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CHAPTER 13

Unpacking My Father's Bookstore

Laurence Roth

For what else is this collection but a disorder to which habit has accommodated itself to such an extent that it can appear as order?
—Walter Benjamin, “Unpacking My Library”

Two early memories of my father's bookstore, J. Roth / Bookseller of Fine & Scholarly Judaica, are a prologue of sorts for this essay. Here is the first: it is 1967, and I am six years old. My father, Jack Roth, is having an IBM computerized billing machine installed in the store. This is the first store, the one on La Cienega Boulevard in Los Angeles, which started out as M. Harelick Books, a small Yiddish-oriented bookshop that Michael Harelick opened in 1944 and that my father bought and is making over into a more sophisticated operation. He has just expanded into what had been a beauty shop next door, which is where the machine is, in the new bookkeeping area. Reels of hole-punched tape magically run a clacking, loud typewriter. The salesman is explaining the system as I walk the pattern in the linoleum, black and white tiles arranged in concentric squares. I walk in rhythm to the keystrokes as they drum across the page—long burst, long burst, short, short, short. This is the sound of bookselling.

The second memory: it is 1971, and I am ten or eleven years old. For some reason, I am alone in the back of the store. I am bored sitting there, and I wander out to the bookshelves to find something interesting to read. Somehow, I stumble upon a few copies of Philip Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint*, which, because of customer complaints, my father has moved from

the new-book table, where they had been displayed face up, and has shelved them, yellow spines out, in the literature section. Did I really find them by accident? Did I know they were there? Had they been moved, in fact, because they were no longer new? What I remember is that I took a copy back to the lunch table and something changed, something that had to do with girls and cored apples and a character named The Monkey for sure, but also with reading. What was *this* doing in the store? What did it *mean*?

Accounting and interpretation. These memories are emblematic of the two parts of this critical meditation on that bookstore, each an aspect of my understanding of, and introduction to, modern Jewish literature. On the one hand, the business of bookselling: it suffused the life of my family. At the end of the day, if my father was home for dinner, and he rarely was, the table conversation was about the ludicrous demands of New York Jewish publishers or, most likely, the outrageous behavior of customers—rabbis at the top of the list, followed by bar mitzvah-gift shoppers, *Yekkes*, those snooty German Jews, and sundry Yiddish-speaking oddballs. On the Sabbath and holidays, my father would sometimes take us to an Orthodox synagogue, sometimes a Conservative synagogue, and, on occasion, even to a Reform synagogue. It was good for business. At social events, my father would often take orders or promise to track down a hard-to-find book. It was good for business.

On the other hand, literature framed our upper-middle-class perspective: books flooded into our home. Signed first editions of Isaac Bashevis Singer, oversize Jewish art and photography books, rare and new printings of prayer books and Hebrew Bibles, fiction by Sholem Aleichem, Cynthia Ozick, Isaac Babel, and Jerzy Kosinski, anthologies such as *A Treasury of Jewish Poetry* by Nathan and Maryanne Ausubel and *The Golden Peacock* by Joseph Leftwich, nonfiction by Hannah Arendt, Amos Oz, Ben Hecht, Trudy Weiss-Rosmarin, and Martin Buber. And not just Judaica; our library included Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Zola, Dreiser, Howells, biographies of Maurice Chevalier and the Kennedys, the entire Time-Life series on countries of the world, the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, and Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* illustrated by Salvador Dali in a series of twelve heliogravures that my father framed and hung along the central hallway of our house.

Little wonder, then, that I see my father's business and his love of the book—his love of their look and feel—through the prism of Walter Benjamin's essay about the passion and "tactical sphere" of book collecting. For

Benjamin, taking ownership of a book is to bring it into the “magic circle” of one’s library, to bring it thus to consciousness as an extension without of the existential and intellectual order within one’s own mind.¹ Yet a collector is also a wily tactician of the book business who must outwit the dealers and auctioneers who hold books captive. To the collector, “ownership is the most intimate relationship that one can have to objects. Not that they come alive in him; it is he who lives in them” (67).

So I have always appreciated the humor and the subtle theorizing of Benjamin’s essay; it so aptly describes my father and his store. Despite the fact that J. Roth / Bookseller was a commercial venture, a “regular bookstore,” as my father put it, the way its stock was bought, sorted, and displayed reflected the mind and habits of a book collector. The two times that I witnessed the store’s books packed up and moved, when it relocated first to the Pico-Robertson area of Los Angeles and then to Beverly Hills, will always color my reading of the quotation that is the epigraph for this essay. There on the floor and in boxes and on wooden pallets all around was Jewish literature in heaps: children’s books, reference books, *sifrei kodesh*, cookbooks, fiction, nonfiction, *musar*, history, women’s literature and *nidah* manuals, biography, humor, books in Yiddish and Hebrew, textbooks, used books, antiquarian and limited editions—the grand disorder of a Jewish bookstore where the religious and the secular, the patriarchal and the feminist, the popular and the arcane were all shelved under one roof.

But to Jack Roth, whose habits as owner and salesclerk were many and ironclad, the store exemplified his belief that a clean, well-lighted place and the salutary order of literary categories could help remake the Jewish bookstore in America and lift it out of the chaos of Lower East Side depravity. He construed such categories, and that of Jewish literature itself, however, as widely as possible. This was so because in the end, and despite all the categories, they were his books, and the store his “magic circle.”

Here, then, I unpack my father’s bookstore in order to theorize a different perspective on the relationship between memory and modern Jewish literature, one that takes into account the material and commercial aspects of that literature, both of which are amply on display in the public space of a bookstore. J. Roth / Bookseller was a “living library,” as Benjamin describes a book collection (66). It was both a personal and communal inheritance, and “inheritance is the soundest way of acquiring a collection. For a collector’s attitude toward his possessions stems from an owner’s feeling of responsibility toward his property. Thus it is, in the highest sense,

the attitude of an heir, and the most distinguished trait of a collection will always be its transmissibility" (66). Benjamin helps us to see that although what is in stock in a Jewish bookstore like my father's certainly gives Jewish memory its texture, equally important is the physical ownership and transmissibility of that collection. The bookstore offered customers an opportunity to possess the personal recollections, creative works, and scholarly interpretations attesting to past and present varieties of Jewish identities and historical experiences. It offered them, in other words, an opportunity to define and be defined by their own Jewish collections. The bookstore's appeal, and what made it viable for over twenty-five years, was that it retailed the building blocks for constructing Jewish memory, and for thereby materializing a Jewish literature of one's own making, just as American Jews were looking to do both.

