: A Reading of the Moses Narratives in Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas”**

**Dr. Marvin A. Sweeney**, Professor of Hebrew Bible at the Claremont Lincoln University and Claremont School of Theology

**4:15-5:00 p.m. - ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION**

*Session Chair: Dr. Tamara Cohn Eskenazi*, Professor of Bible at Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion, 2011 National Jewish Book Award Recipient for *The JPS Bible Commentary: Ruth*, and 2012-2013 National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship Recipient

**5:00 p.m. - CONFERENCE ENDS**

## SPEAKER ABSTRACTS AND BIOGRAPHIES

### “The Voice and the Book”

Dr. Catherine Chalier, Professor of Moral Philosophy and  
Jewish Thought at the University of Paris

What does Levinas mean when he writes that we must think of the humaneness of the human being in relation to books? Is indeed what is written in souls first written in books? These two main questions will orientate this paper on the voice and the book. This paper will put an emphasis on the importance of the word “*expression*” as described in the *Inédits* and also on the necessity to listen to the voice, the master’s voice and the pupil’s voice when reading books. It will explain why human voices, carnal voices, are the necessary witnesses of the Infinite’s voice.

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Catherine Chalier is Professor of moral philosophy and Jewish thought in Paris Ouest Nanterre University. She has written over 25 books dealing with the link between philosophy and the Jewish source of thinking, among them six books on Levinas. The latest books are *La nuit, le jour au diapason de la création* (Seuil, 2009); *Le désir de conversion* (Seuil, 2011); *Kalonymus Shapiro, Rabbin au Ghetto de Varsovie* (Arfuyen, 2011).

## **“Whose Pain? Levinas’ Critique of Job”**

Dr. Theodore A. Perry, 2011-2013 Corcoran Visiting Chair  
in Christian-Jewish Relations at Boston College

In the matter of human suffering, LaRoche foucauld may have provided a key to reading the book of Job: “We all have sufficient strength to bear the suffering of others.” This wry observation seems to apply not only to Job’s consolors but even to Job himself, who rattles on endlessly *and exclusively* about his own situation, provoking Emmanuel Levinas to wonder whether Job ever raises the question of the suffering of the Other. The author is especially interested in how Levinas attempts to resolve Job’s exclusion of the Other by a rather innovative reading of Job 38:4, where God asks Job, in a rather haughty put-down: “Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?”

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Theodore A. Perry is the 2011-2013 Corcoran Visiting Chair in Christian-Jewish Relations at Boston College. Dr. Perry is Professor Emeritus at the University of Connecticut. He has published and taught prolifically in the areas of comparative literature, the Hebrew Bible as literature, medieval Sephardic (Spanish Jewish) and Spanish literature, religious studies, paremiology, and 16th-century French literature. He was Professor of Comparative Literature at Ben Gurion University of the Negev in Israel, Cardin Chair in Jewish Studies at Loyola College in Maryland, Visiting Fulbright Professor at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and Professor of Modern and Classical Languages at the University of Connecticut. He has also taught at Williams College and Smith College. Dr. Perry studied at Yale University (Ph.D., Romance Philology; M.A., French Literature), the Universite de Bordeaux, France (Fulbright Fellow in French Literature and Philosophy), Post-Doctoral study at Brandeis University and Hebrew University, and Bowdoin College (B.A. *summa cum laude*, French).

He is the author of twelve books, including *Erotic Spirituality: The Integrative Tradition from Leone Ebreo to John Donne* (University: University of Alabama Press, 1980); *The Moral Proverbs of Santob de Carrión: Jewish Wisdom in Christian Spain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987); *Dialogues with Kohelet* (Penn State, 1993); *Wisdom Literature and the Structure of Proverbs* (Penn State, 1993); *The Honeymoon is Over: Jonah’s Arguments with God* (2006); *God’s Twilight Zone: Wisdom in the Hebrew Bible* (2008). His *Joyous Vanity: Qohelet’s Guide to Living Well* (a Levinassian analysis), is forthcoming.

