

## MEET THE FACULTY

The Seminary's faculty is recognized for its distinction throughout the world, yet our younger and newer members are shining lights whose presence is understandably less known. In this new series, **PROGRESS BULLETIN** will remedy that situation by providing in-depth profiles of some relative newcomers to our faculty.

### DR. DAVID G. ROSKIES

Dr. David G. Roskies, Assistant Professor of Jewish Literature at the Seminary, is a native of Montreal. He attended Brandeis University where he received his bachelors, masters, and doctoral degrees in Near Eastern and Judaic Studies. From 1971 to 1974 he was a Kent Fellow, a fellowship awarded by the Danforth Foundation, and received a Canada Council Doctoral Fellowship. He also taught at Brandeis' Hiatt Institute in Jerusalem before joining the Seminary faculty in 1975.

Dr. Roskies traces his commitment to Yiddish literature back to his upbringing. His family home was a Yiddish literary salon visited by many of the great Yiddish writers of this century. He recalls, "It was an environment in which Yiddish was not relegated to jokes, but represented the highest achievements of Jewish secular culture."

He went to Yiddish Day School, where the legacy of Montreal Yiddish culture made a deep impact on him. "The teachers emphasized the indivisibility of Yiddish and Hebrew culture," he says. "They were Hebraists and Yiddishists at the same time... The man I consider my Rebbe was a scholar of Midrash. He spent his life translating it from Hebrew-Aramaic into Yiddish."

When Dr. Roskies entered Brandeis, it was axiomatic to him that he would study classical and modern Hebrew as well as Yiddish, for it was all part of the same continuum: "Historically Ashkenazic Jewry was internally bilingual. Hebrew fulfilled certain functions, Yiddish the others. Both were needed. The war between Yiddish and Hebrew actually began only in 1908. My teachers in Montreal were true to the historical reality of their tradition."

In analyzing why he did not rebel against this tradition like so many others of his generation, he reflects, "There was no need to rebel because it was presented to me as something to aspire toward, not as a lowly immigrant phenomenon."

Since his upbringing was secularist and pluralistic, Dr. Roskies came to a religious orientation much later. The turning point for him, as for Dr. Resnick in a different context, was his junior year in Israel in 1967-1968. He recalls, "I came back to the States with a very strong need for community. In Israel I had experienced what it means to be part of a living organism. Up to that point I viewed myself as a "cosmopolitan Jew," somewhat like the writer George Steiner, a master of all cultures but belonging to none — the intellectual who draws his strength from being on the margins of society. I decided



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photo by Arnold Katz

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Dr. Roskies teaches an introductory survey course in the Seminary college, "The Yiddish Foundations of Modern Hebrew Literature." Taught in Hebrew, the objectives of the course are to illustrate points of contact between the two cultures, to show the unique impact that the East European experience had on Jewish lives. Recently he has generated a new interdisciplinary course for the Rabbinical School: "Responses to Catastrophe in Jewish Tradition." The course brings together various disciplines: historic, literary, Halakhic, liturgical, psychological and theological. Among the 15 lecturers are Chancellor Gerson D. Cohen; Dr. Mortimer Ostow, Chairman of the Seminary's department of pastoral psychiatry; and theologians from Union Theological Seminary who speak of the Christian response to the Holocaust.

The objective of the course (which was first suggested by Rabbi Neil Gillman) is "to train the student to bring various disciplines to bear on a single issue," Dr. Roskies says. "That is in fact what a Rabbi has to do in the field."

The course has succeeded in involving rabbinical students, who have led some of the workshops. The concluding class was open to the public, and was held on Yom Hashoa. The program was divided into four workshops: *Paradigms*, which dealt with Kiddush Hashem, *Prayer*, which examined the place of catastrophe in liturgy, *Play* — a dramatic presentation by a student, and *Parallels*, which explored the

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The author of many articles and translations, Dr. Roskies has also published *Nightwords: A Midrash on the Holocaust*, *The Yiddish Source Finder: A Guide for the Student* (co-authored with Mordkhe Schaechter), and *The Shtetl Book* (co-authored with Diane K. Roskies). He is presently at work on a book about Jewish literary responses to catastrophe in the 20th century.



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