J. Roth / Bookseller thus exemplifies the rise and fall of a particular kind of American Jewish bookstore. It thrived in the glow of the Jewish ethnic pride movements of the sixties and seventies, but was unable to market its unique definition and collection of Jewish literature after the resurgence of Orthodox Judaism and the assimilation of Jewish writing into the corporate book superstores, during the late eighties and early nineties. Hence the story of my father's bookstore is a story about the limits of transmissibility, the insolvency of memory. He did not retire; the store failed. His Orthodox competitors undercut his prices for traditional *sforim* and stripped off his religious customers, while the book superstores undercut his prices for new Jewish publications and took away his secular customers.

By telling this story, I hope, ultimately, to shift thinking away from questions regarding the "Jewishness" of writing by Jews and toward an understanding of modern Jewish literature as a historically contingent collection belonging, like all property, to those diverse individuals and communities wealthy and passionate enough to claim ownership. Such a purchased inheritance is, in fact, a disorder to which each generation gives the appearance of order by unpacking and arranging it on shelves of its own making.

Accounting

My father was born in New York City, in the borough of Queens, in 1932, the youngest of six children. His father and mother, my grandparents, had immigrated to the United States in the 1920s from what was left of the

Austro-Hungarian Empire, from an area that is now divided between eastern Slovakia, southwestern Poland, and northern Hungary. My grandfather was a *shohet*, a ritual slaughterer, but he was also an amateur poet who translated the book of Esther into rhymed Yiddish couplets. Though there were a great many religious books in my grandparents' home, there were no secular Jewish writers. They were strictly Orthodox, admirers of Satmar Hasidism though not adherents themselves.

My father attended Yeshiva Torah V'Daas in Brooklyn, but rather than go on to rabbinical school, as his three older brothers had done, he chose to enroll in the City College of New York, take a few classes in Russian literature, and work part-time for Jonathan David, a Jewish publishing company and wholesaler. No one factor was paramount in this decision. He was the youngest boy, so there was less pressure on him to prove his religious devotion. And this was New York in the late forties and early fifties; the city's urban cosmopolitanism was a powerful lure. Between Frank Sinatra and the New York Jewish intellectuals—Philip Rahv, Alfred Kazin, Lionel Trilling, Daniel Bell, and Irving Howe—lay a world that my father found irresistible. On the other hand, his reason for working at a publishing house, rather than another type of business, remains vivid for him even to this day. Shopping among the Jewish bookstores on the Lower East Side with his father, he was appalled at what a mess they were. "One day," he announced, "I'm going to have a Jewish bookshop no one will be ashamed to walk into." Jonathan David was his first step in that direction. Of course, as a part-time student, he had left himself open to the draft. Like the protagonist of Saul Bellow's *Dangling Man*, my father seemed to need the help of larger historical circumstances to push him across the threshold into his future. So in 1953, he found himself headed to Korea. The war ended as his troop ship crossed the Pacific, and he spent his tour as a mail clerk. Upon his return to civilian life, he bought a new Chevy Bel Air and landed a job as general manager of Behrman House, one of the major independent Jewish publishers.

On the surface, of course, both the car and the job appear unremarkable of any substantive change in my father's life, until we look closer at some of the transformations in the American Jewish book trade up to that time. Before World War I, the Jewish book trade serviced a limited market. Jewish commercial publishers primarily issued Bibles, prayer books, liturgical reference works, and school texts and, acting as agents for European Jewish publishers, imported, reprinted, and/or translated various titles of Hebrew,

Yiddish, German, and English Judaica, a business model developed by the first Jewish publishers in America: the American Jewish Publication Society (Philadelphia, 1845 [destroyed by fire in 1851]), the Jewish Publication Society (New York, 1871–73; Philadelphia, 1888), Bloch Publishing Company (Cincinnati, 1854 [relocated to New York in 1901]), and the Hebrew Publishing Company (New York, 1901).²

Following World War I, toward the end of the great wave of Eastern European Jewish immigration between 1880 and 1924, the Jewish publishing scene changed. Jewish acculturation into the urban manufacturing class—speeded up by the postwar economic expansion—opened new doors for business opportunities in publishing, one of the few major industries open to Jews. And a new crop of Jewish writers and intellectuals came into their own: Mary Antin, Waldo Frank, Horace Kallen, Anzia Yezierska, Walter Lippmann, Charles Reznikoff, Ludwig Lewisohn, Edna Ferber, and S. J. Perelman, to name just a few. These writers, as Jonathan Sarna points out in his history of the Jewish Publication Society, reflected a wide range of political views and aesthetic tastes.³ As a result, competition for publishing Jewish writing increased among new mainstream publishing companies founded by Jews, such as Alfred A. Knopf and Boni and Liveright, and among established houses like Macmillan and Harper.⁴ New Jewish commercial publishers like Behrman House and Ktav found their corner of the market catering to the growing, but still more insular, demand for Jewish textbooks, scholarship, and reprints of older, European Jewish materials; organizational publishers such as the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the Central Conference of American Rabbis, and United Synagogue of America developed new curricular materials for Jewish religious schools affiliated with those movements.⁵

In addition, after World War I, both general and Jewish book trades witnessed an increasing division between publishing and bookselling, an important development that helped shape the modern bookstore and increase its numbers.⁶ Nowadays, there is much nostalgia for the small, literary bookstores of old where there was no coffee, no tchotchkes, just books. But that Edenic past is exaggerated. Such stores were always an urban and college-town phenomenon, one that reflected changes in the book trade during the early part of the twentieth century.⁷ The vast majority of bookselling establishments in America from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, according to bookselling historian John Tebbel, sold stationery, cards, candy, snuff, calendars, pamphlets, erotica (under the

counter), and, yes, coffee, in addition to books.⁸ In the late nineteenth century, the most popular and aggressive book retailers were department stores, such as Wanamaker's and Macy's, followed closely by the publishers themselves, many of which—Brentano, Scribner, Doubleday, and E. P. Dutton, for instance—boasted lavish and celebrated bookstores.⁹

The postwar culture of consumption led to an explosion of consumer goods and entertainment products as well as the development of modern advertising. Publishers, Jewish or otherwise, realized that they could make more money if they did not compete with retailers by selling their own goods directly to the public at highly discounted prices. And the beleaguered bookshop, once professionalized and revitalized, looked to be an important partner rather than a competitor in servicing a variety of customers, from small town to big city, from adults to children, and from the literary to the religious.¹⁰