**“On Seeing With *Two* Eyes: Universalism and Particularism in Levinas' Philosophical Appropriation of The Hebrew Bible and Talmudic Tradition”**

Dr. Jacob Meskin, Academic Director of Adult Learning,  
and Assistant Professor of Jewish Thought and Education, at Hebrew College

Criticism, whether ultimately sound or not, can sharpen and renew vision. In recent philosophical work Badiou, Zizek, and in a different way Agamben—among others—have sought to rediscover in the New Testament writings of Paul a profound source for a new kind of messianic, transformative, and utterly thoroughgoing universalism. This work has generated intense debate, but even in what many might view as its excesses, it can catalyze valuable new readings. The present essay, then, seeks to clarify the very different and more complex position that emerges from Levinas' unusual kind of philosophical understanding of the Hebrew Bible and the talmudic tradition through which it has traditionally been read. It stands in opposition both to this far-reaching and controversial philosophical turn to Paul, *and* to a recent trend in scholarship on Levinas that attempts to question and devalue his rootedness in Jewish tradition. The author will argue here instead that Levinas' sophisticated appropriation of Husserl and other philosophical resources, allows him to grasp and benefit from the Hebrew Bible and talmudic tradition in a unique way, enabling him to articulate the non-destructive and mutually reinforcing simultaneity of a tolerant universalism *and* a discrete particularity. Significantly for Levinas, this complex notion is carried within what one might call a Hebraic and talmudic embodied intellectual culture; this was originally (and still is today) lived out religiously, but that modality may not be the only form this culture can take. In arguing for these points, the author will explore some of Levinas' early comments on the Hebrew Bible, and some of his hitherto unpublished manuscripts, now available in the recently issued volumes one and two of his complete works, as well as his better known philosophical masterworks.

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Jacob Meskin is Academic Director of Adult Learning, and Assistant Professor of Jewish Thought and Education, at Hebrew College. He was the inaugural holder of the Ruderman Chair in Jewish Studies at Northeastern University in 2009-2010, and has taught previously at Princeton University, Rutgers University, the Bernard Revel Graduate School of Yeshiva University, Williams College, and Lehigh University. He received his MA and PhD from Princeton University. His articles have appeared in *Modern Judaism*, *The Journal of Religion*, *CrossCurrents*, *Judaism*, *Soundings*, and *Levinas Studies*, as well as in a number of edited volumes.



## **“Metaphor in Levinas’s Unpublished Writings: Implications for a Biblical Hermeneutic”**

Dr. Annette Aronowicz, Professor of Religious Studies and the Robert G. and Patricia F. Cohn Weis Chair of Judaic Studies at Franklin and Marshal College

In the two recently published volumes of Emmanuel Levinas’s archival material, dating from 1937 to 1964, many of his reflections are devoted to language, and within that, to metaphor. In their introductions to these volumes, the editors, Rodolphe Calin and Catherine Chalièr, connect these reflections to Levinas’s subsequent *oeuvre*. Each notes that metaphor as a category no longer figures in it, but some aspect of these reflections reappear in a reworked form both in the philosophical work and in the Jewish writings. Given the space given to metaphor in the unpublished writings and its ramifications elsewhere, the concern of this paper will be threefold. In the first place, it will focus on the various ways Levinas works out his idea of transcendence in the context of working out his notion of metaphor. At a certain point, he arrives at the conclusion that metaphor no longer seems adequate to express transcendence, but nonetheless, at least in these writings, he does not completely drop the term, and his explorations of the excess metaphor represents vis-à-vis other modes of thought remain very suggestive. Secondly, the author will suggest how his notion of metaphor, and the transcendence associated with it, appear in the hermeneutic he develops to interpret Jewish texts. Finally, the author will turn to two exegeses of biblical texts, one by the poet Yehuda Amichai, and the other his own, to reflect on two paths to biblical interpretation his reflections on metaphor open us for us.

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Annette Aronowicz is Professor of Religious Studies and the Robert G. and Patricia F. Cohn Weis Chair of Judaic Studies at Franklin and Marshal College. She is the translator of *Nine Talmudic Readings by Emmanuel Levinas* (Indiana, 1991), *Jews and Christians on Time and Eternity* (Stanford, 1998) and a series of articles on the Jewish Communist playwright Chaim Sloves.