This led to changes even on the Lower East Side, where the Hebrew Publishing Company had its own publisher's bookstore (Bloch Publishing Company's bookstore was on West 31st Street) doing business alongside an already large number of smaller Jewish bookstores modeled after the *moykher sforim* stores, stalls, and peddler's carts ubiquitous in Eastern Europe.¹¹ As a 1906 magazine article described it, these stores, "musty with the smell of books and soup," featured in their show windows ritual items like prayer shawls, phylacteries, mezuzahs, kiddush cups, and Torah mantles, but in back stocked prayer books, Bibles, and works of halakhah and responsa.¹² They might also, depending on the owner's tastes, carry Yiddish stories by Mendele Moykher-Sforim (Sholem Abramovitch) or Jacob Dineson, plays by Jacob Gordin, or even Yiddish translations of Shakespeare and Tolstoy.¹³

Still, the expansion of Jewish publishing in the 1920s offered new opportunities for retailing, especially in servicing niche markets. Many of the bookstores that my father visited in his youth were, as he recollects, established during that decade: S. Goldman-Otzar Hasefarim (which specialized in Hasidic books), M. Wolozin, Zion Talis, Schenker Books (which sold sheet music), Wolf Sales, M. Vaxer (which specialized in Yiddish books), B. Morgenstern Books, and Zeigelheim's.¹⁴ J. Levine Company, which began at the turn of the century as distributors of European ritual items, expanded into book sales in the 1920s when the selection of traditional books, Hebrew textbooks, and English language titles increased, though, as the store's website notes, "[t]he entire stock required only a few shelves."¹⁵

That changed dramatically after World War II, when a wave of new Jewish writing in English arrived for Jewish and general bookstores to sell. As Jonathan Sarna notes, American Jews were in search of religious and cultural affirmation after the war, partly in response to the dire news from Europe and partly in response to, and in support of, their own rapid climb up the social ladder.¹⁶ American Jews' participation in the postwar economic boom, their exodus to the suburbs, and the relaxing of restrictions on Jewish entrance into the professions stoked a burgeoning appetite for writing that defended, explained, celebrated, or chronicled the passage of Jews into the American mainstream. Recognizing the educational and cultural opportunities afforded by this increased demand for and production of Jewish books, the Jewish Book Council of America even put out a manual, *The Jewish Bookshop: Its Organization and Operation*. By doing so, the council hoped to stimulate the establishment of more Jewish bookstores that would help distribute Jewish books outside the large metropolitan areas.¹⁷ These books included, according to Sarna, noncontroversial introductions to Jewish theology and observance, fiction about Jews struggling with their heritage, such as Jo Sinclair's *Wasteland* or Milton Steinberg's *As a Driven Leaf*, children's books that focused on ethics, morality, and American settings, and books that tracked the lesser-known arcs of Jewish success in America, such as Harold Ribalow's *Jews in Sports*.¹⁸

Add to this picture the more well-known story about the achievements of major literary voices such as Muriel Rukeyser, Arthur Miller, Grace Paley, and, of course, Saul Bellow and Bernard Malamud; color that picture with the knowledge that all this writing is being produced and distributed by Jewish and non-Jewish publishing companies that were still privately held and committed to publishing a wide variety of titles in order to make the most of the existing market; take all this together, and it becomes clear that Jack Roth's new Chevy expressed, on a social level, his affiliation with a rising, mobile American Jewish middle class, while his choice of a career in the Jewish book trade reflected a decisive turn toward the worldliness and cultural uplift to which both he and that business aspired at mid-century.

Working for Behrman House over the next ten years, then, my father married, started a family, and learned the trade more through careful watching than through any mentoring. As the product of a thorough Jewish education, conversant in the ideas, personalities, and historical trends of the Orthodox and Yiddish-speaking worlds, he seemed a ready-made

employee to his boss, Jacob Behrman. Left to his own devices, my father used the position to further another kind of education. He noted the expansion of Judaica lists at the general publishing houses and the growing trade in Jewish textbooks. And he discovered—via phone and business trips to conferences for organizations like the National Association of Temple Educators—a growing network of Jewish synagogues, schools, and bookstores across the country. In 1960, the NATE convened in Los Angeles, and my father called one of his accounts and invited him out for coffee. He and Michael Harelick hit it off immediately. Harelick was then in his late eighties, a Russian-born Yiddishist so devoted to the literature of *mameloshn*, the mother tongue, that he once told a pesky customer looking for the latest Leon Uris novel to go find such trash somewhere else. He was therefore especially impressed that my father could speak Yiddish.

Memory at this point yearns toward a simpler story: that my father's dream of having his own Jewish bookstore, professional and up-to-date, in sync with the dominant trends of the industry at mid-century and servicing laypeople, rabbis, educators, and libraries, came to fruition at this meeting between a bookman of the Yiddish literary scene and a bookman of a newly blossoming American Jewish literary scene; or that my father, in a moment of historical prescience, saw in Los Angeles an obvious location for a store that would help educate and sustain a Sunbelt Jewish community already witnessing tremendous postwar growth. Yet the truth is that six years went by, until one especially torrid day in May 1966, when my father, trapped in the steamy confines of a New York City subway car, swore to himself that this was the last year that he would suffer through such an unbearable commute. Without telling Behrman, he flew to Los Angeles and made a deal with Harelick, who was happy to sell the store to his young friend. By August, we had moved to the West Coast.

In went the billing computer, a larger and more diverse stock arrayed in clearly marked sections, a greater attention to customer service, and up went sales. At first, my father followed the general pattern of the Jewish publishing world that he had just left. He expanded his textbook line, essentially becoming the West Coast textbook distributor for a number of Jewish publishing companies. He also developed a brisk seasonal mail-order business wholesaling dreidels, Simhat Torah flags, and groggers, which he maintained for many years. But as he began responding to specific customer requests—especially from bibliophiles who discovered a Jewish bookstore totally unlike the Lower East Side imitations on L.A.'s Fairfax Boulevard—

and as he began purchasing stock for his retail business from non-Jewish publishers and regional distribution companies, he sensed the commercial possibilities of a Jewish bookstore that seemed more like a library. He started building a deep backlist in English, Yiddish, and Hebrew books, taking one or two copies of a title that he thought this or that particular customer might buy, or, increasingly, that seemed interesting or important to him. He stocked books from a variety of genres and covering a range of subject matter. He began his habit of buying a personal copy of a particularly beautiful or collectible book that he was purchasing for the store. And, familiar with the leading Jewish studies scholars of the day, he also began ordering titles from university presses.

In short, my father incited his own taste for collecting Judaica. Solomon Freehof, in *On the Collecting of Jewish Books*, notes that a true collector, one who aspires to creativity in collecting and to contribute to the making of a culture, begins with a desire for “*exclusive* possession. . . . There is something that no one else has and *you* have it.”¹⁹ That something for my father was having *the* largest selection of Jewish books. By yoking that desire to a mid-century model of the American bookstore, he fortuitously discovered a powerful formula for retail success. It was particularly well suited for the times: the civil rights movement and Israel’s victory in the Six Day War of 1967 provoked a surge of American Jewish ethnic pride, which in turn led to a flowering of renewed Jewish learning at Hebrew Union College on the Eastside and at UCLA on the Westside, in synagogues and day schools, and among those caught up in the Havurah movement and in the rage for Hasidic literature. J. Roth / Bookseller offered a useful resource for Los Angeles Jews in search of Jewish sources both popular and hard to find. By the end of the 1970s, my father needed to relocate the store to a larger space. So, in June 1979, he moved to 9427 West Pico Boulevard. This is the location that, to me, was the most complete incarnation of my father’s vision of a Jewish bookstore, an exemplary space that I offer as a frame for my speculation about collection and modern Jewish literature.

Interpretation

Among other things, I have so far provided a fairly long and diverse list of authors and titles that, by 1979, were all stocked at J. Roth / Bookseller. As one local Jewish newspaper reflected years later, “[I]t stood alone as the place to find seemingly every book of interest to Jews. . . . Everyone, from

Orthodox rabbis to Hollywood stars to visiting dignitaries, knew that whatever the Jewish book, J. Roth had it.”²⁰ Though I did not appreciate it at the time, this difference from his competitors not only explained our family’s economic good fortune, but also an assumption I often encountered from teachers and friends—that somehow I possessed special insight into Jewish literature. Looking back, my confusion about this is indicative not only of my adolescent self-absorption and utter lack of interest in my father’s work, but also of a larger and now quite familiar confusion: What *is* Jewish literature?

Hana Wirth-Nesher’s critical anthology of the same name features an introductory essay that only underscores the problem. “Defining the Indefinable”²¹ raises the corollary and equally important problem of how even to frame a critical approach toward a definition. Her review of the various attempts to do so reveals both the quixotic determination of literary critics and a curious omission. Wirth-Nesher considers explanations that highlight biography, thematics, linguistics, religiosity, assimilationism, and tradition. But missing from all these perspectives on the literature of the people of the book is the book itself. What do the libraries and collections of those who purchase and read Jewish writing look like? How do people use their collections? In what ways might books as objects, as well as the spaces in which those objects are kept, affect definitions of a modern Jewish literature?

These are not new questions; they have merely been out of fashion for a while. Cecil Roth, Bernard Heller, A. Alan Steinbach, Philip Goodman, and Salamon Faber, for example, took them up in essays, the first of which appeared in 1944, for the *Jewish Book Annual*. Citing Ecclesiastes, Hai Gaon, and Judah Ibn Tibbon, these mid-twentieth-century critics traced a Jewish predilection for books and book collecting from antiquity to their own time. Roth, writing during World War II, argues that the persecution of Jews during the Middle Ages, along with the destruction of their books and illuminated manuscripts, was also a “persecution of literature,” and he notes that the mitzvah of redeeming Jewish captives became associated at that time with the redemption of books as well.²² Steinbach and Goodman laud “the traditional Jewish attitude which considered the lending of books a meritorious act, a religious obligation,” and Goodman, Heller, and Faber, faintly echoing Benjamin’s essay, all construe the ownership and collecting of books as a way of ordering and immortalizing human experience and knowledge.²³

My asking these questions anew, however, reflects not only indebtedness to these scholars and to Benjamin, but also to the recent boom in theory and criticism exploring commodities and the mundane bric-a-brac of modern life. "Rather than considering things as idols," write the editors of "The Status of the Object," a special issue of the journal *Theory, Culture & Society*, we ought to acknowledge that commodities, as totems of abstract ideas or as the charmed objects of our reverence, are "precisely what holds the social order in place and allows it to move at the same time."²⁴ In other words, as James Clifford explains it, in the modern, consumer-oriented West, collecting things is an extension of "the idea that identity is a kind of wealth (of objects, knowledge, memories, experience)" and that analyzing the way that Westerners collect objects may help remind us "of the artifices we employ to gather a world around us."²⁵ In that light, J. Roth / Bookseller was one such artifice, a space that enabled a certain kind of cultural and self-possession.

Photographs of my father's bookstore in *Judaica Book News* and *The Jewish Journal of Greater Los Angeles* reveal the care he took to arrange and display his books, the meticulous presentation of his collection. Yet just as important to the store's outward face was its inward floor plan, which reflected a narrative about the collection, about Jewish literature. Entering the store, you faced the checkout counter directly ahead. Behind it was my father's desk, and behind him was his rare and fine bookcase; thus if you had a question or request, or were in search of something hard to find, the answer could be found here in the heart of the store. If you wished to browse, the floor plan led you in one of two ways. If you turned left at the entrance, you were at the children's section, to the left of which were the Hebrew grammar and dictionaries, miscellaneous Hebraica, and finally, *sifrei kodesh*, holy books. At that point, you would be at the back wall, at the passage back to the shipping area, where the textbooks were stocked. Heading rightward along the back wall, and underneath the stairs to a small loft above the store, where my father kept a very few collectible paintings and silver items (a minor superstructure to the store's substructure of books), was the religious literature in Hebrew and English—the Mishnah and Talmud, works of legal exposition and commentary, ethical and inspirational works, kabbalah, and a section devoted strictly to the burgeoning ArtScroll publications, today the premier ultra-Orthodox publisher of English-language and bilingual religious texts. Passing the billing and office area, you came to the English-language Bible section, which anchored the

left side of the far wall of the store. Next to it was History/Holocaust/Zionism, next to which was Philosophy/Jewish Thought, next to which was Fiction/Poetry, next to which was Yiddish/Cookbooks. In front of this wall were three tables, miscellaneous biblical scholarship in English and two gift-book tables, which, if you continued rightward, would lead you past the cookbook table and the new-book table in front of the store windows, and then to the three wire display racks of new and popular paperback books that brought you full circle (or, rather, full square) back to the store entrance.