## **“Beyond Haverut: Towards an Inter-Faith Hermeneutics”**

Dr. Abigail Doukhan, Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Queens College

*Haverut* is a Jewish approach to reading scripture which acknowledges that the meaning of a given text can only be found with a partner, or friend (*haver*). While such a pluralistic approach seems to give way to a certain hermeneutical freedom, it goes without saying that, for Levinas, the community engaged in *Haverut* must necessarily be Jewish. The Hebrew scriptures remain, according to Levinas, indissociable from the tradition from which they have emerged. An approach which makes abstraction of the tradition surrounding the Hebrew scriptures could only arrive, according to Levinas, to a misunderstanding or misinterpretation of the text. Although we understand Levinas' concern with guarding the text's intrinsic connection with tradition, one wonders as to whether the text's entrenchment in a given tradition does not run other risks. Levinas himself acknowledges those risks and proposes the broadening of the hermeneutical circle beyond an elitist circle of *connoisseurs* to include “other seekers” in order to avoid the crystallization of the text into dogma. Yet these “other seekers,” although situated on the margins of the Jewish community, must, according to Levinas, remain part of that community if the text is to be salvaged from the dangers of misinterpretation. This is where we beg to differ from Levinas. Why not extend the identity of these “other seekers” to people beyond the Jewish community? Levinas' definition of pluralism as the confrontation between strangers already invites us to do so. This paper will follow along the lines of this invitation and will discuss the pros and cons of a broadening of the concept of *Haverut* to the stranger beyond the Jewish community, thereby paving the way towards a possible inter-faith hermeneutics.

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Abigail Doukhan is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Queens College, New York City, and holds the Pearl and Nathan Halegua Family Initiative in Ethics and Tolerance supported by the Pearl and Nathan Halegua Family foundation. She holds a Masters in philosophy from the Sorbonne and a Ph.D. in philosophy from Nanterre University in Paris, France, under the direction of Catherine Chaliel. Her dissertation focused on the concept of exile in the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas and she is currently finishing a book version of it entitled *Emmanuel Levinas: A Philosophy of Exile* (Forthcoming: Continuum, 2012). Doukhan's research interests are fueled by a deep concern for the status of the stranger or exiled within today's contemporary societies, as well as a passion for dialogue between different faiths and ethnicities. Her most recent publications include an article on the structure of inter-faith dialogue according to Levinas (“The Hospitality of Abraham: Reflections on a Levinassian Approach to Interfaith Dialogue,” in *The Face of my Brother: Israel, Islam, and the Church*, Crossroads, Forthcoming, 2012) and an essay on the connection between exile and ethics in the philosophy of Levinas (“From Exile to Hospitality: A Key to the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas,” in *Philosophy Today*, Fall 2010).

**“On Holiness - Through the Lens of Levinas: A Phenomenological Approach  
within the Context of the Jewish Commentary Tradition”**

Dr. Richard Sugarman, Professor of Religion and Director  
of the Integrated Humanities Program at the University of Vermont

We will explore some aspects of the phenomenon of Holiness through the lens of Levinas. Special emphasis will be given to Leviticus, chapter nineteen, *Kedoshim*, the *locus classicus* on this subject. For Levinas, holiness is an ethical-metaphysical category, as opposed to “the sacred,” which belongs to the realm of ontology and power. Why does the sacred so easily lend itself to idolatry, while the holy expresses itself as a concern for the “widow, the stranger, the orphan, and the poor?” What are some of the primary ways that holiness manifests itself in relation to other people? If Holiness may be viewed as ‘the surplus of morality,’ in the thought of Levinas, how does this surplus or excess show itself? More precisely, we will focus on the commandment “to love your neighbor as yourself.” We will do so in the context of this portion of the Torah, in which the commandment appears. In following out this approach, we will consider some of the material expressions of the laws of Holiness. Why must there be laws of Holiness? We will ask why, according to the Rabbinic tradition, these laws are distinctive in that they are addressed to the entire nation of Israel. Why is there a reiterated emphasis upon matters of economic justice, such as using honest weights and measures? We will consider in what way Levinas adds to some of the Rabbinic commentaries on the subject before us. How, in turn, does the analysis of these themes help us to better understand the ongoing importance of the radically original philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas?