Following the books in this direction, customers were clearly led from the past to the present, from a Jew's foundational reading toward works that, in some ways, depended on previous knowledge to contextualize their Jewishness. Traversing the store from the opposite direction simply turned such a pedagogical narrative into an archaeology of Jewish writing. Each wall could also be read in itself as a minor commentary on Jewish literature; most evocative was the far wall, which was telling in its reflection of my father's and, by extension, of publishers' thinking about the historical succession of Jewish writing: Bible, History/Holocaust/Zionism, Philosophy/Jewish Thought, Fiction/Poetry, and Yiddish/Cookbooks—a spatial narrative whose punch line is "So now let's eat."

One of my own photographs of the store also reveals a prominent and very telling detail of the store's presentation. Rightward from the entrance, at the far end of the new-book table, was a large support column on which hung a sepia-tone photograph of a bearded old Jew in an old-fashioned, wide-brim *biberhit*, a beaver hat. He is leaning on a *shtender*, a lectern, in front of a Torah ark and looking straight into the camera. That was my great-great-grandfather, Dovid Roth. His is an image of Jewish memory and authenticity that privately advertised my father's ownership of the collection and publicly advertised its cultural purpose. It also, if I may push my speculation a bit further, turned the customer into the object of a Jewish gaze. Given the composition of the photograph and its placement just above eye level, my great-great-grandfather functioned as a kind of store greeter, welcoming and surveying all who came in. His regard and appearance assured customers, especially new ones in search of a title like Hayim Halevi Donin's *To Be a Jew* or Morris N. Kertzer's *What Is a Jew?*, that they were in the right place. What I am suggesting here is that the consciousness that Benjamin attributes to a collection, a consciousness that is both an extension and reflection of the owner's mind and tastes, finds symbolic

expression in this photograph of a forefather. It illustrates the nature of my father's living library: seeing and being seen within a space organized under this sign of memory and by the memory-driven spatial narratives of the store's floor plan created a metaphoric Jewish community, one entirely dependent upon a dynamic interplay between subject-ness and object-ness.²⁶

To put it more plainly, Jewish memory and Jewish identity accrued social meanings through the customer's interactions with the store's collection—both the books *and* the customers were subjects and objects, actors and acted upon insofar as each took possession of the other. To shop at the store was, therefore, an engagement in self-definition and self-explanation. It acted out in small, and for purposes that did not require that one identify *as* Jewish so much as *with* Jews, the larger dynamic of my father's quest to gather a meaningful world around himself through a collection of books. This is one reason that the store was perceived as a welcoming space by Jews of every denomination and ideological bent—from Rabbi Immanuel Jakobovitz, the Orthodox chief rabbi of England, to Rabbi Sue Levi Elwell, the Reform rabbi of Leo Baeck Temple in Los Angeles; from Irving Howe to Dennis Prager; and from Barbra Streisand to Wolf Blitzer. They all shopped there. Non-Jews, too, saw it as a welcoming space, especially the evangelical Christians who visited the store in the 1980s in search of the Jewish roots of Jesus.

Thus Jewish literature, as J. Roth / Bookseller defined it, is constituted not only by authors and texts but also through commerce and within social space. Seen from that materialist point of view, Jewish literature presents itself as larger than its parts; it becomes an *activity*. More specifically, my father's store and its gathering of books as objects reveal modern Jewish literature to be a business, a network of human behaviors, transactions, and deeds in and of their time, and reveal bookstores as places where ideas and capital collide as literal bodies. This knowledge does not so much change our notions of Jewish literature as reassert what is tangible yet transient about it (definitions, like possessions, are fugitive goods), without reducing such transience to the vagaries of biological or cultural identity.

The varied collection within my father's bookstore therefore only underlined that a "modern" Jewish literature is not self-evidently a canon of works produced at a particular moment in history or even strictly by Jews. What is modern about that literature is implicit in its complex of responses to, improvisations on, and commercial interrelationships with

classical Jewish texts; Jewish mystical writing and the Gentile interpretations inspired by it during the Renaissance; works that illuminate the ragged edges of Jewish affiliation like Uriel Acosta's *Exemplar Humanæ Vitæ* or Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*; and works by non-Jews that claim to describe Jews, such as Jean-Paul Sartre's *Anti-Semite and Jew*—or even *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* and Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, both of which my father kept in a drawer of his desk available for sale, should someone ask for them. J. Roth / Bookseller manifested Annette Kolodny's well-worn but still useful observation about literary canons, that "the choices we make in the present inevitably alter our sense of the past that led to them."²⁷ It exemplified how we review and revalue the past through the creatively distorting lens of our contemporary writing, publishing, bookselling, and reading practices.

In addition, "literature," as it was constellated in my father's bookstore, quite obviously meant more than just works of fiction and poetry. What counted as literature to his customers, however, is now beyond accurate recuperation—my father threw away all his billing and sales records when he closed his store. Nevertheless, he was still able to conjure, out of old notes and what remains in his personal collection, a long list of his best sellers over the years. That list is evocative of the wide range of genres described by "literature" and of the ways in which "literature" served his customers as a heuristic or pedagogic tool. Here is a very abridged version: *The Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Elie Wiesel's *Night*, Abraham Cahan's *A Bintel Brief*, the JPS Tanakh, Nehama Leibowitz's *Studies in the Weekly Sidra*, Lawrence Kushner's *Book of Letters*, Chaim Potok's *The Chosen*, Arthur Hertzberg's *The Zionist Idea*, Ellen Umansky and Dianne Ashton's *Four Centuries of Jewish Women's Spirituality*, *The Complete ArtScroll Siddur*, Isidore Twersky's *Maimonides Reader*, Art Spiegelman's *Maus I*, Milton Steinberg's *Basic Judaism*, Henry Roth's *Call It Sleep*, the Lubavitch Women's *Spice and Spirit Cookbook*, Leo Rosten's *Joys of Yiddish*, Herbert Weiner's *9½ Mystics*, *The New Bantam Megiddo Hebrew-English / English-Hebrew Dictionary*, J. Hertz's *Sayings of the Fathers*, all the novels and short-story collections by Bellow, Malamud, and Roth, *The Diary of Anne Frank*, the Zion Talis *Luach Minhagei Beit Ha-Knesset*, Hayim Ben-Sasson's *A History of the Jewish People*, and every I. B. Singer children's picture book.

As a commercial library of Jewish memory, then—memory of patriarchs and matriarchs, of law and custom, languages and commentary, the Holocaust, the establishment of the State of Israel, and the diverse histories

of a transnational Diaspora—my father's bookstore offered customers a social and cultural opportunity to construct, deconstruct, and reconstruct a modern Jewish literature of their own. But it had its limits; the physical space of the store was finite, a reminder that the very materiality of the book, in Seth Lerer's words, makes "the canonizing of the literary work into an act of space management."²⁸ It was not, and my father never intended it to be, a version of Borges's Library of Babel, that labyrinthine metonymy for the mind in which the entirety of human literary production would be cataloged and preserved for all time. And it was subject to the commercial and cultural marketplace, liable to competition and to public statements of discontent with the collection, such as when certain customers felt compelled to turn Lev Raphael's *Dancing on Tisha B'Av* face down on the new-book table because its frank portrayal of gay Jewish life offended them. In these ways, the store revealed its vulnerability and historical contingency, foreshadowing its demise.

The Limits of Transmissibility

Benjamin understood ownership well. My father did indeed possess the attitude of an heir—a sense that he had been entrusted with a responsibility to care for and preserve for the future his beloved Jewish book collection. Yet there was blindness along with Benjamin's insight. The transmissibility of a collection may be its most distinguished trait, but it is not a given. There may be no one willing to purchase the collection, or the inheritors may decline their inheritance. The market may dry up or move on; after all, and especially in the West, the past is an endlessly regenerating commodity. And if objects share in our subjectivity, then they, too, are mortal.

In 1989, the Loma Prieta earthquake revealed the necessity for seismic retrofitting of all buildings in Los Angeles, and the landlord of 9427 Pico began work on the property. The store took on the look of a construction site. At the same time, the book business changed yet again. In the 1980s, S. I. Newhouse and Rupert Murdoch were transforming publishing in America, merging older houses and ruthlessly demanding that every title pull its weight in profits.²⁹ More important, by the mid-1980s, the mall bookstore chains—Walden Books, B. Dalton, and Crown Books—had reached the limit of their expansion. They were sold off to outfits like Kmart and Barnes and Noble, which recognized, according to Jason Epstein, that the "surviving independents had shown that extensive backlist

inventories attract customers to large freestanding bookstores, which often cost less per square foot to occupy than comparable space in high-rent malls.”³⁰

My father understood that these new book superstores could and would undercut his prices, and he even understood how attractive a target his backlist presented to them. But his strategy for facing these challenges was to move his store in November 1990 to larger quarters in Beverly Hills, adjacent to Beth Jacob Congregation and Hillel Hebrew Academy, and thereby mimic a superstore model. The new store was modern, box-like, and cold. Though it was only six blocks from the old location, to the Los Angeles Jewish community it seemed as if the bookstore had become too upscale and had lost its *taam*, its Jewish taste. For the first time, and in response to the superstores’ increasing pressure, my father began to stock ritual items, greeting cards, and gifts. He did so, however, with the same collector’s sensibility with which he had built up his book collection, and, ironically, this proved to be his undoing. His obsession with collecting blinded him to the dangers of the social changes taking place around him: the resurgence of Orthodox Judaism, the rise of the *ba’al t’shuva* phenomenon, and political developments in Israel that turned the question “Who is a Jew?” into an international Jewish brawl. In addition, as Haym Soloveitchik observed, the shift of religious and cultural authority to texts and “their enshrinement as the sole source of authenticity,”³¹ though potentially a boon for my father’s business, instead provided a warrant for the newly religious to create litmus tests in order to discriminate between authentic and inauthentic texts. The 1990 National Jewish Population Survey, with its report of American Jews’ high rates of intermarriage, only fanned the flames.

My father responded to these changes by wearing a *kippah* during business hours (for the first time in his career, and not without complaint) and by simply collecting more Orthodox and traditional Jewish materials. The primary way in which he did that was by inviting an Orthodox silver wholesaler and an Orthodox *sofer*, a scribe, to set up their shops within his store. He put the *sofer* behind the glass wall of a corner room that had originally separated his small collection of Jewish paintings from the book collection, thinking to show him off as an attraction. Unwittingly, though, my father turned his store from a living library into a museum. His *sofer* exhibit, and the scribe’s performance of culture, suggested that authentic Jewish tradition belonged, literally, to religious insiders, relegating nonobservant out-

siders to the role of audience and cultural tourists.³² This undermined the very concept of the bookstore. What had once been hospitable and inviting space now appeared staged and contested. It discomfited, even alienated, the few remaining Reform and secular customers who had not already been lured away by the cheaper prices and caffeine-fueled socializing at the superstores. In the meantime, the *sofer*, who stayed in the store after my father closed up for the night, was busy with his own plans. In less than a year, he opened his own shop back on Pico Boulevard, the 613 Mitzvah Store, which carried only “kosher” *sforim* and ritual goods.

That signaled the end for my father's bookstore. If the Jewish memory that materialized in his store can be said to have described a collective memory, it was only because my father, as a collector, gathered as much as would fit into that space. Once that memory collection—and, by extension, the definition of modern Jewish literature that it described—was broken up and demarcated by Jewish book publishers, retailers, and consumers into rigidly policed categories of classical and modern, traditional and secular, authentic and inauthentic, its purchase became subject to availability. By the spring of 1994, the shelves and tables of J. Roth / Bookseller were thinned out and filled with gaps, and both Jewish and non-Jewish publishers began refusing my father's orders. In June, he sold what stock remained to another Jewish bookstore that took over his lease, and though he could have declared bankruptcy, he instead worked out repayment schedules with his many creditors. He paid the last of them off in 2004.

Today, Jewish bookstores, like American bookstores in general, have reverted to the commercially and economically more feasible model of their late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century forebears, albeit one now buttressed by new technologies. No Jewish bookstore that I know of carries only books, just as no general bookstore can survive without offering, if not the nonliterary inventory, at least the level of service of the old department stores. That is the secret to the survival of Powell's Books in Portland, Oregon; City Lights in San Francisco; Vroman's Bookstore in Pasadena, California; the Tattered Cover in Denver; Square Books in Oxford, Mississippi; Books & Books in Coral Gables, Florida; Kramerbooks in Washington, D.C.; and Shakespeare & Co. Booksellers in New York—the last of the large independents, a fact that they all advertise on their Internet websites. Bookstores come and go, however; insolvency is an ever-present hazard of doing business. Bemoaning the end of a particular model of the American bookstore, taking offense that no one in the new book superstores “seems

to love books, or even to like them, except as money makers,"³³ simply underscores the one enduring aspect of the bookstore: it is a culturally invaluable space on which to project notions about writing and reading that express, and allay, anxiety about changes in literature and literacy.