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Richard Sugarman is presently Professor of Religion and Director of the Integrated Humanities Program at the University of Vermont, where he has taught for the past 40 years. He is a Yale trained philosopher who studied under John Wild, who is responsible for introducing the thought of Emmanuel Levinas to America. Sugarman was one of the first American philosophers to teach *Totality and Infinity*. Sugarman received his B.A. and M.A. in Philosophy from Yale, and his Ph.D. in Philosophy from Boston University. He is the author or editor of several books, including *Rancor Against Time: The Phenomenology of “Ressentiment,”* (Felix Meiner Verlag Hamburg, 1980). He is the co-author of *Reclaiming the Humanities: The Roots of Self-Knowledge in the Greek and Biblical Worlds* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1986). He is the guest editor of *Levinas in a Humanistic Context: Phenomenological Inquiry; Volume 24*, (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000) and *The Promise of Phenomenology: Posthumous Papers of John Wild* (Lexington Books, 2006). He edited and annotated John Wild’s posthumously published commentary *On Totality and Infinity* found in *The Promise of Phenomenology*. Professor Sugarman has published numerous articles on the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas and given papers at international forums dedicated to the work and thought of Levinas.

At the University of Vermont, Professor Sugarman has received teaching awards at both the college and university levels. Currently, he is working on a book entitled “A Transcending Humanism: Emmanuel Levinas and the Jewish Bible.”

Professor Sugarman was appointed “Commissioner of Reality,” by then mayor Bernard Sanders of Burlington, Vermont. He wishes to emphasize that this was a non-paying position. He presently serves as a senior advisor to Senator Sanders.

## **“God, Metaphor and Trace”**

Dr. Jeffrey Bloechl, Associate Professor of Philosophy at Boston College

In 1960, in lecture only recently published in the second volume of his "Oeuvres complètes," Levinas referred to God as "metaphor of metaphors"; in 1961, he published "Totalité et Infini," which contains important resources for new work in philosophy of religion; in 1962, he committed a lecture, also published only recently in his "Oeuvres complètes," to the theme of "Signification"; in 1963, his important essay "La trace de l'autre" appeared in the "Tijdschrift voor Filosofie." The author will offer some general remarks on the relationship between these unpublished and published texts, the move to some concentrated reflection on Levinas's move toward a conception of language that admits a relation with God without pretending to submit God to the rules of grammar or capture God in a word or idea.

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Jeffrey Bloechl is Associate Professor of Philosophy, Boston College; founding series editor of "Levinas Studies. An Annual Review"; writes and teaches extensively in philosophy of religion, contemporary European thought, and the history of philosophy.

## **“Literary Levinas: Between Word and Image”**

Dr. Richard Kearney, Charles B. Seelig Chair of Philosophy at Boston College

This paper will explore some of Levinas's views on literature and imagination as sketched out in “Totality and Infinity,” “Reality and Its Shadows,” “Proper Names,” and other essays. It will examine the way in which Levinas seeks to distinguish between an imaginative literature (magical) and a thinking literature (ethical)—comparable to Sartre's distinction between poetic and prosaic literature—and ask: does he succeed?

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Richard Kearney holds the Charles B. Seelig Chair of Philosophy at Boston College and has served as a Visiting Professor at University College Dublin, the University of Paris (Sorbonne) and the University of Nice. He is the author of over twenty books on European philosophy and literature (including two novels and a volume of poetry) and has edited or co-edited eighteen more. He is a Member of the Royal Irish Academy and was formerly a member of the Arts Council of Ireland, the Higher Education Authority of Ireland and chairman of the Irish School of Film at University College Dublin. As a public intellectual in Ireland, he was involved in drafting a number of proposals for a Northern Irish peace agreement (1983, 1993, 1995). He has presented five series on culture and philosophy for Irish and/or British television and broadcast extensively on the European media.

Recent publications include a trilogy entitled 'Philosophy at the Limit'. The three volumes are *On Stories* (Routledge, 2002), *The God Who May Be* (Indiana UP, 2001) and *Strangers, Gods, and Monsters* (Routledge, 2003). Since then, Richard Kearney has published *Debates in Continental Philosophy* (Fordham, 2004), *The Owl of Minerva* (Ashgate, 2005), *Navigations* (Syracuse University Press, 2007) and *Anatheism* (Columbia, 2009). His recent edited/co-edited books include *Phenomenologies of the Stranger* (Fordham UP, 2011), *Hosting the Stranger* (Continuum, 2011) and *Traversing the Imaginary* (Brill, 2011). Richard Kearney is international director of the Guestbook Project.

## **“Salvation through Literature: Reading, Writing, and the Carnets de captivité”**

Dr. Seán Hand, Professor of French at the University of Warwick

Levinas's posthumously published *Carnets de captivité*, written mainly during wartime captivity, record a wide-ranging reading of literature and extended plans for novelistic writing. Given Levinas's post-war judgement of the artwork as false transcendence, the suggested dialectic between captivity and captivation confronts a normative presentation of Levinas with the seemingly conflicting evidence of reading and writing that might usher in a post-philosophical phenomenology of redefined Jewish identity. Most remarkable, in this context, is Levinas's 1944 reading of Léon Bloy's Letters to his fiancée, whose noted pronouncements about suffering, the female, glory, and the absolutization of thought arguably anticipate major exegetical strategies in the post-war philosophy. Levinas's captivated engagement with literature during this period therefore compels us to re-view his major work as retaining at least the trace of seemingly opposing intellectual, artistic, and salvatory visions.

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Seán Hand is Professor of French at the University of Warwick. He is the author of, inter alia, *Emmanuel Levinas* (Routledge, 2008), translator of *Difficult Freedom* (Athlone, 1990) and editor of *The Levinas Reader* (Blackwell, 1989) and *Facing the Other: Emmanuel Levinas* (Routledge, 1996).

**“Oral Discourse is the Plenitude of Discourse:” Emmanuel Levinas'  
Philosophy of Language Applied to Reading”**

Dr. Olga Kuminova, Postdoctoral Researcher at the Foreign Literatures and Linguistics  
Department of the Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Beer-Sheva

This paper theorizes reading as an activity that presupposes and is conditioned by a specific mode of intersubjective relationship between the reader and the author. This view of reading is based on Emmanuel Levinas' philosophy of language as primarily a mode of relationship between the self and the Other. The author argues that this paradigm, originally relating to spoken language, can be also applied to written language. The key concepts of Levinas' philosophy of language are "the said" vs. "the saying," the speaker *as* the signifier, and language as a sign system being secondary to language as an *attitude* of the self towards the Other. Levinas' view of language can be either pitched against or dialectically synthesized with Derrida's view of writing as a machine (*Limited Inc.*) and language as essentially reducible to writing (*Of Grammatology*). It can be said that with writing, and even more so with print, the foundational relationship with the Other, emphasized by Levinas, is overlaid and in many respects transformed by technical factors, but still present at the core of the communicative act of writing, in spite of the interlocutors being distanced by time, space and the very media of writing or print.

Some literary and psychoanalytic theorists have embraced similar views of writing, which stress the reader's need to presuppose the agency and initial presence of the author of a written utterance in order for interpretation to take place; this necessary or inevitable presupposition is discussed, from different angles, by Walter Benn Michaels and Steven Knapp in their article "Against Theory," and also by Eric Santner and Jean Laplanche, who argue separately but similarly that signification "to" or "from" is prior to signification "of." Limit cases of unreadable texts in extinct languages, or Knapp and Michaels' famous example of a poem left by a receding wave on the seashore, show that a piece of written language, in order to be perceived and dealt with as language, has to be oriented by the reader as addressed to him or her by an "other," as "signification [coming] from" someone, even if the reader has no way of knowing what it is a signification "of" or *who* it is a signal from. Thus, the paper outlines a theoretical basis of such reading strategies as "reading for the author" (Barbara Hochman) or personal marginalia (Heather Jackson), which emerged in the period of the eighteenth and nineteenth-century "reading revolution," along with the advent of mass print.

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Olga Kuminova is a postdoctoral researcher at the Foreign Literatures and Linguistics Department of the Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Beer-Sheva, under the guidance of Prof. Barbara Hochman. The working title of the research project is "From Reader-Author Companionship to the Birth of Fan Mail in the United States, 1840-1880," and a central component of the project's theoretical framework is Emmanuel Levinas' philosophy of language. A book based on her M.A. thesis titled "Emmanuel Levinas's Concept of the Feminine and Its Feminist Critics - Towards a Dialogical Model of Theorizing Sexual Difference" was published by VDM Verlag, Saarbrücken, Germany, in 2009.