Change, though, is inevitable. In Brooklyn, Eichler's Judaica Superstore, the largest Orthodox-oriented bookstore in America, retails a very well stocked but narrowly conceived selection of Jewish books in Hebrew, English, and, increasingly, Yiddish. The four largest nondenominational Jewish bookstores—Westside Judaica and J. Levine Books & Judaica in Manhattan, Pinskens Judaica Center in Pittsburgh (home to 1-800-Judaism and Judaism.com), and Rosenblum's World of Judaica in Chicago (home to alljudaica.com)—offer more widely conceived selections, though their backlists are thin and their stock is still aimed primarily at tradition-minded customers. All organize the disorder of Jewish literature according to the habits of a new generation of American Jews. They forward a definition of that literature reflective of the more stringent tastes of those buyers and sellers who currently wield the greatest desire for, and ascribe the highest value to, the religion section of the collection.

But the insolvency of memory that my father's bookstore exemplifies is perhaps most evident in the person telling this story. Yes, I took a boxful of titles and an entire set of Talmud, the *Zhitomir Shas*, before the store closed. Nevertheless, as the obvious inheritors of my father's collection, I and my two brothers failed to take possession of it. Though at the end I came to work for him in order to help salvage the business, I had long made it clear to my father that my career interests lay elsewhere. Working in the academy on a professor's salary, I now lack the economic resources to buy an even remotely similar collection of my own. I have access to institutional libraries that offer a kind of recompense, but not the Benjaminian satisfactions of ownership. Which brings me to a final objection among some friends, that I at least remember that collection, and, as a teacher, I can forward its memory and its definition of modern Jewish literature for future generations. Maybe. Memory is a notoriously unstable and shape-shifting human production, and there is no telling how effectively or widely or enduringly my particular one will travel.

Still, when it comes to endings, the very pitfalls of memory are what enable a choice of usable pasts. Here is one such choice. I actually do not recall what the final day of work at my father's bookstore was like. I have no idea what we did or what my father said. As a scholar, of course, I could

probably reconstruct that day in specific detail. As a writer, I prefer not to. Instead of trying to manage the trick of wrapping up the store's history with an exacting account of that day, or overboiling it for sentimentality's sake, I like to imagine that it was little different from all the other unremarkable days that we worked together. At six, we locked the door, neatened the books, and counted the money. We then drove in separate cars—this is Los Angeles, after all—to the Hamburger Hamlet on the Sunset Strip. We had a whiskey or two, discussed the poor state of the business, gossiped about customers and family, and ate our nonkosher burgers. Afterward, waiting in front of the restaurant for the valet to bring our cars, my father insisted on paying for my parking, and without too much argument, I let him. We said our goodnights, and we each drove off, tired, minds blank, looking forward to a good book and then bed.

Notes

My thanks to Arthur Kiron for helping me to see that I was finally ready to write about my father's bookstore. This essay was originally presented as the John C. Horn Distinguished Service Lecture at Susquehanna University in March 2006. For their invaluable suggestions and insights as I drafted the lecture and essay, I am grateful to Susan Bowers, Ilan Stavans, David Myers, Laura Levitt, Zachary Braiterman, Lawrence Silberstein, Mary Bannon, and Michael Kramer.

1. Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (New York, 1969), 60 (hereafter cited in the text). Clifford cites Benjamin as an example of a "good collector (as opposed to the obsessive, the miser)," for whom "[c]ollecting appears as an art of living intimately allied with memory, with obsession, with the salvaging of order from disorder." James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, Mass., 1988), 219. Gumbrecht and Marrinan contextualize Benjamin's views on collecting as an extension of his views about historical materialism and the cult value of the artwork; see Hans Ulrecht Gumbrecht and Michael Marrinan (eds.), *Mapping Benjamin: The Work of Art in the Digital Age* (Stanford, Calif., 2003), 196–97.

2. On American Jewish publishing and bookselling in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, see Maurice Jacobs, "Generations of Jewish Literary Labor: Sixty Years of the Jewish Publication Society of America," in Philip Goodman (ed.), *Essays on Jewish Booklore: Articles Selected from the Jewish Book Annual, 1942–1971* (New York, 1972), 224; Charles A. Madison, *Jewish Publishing in America: The Impact of Jewish Writing on American Culture* (New York, 1976), chs. 1, 2, and 4; and Jonathan D. Sarna, *JPS, The Americanization of Jewish Culture, 1888–1988: A Centennial History of the Jewish Publication Society* (Philadelphia, 1989), chs. 1–2.

3. Sarna, *JPS*, 143.

4. *Ibid.*, 144; and Madison, *Jewish Publishing in America*, 253–75.

5. Madison, *Jewish Publishing in America*, 46–54.

6. On bookselling in America, including the reasons for the split between publishing and bookselling, see John Tebbel, “A Brief History of American Bookselling,” in Charles B. Anderson (ed.), *Bookselling in America and the World* (New York, 1975), 3–25. For further details on that split from the perspective of booksellers, see Chandler B. Grannis, “More than Merchants: Seventy-Five Years of the ABA,” in Anderson (ed.), *Bookselling in America and the World*, 65–108.

7. For an interesting discussion of the college-town bookstore, see Barbara A. Brannon, “The Bookshop as an ‘Arsenal of Democracy’: Marion Dodd and the Hampshire Bookshop during World War II,” *The Papers of the Bibliographic Society of America* 92:1 (March 1998): 5–31. Nineteenth-century bookstores in Boston, particularly the Old Corner Book Store, seem like exceptions to my assertion about the twentieth-century development of this phenomenon. But, in fact, only a very few of these stores did not carry at least stationery and cards. Those that did carry only books, such as Charles E. Lauriat Co., are not so much exceptions as they are turn-of-the-century progenitors of the phenomena that I describe, Boston being the perfect amalgam of urban milieu and college town. See Frederick G. Melcher, “Bookselling in Boston,” in Anderson (ed.), *Bookselling in America and the World*, 156–62.

8. Tebbel, “A Brief History of American Bookselling,” 7–10.

9. *Ibid.*, 13. Under pressure from the publishers and nonliterary merchants who carried books as loss leaders in order to attract customers, bookstores seemed a dying animal: “In Salem, Massachusetts, which had once boasted several retail stores, some of which became publishing houses, every bookseller had vanished by 1889, and the only outlet remaining for books was a chain drygoods store.” *Ibid.*, 17.

10. The net-price wars of the late nineteenth century were brutal and destabilized the book trade for decades. Indeed, the American Booksellers Association was founded in 1901 in a spirit of progressive reform aiming to rationalize the net-pricing system and professionalize bookselling. A young Van Wyck Brooks, Pulitzer Prize winner and eminent American literary critic of the 1920s, taught the ABA’s first booksellers’ course in 1913. Grannis, “More than Merchants,” 67–74.