Following the completion of her PhD in 2009, she has been working as an adjunct lecturer at the Ben-Gurion University and Kaye College for Education, Beer Sheva, teaching literature and academic writing in English.

## **“On Levinas and the Question of Cardiology”**

Dr. Alan Udoff, Professor of Philosophy and Religious Studies at St. Francis College

Taking as its signpost the master metaphor "heart," a version of the quarrel between the ancients and moderns is staged in the figures of Bahya ibn Paquda and Emmanuel Levinas, and the themes of intellectual and practical virtue, respectively. At ring center is the text of *Genesis* 1.1 as interpreted by Rashi, and Rashi as interpreted by Levinas.

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Alan Udoff teaches at St. Francis College, in the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies. His areas of study and publication include the history of philosophy, literary/cinematic theory and criticism, Jewish thought, and the Holocaust.



**“Ethical Modulations: Reconciling the Infinite Face with the Unique Face”**

Dr. Martin Cohen, Adjunct Associate Professor in the Honors Program at Boston College

The Infinite Face has no attributes. This is what keeps the other from being reduced to the same. Knowing attributes, according to Levinas, despoils the infinite face and deprives it of its otherness. Yet ethical responsiveness requires perceiving and adjusting to the particular attributes of the other. This talk will explore how Levinas' valid ethical cry protecting alterity can be reconciled with the kind of discernment that makes it possible to modulate to the call and challenge of a unique person.

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Martin Cohen is an adjunct associate professor in the Honors Program at Boston College.

**“Moses’s Encounter with G-d and G-d’s Encounter with Moses:  
A Reading of the Moses Narratives in Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas”**

Dr. Marvin A. Sweeney, Professor of Hebrew Bible at the  
Claremont Lincoln University and Claremont School of Theology

This paper will present a reading of the Torah in dialog with Emmanuel Levinas. Its purpose is to explore the encounter with the Other on the part of the TWO major characters, viz., Moses and G-d, insofar as each is revealed to the Other during the course of the narrative and each is transformed as a result of their interaction. It will both affirm and test Levinas’s understanding of love or beneficence on the part of the Other by pointing to both the constructive aspects of Moses’ and G-d’s interrelationship as well as the tensions that emerge between them and the consequences that result. Overall, the paper will argue that Levinas’s understanding of encounter with the Other provides an appropriate hermeneutical standpoint from which to read biblical literature, but that his understanding of the beneficence of such encounter must be modified to account for the tensions and conflicts that emerge. The paper will begin with a discussion of Levinas’s hermeneutical perspectives, including his rejection of the concept of totality in favor of infinity, his concept of the Self formed in relation to the Other, his understanding of Face in relation to moral summons, and his understanding of ethics applied to both Moses/Israel and to G-d. Issues to be treated include Moses’ encounter with G-d in the burning bush and plague narratives (Exodus 3-15); the revelation of Torah at Mt. Sinai and its recapitulation in Moab (Exodus 19-Numbers 10; Deuteronomy); and conflict between Moses and G-d in the Golden Calf episode (Exodus 32-34); the Spy Narratives (Numbers 13-14); and the call for water from the rock at Meribah (Numbers 20) resulting in G-d’s barring Moses from the land of Israel (Deuteronomy 34).

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The Center for Christian-Jewish Learning is devoted to the multifaceted development and implementation of new relationships between Christians and Jews that are based not merely on toleration but on full respect and mutual enrichment. This defining purpose flows from the Mission of Boston College and responds to the vision expressed in Roman Catholic documents ever since the Second Vatican Council.

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Educationally, we are committed to the goal that "Jews and Judaism should not occupy an occasional and marginal place in [Christian religious education]: their presence there is essential and should be organically integrated" (*Notes*, 2). We are convinced that Jews and Christians enrich and deepen their respective identities by joint educational endeavors. The Center is thus dedicated to conducting educational research and to offering programs, both in the university and the wider community, in which Christians and Jews explore their traditions together.

In short, the Center applies the scholarly resources of a Catholic university to the task of encouraging mutual knowledge between Christians and Jews at every level (*Notes*, 27).

[*Notes* = Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, *Notes on the Correct Way to Present Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Teaching in the Roman Catholic Church* (1985).]

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