11. On the image and social function of the *moykher sforim* in relation to the fiction of S. Y. Abramovitsh, see the classic study by Dan Miron, *A Traveler Disguised: The Rise of Modern Yiddish Fiction in the Nineteenth Century* (Syracuse, N.Y., 1996), 158–62, 187–91.

12. “Jewish Bookstores of the Old East Side,” *The Book Peddler: Newsletter of the National Yiddish Book Exchange* 17 (summer 1992): 20.

13. *Ibid.*

14. I am taking my father at his word here, despite the fact that his memory is as fallible as anyone else’s. I have verified that Zion Talis and S. Goldman were founded in the 1920s, and Schenker Books as well as Wolf Sales are likely products of that decade, too, but more archival research is called for here in order to locate and date the

other stores, which seem to have vanished from the records of most of the databases I consulted.

15. "J. Levine Co. A Modern Tradition 'Judaica Book News, 1981,'" J. Levine Books & Judaica website, August 10, 2005, <http://www.levinejudaica.com/catalog/moderntraditions.php>.

16. Sarna, *JPS*, 205–10.

17. The manual's introduction makes clear the rationale for its publication: "The Jewish Book Council of America recognizes that if Jewish books are to be distributed in greater quantities, local communities must have adequate facilities for this distribution. Except for some large metropolitan areas, there are few communities that have acceptable Jewish book shops, if any. . . . These shops may provide profit-making activity; but, more importantly, will afford an exceptional opportunity to stimulate an abiding zeal for Jewish knowledge, the development of a Jewish cultural atmosphere in the home, and the enrichment of educational programs in all types of Jewish groups." Isidore Cooperman, *The Jewish Bookshop: Its Organization and Operation* (New York, 1947, 1953). My thanks to Noni Rudavsky and the Klau Library at Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati, for making this available to me.

18. Sarna, *JPS*, 208–15.

19. Solomon B. Freehof, *On the Collecting of Jewish Books* (New York, 1961), 8.

20. Robert Eshman, "A Book Man to the End," *Jewish Journal of Greater Los Angeles* 11:39 (November 22–28, 1996): 21.

21. Hana Wirth-Nesher (ed.), "Defining the Indefinable," in *What Is Jewish Literature?* (Philadelphia, 1994).

22. Cecil Roth, "The Jewish Love of Books," in Goodman (ed.), *Essays on Jewish Booklore*, 180. Roth also cowrote with Abraham Meir Habermann the entry "Book Trade" for the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, ed. Cecil Roth (Jerusalem, 1972), 4:1238–39.

23. The first quotation is from Philip Goodman, "Love of Books as Revealed in Jewish Bookplates," in idem (ed.), *Essays on Jewish Booklore*, 199. Goodman observes that bookplates featuring the owner's portrait reveal ownership as an "attestation of oneness" with the book, a kind of existential affirmation that he later sums up this way: "Furthermore, the bookplate testifies to the owner's artistic and aesthetic sense and his literary proclivity for it is a fusion of two personalities—the owner who gives his own ideas reflecting his interests, and the artist who executes the ideas in his own style" (212). Heller ascribes to the book a metaphysical dimension: "The Universe was not only created by the Book, but also for the Book. Spirit, vision are concepts of supreme import. They constitute the heart of the Cosmos. If ideas and ideals, values and visions were to be extirpated then nature would be inconceivable or sink into a state of disorder which would make its existence impossible." Bernard Heller, "The Book: God's Blueprint," in Goodman (ed.), *Essays on Jewish Booklore*, 187. Faber asserts that book collecting "reflects man's desire to acquire and preserve knowledge" and "can become a source of spiritual delight to all involved: the collector who buys the books, the bibliographer who offers guidance, and even the dealer interested solely

in a business transaction.” Salomon Faber, “Selected Private Jewish Library Collections,” in Goodman (ed.), *Essays on Jewish Booklore*, 336, 343.

24. Dick Pels, Kevin Hetherington, and Frédéric Vandenberghe, “The Status of the Object: Performances, Mediations, and Techniques,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 19:5–6 (2002): 8.

25. Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, 218, 229.

26. This observation is predicated on two perspectives that helped shape my understanding of the interplay between people and books, identity and objects. The first perspective is from post-structural social theory, which, assuming “the performative and integrative capacity of ‘things’ to help make what we call society,” posits that in contemporary Western cultures, “we have also come to appreciate the fluidity and instability of the (multiple) ontological boundaries which separate thinglike from non-thinglike entities (persons, animals, relations, concepts), in a growing discomfort about the traditional hierarchies which separated subjects from objects, cultures from natures, and humans from nonhumans.” Pels et al., “The Status of the Object,” 2 and 3. The second perspective comes from Canetti’s novel *Auto-da-Fé*, particularly Professor Peter Kien’s bibliomaniacal reflections on the sentience of books; see Elias Canetti, *Auto-da-Fé* (New York, 1979), 67–68.

27. Annette Kolodny, “Dancing through the Minefield: Some Observations on the Theory, Practice, and Politics of a Feminist Literary Criticism,” in Vincent B. Leitch (ed.), *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* (New York, 2001), 2154.

28. Seth Lerer, “Epilogue: Falling Asleep over the History of the Book,” *PMLA* 121:1 (January 2006): 232.

29. Andre Schiffrin, *The Business of Books: How International Conglomerates Took Over Publishing and Changed the Way We Read* (London, 2000), 73–102.

30. Jason Epstein, *Book Business: Publishing Past, Present, and Future* (New York, 2002), 160.

31. Haym Soloveitchik, “Rupture and Reconstruction: The Transformation of Contemporary Orthodoxy,” in Roberta Rosenberg Farber and Chaim I. Waxman (eds.), *Jews in America: A Contemporary Reader* (Hanover, N.H., 1999), 339.

32. As both an exhibit and folkloric performance, the *sofer* incited what Kirshenblatt-Gimblett calls “the museum effect”: “Not only do ordinary things become special when placed in museum settings, but also the museum experience itself becomes a model for experiencing life outside its walls.” Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, “Objects of Ethnography,” in Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (eds.), *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (Washington, D.C., 1991), 410. In terms of performing Jewish culture, the *sofer* illustrated that the question of “who is qualified to perform culture is thorny because it reveals the implicit privileging of descent over consent in matters of cultural participation” and that such performance makes operative “a distinction between those who are licensed to do and those who are mandated to watch.” *Ibid.*, 431.

33. Jack Perry, “Bookstores, Communist and Capitalist,” *The American Scholar* (2001): 109.