

# Etrög

Spring 5785



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# A Word from the Chair

Andrea Torres



**H**ola (hello), my name is Andrea Torres and, as of the 2025 AGM, I was elected the new Sukkat Shalom Chair.

As I'm writing this, I have found myself reading most of the 'Words from the Chair' from the past 20 years of *Etrog / Lulav*. I counted about 10-15 different variations of the title with

the most recent change to "a word from the sofa" when our community embarked on a new leadership structure with our then co-Chairs taking the reins. Without realising, like most of us, this new leadership helped our community through unprecedented times with a worldwide pandemic halting all in-person activity.

Through it all, our community stayed strong and even increased in membership numbers. This was no easy feat by our leaders but here we are, five years on.

It is a true honour to come into this role at a time where there is great hope ahead. I would like to thank the former co-Chairs, Sue, Nick and Maurice and our senior Council members - Gillian, Jonathan, Marjory and Barrie for creating and nurturing the welcoming environment which led me to join this community. Before I tell you a bit more about my goals and aspirations for this year, let's start at the beginning. Who am I? Who is this young blood taking on the Chair role and turning a sofa into a chair?

I officially joined our community in December 2022 when I moved here to join my husband, Rolando Hernandez Trapero. Rolando's postdoc position at the University of Edinburgh

is what brought him here from South Texas and Utah. Like him, I am also originally from South Texas with most of my family based in San Antonio, Texas and the Mexican cities of Monterrey & Chihuahua.

Prior to moving to Edinburgh, I was in Washington, D.C., where I lived from 2019 to 2022. This was an interesting time (for my reasons), but my most fond memories were made with my small *kehillah*. This group is made up of six caring and loving people who would meet once a month for Shabbat dinners. We were matched through the JWW - Jewish Welcome Workshop class we were enrolled in at our local synagogue - Sixth&I. I am forever thankful to my Rabbis Ilana, Aaron and Nora for their teachings.

Rolando was already an active member at ELJC when I moved here. Within a couple of weeks of joining, I was itching to find ways to be involved in the

community. In the first AGM I attended in 2023, I decided to join our Council. This is where I began my two years learning about our community and helping lead our social media efforts and creating Shabbat dinners outside of services. These dinners attracted (mostly) 20-, 30- and 40-somethings who were looking to experience Jewish events outside of regular community services and events. Mind you, like many other things, it truly took a dedicated group of hosts to pull off these dinners.

In my first year, I completed Liberal Judaism's Emerging Leaders Programme. This programme taught me so much about the Liberal movement and the early talks of creating Progressive Judaism - the joining of Liberal and Reform movements here in the UK. This is where my journey as the new Chair starts. I am nervous, excited and ready to help our community

transition in this new time where not only are we increasing our membership on a yearly basis, but helping shape the birth of a new movement.

Through this year, my goal is to not only support our Council in our ongoing community activities, but most importantly, I want to hear from you - our members.

If you are interested in helping to lead services, plan one of our holidays, or simply want to learn about the opportunities that exist where you can help, please contact me!

It truly takes a village to run our community. I am eager to hear from our members where they can and are interested to be involved. In the coming months, you'll hear more from me on the new Progressive movement as we prepare for the formal vote to take place. I am an email away through [chair@eljc.org](mailto:chair@eljc.org). Let's get started!

## Meet the Council

**E**lected at the AGM in February 2025, your new Council represents our members and helps to make leadership decisions within Sukkat Shalom. All 15 places at Council are currently filled and we welcome our new Chair, Andrea Torres (see [A Word From the Chair](#) earlier in this *Etrog*).



**Jennifer Andreacchi** (she/they) has served as a Sukkat Shalom Council Member since 2024. Originally from New Jersey in the US, she moved to Scotland to attend a masters programme at the University of Edinburgh and has been a member of Sukkat Shalom since 2021. She now lives in Edinburgh and works in marketing for a local book publisher. Jen is passionate about the arts, Jewish history, and ensuring that Sukkat Shalom is an inclusive and welcoming space for Jews of all backgrounds.

I am **Sue Bard**, originally from London but in love at first sight with Edinburgh, aged 18, and very happy after to-ing and fro-ing to be living here since 2007. I am grateful to have found Sukkat Shalom and have been a member for 10 years. I've been a council member for 9 of those years and have a spring in my step down from co-chairing for 5 years. I enjoy living by and swimming in Edinburgh's sea and reservoirs (in the summer) and walking. I like hanging out with family - I have four children and four grandchildren - and friends.





**Jonathan Broadie.** I was born in Oxford, but raised and educated in Edinburgh where I attended the Orthodox Shul and Cheder. After I graduated from University, I trained as a Chartered Accountant and as an economist and, as a young adult, I joined Glasgow New Synagogue, where Marjory and I were married. I've been a member of Sukkat Shalom since the beginning, serving as Treasurer, and in Burial and security roles, as well as involvement in a range of community and religious activities. I'm a parent and grandparent, and love spending time with family and friends. I enjoy voluntary work, travelling, hill-walking and reading, and I remain a fully paid-up member of cafe society!

I'm **Marjory Broadie**, married to Jonathan, and a very proud mum, mum-in-law, granny, and by profession a school teacher! Born in Malawi, and growing up there and in Tanzania, sparked my most passionate pursuit - a thirst for travel - especially to remote destinations. My other pleasurable interests include cooking, reading, the theatre and time spent with family and friends. I was a member of Glasgow New Synagogue, where Jonathan and I were married. As a founder member of Sukkat Shalom, and Council Member since the beginning, I care very deeply about our very special community and its future.





Hi my name is **Olly Davidson-Richards**. I grew up in Kent and first came to Edinburgh in 2008 for university. I live in the Leith Walk area with my dog Betty and work as a solicitor. I first became involved in Sukkat Shalom in 2018 and became the associate member representative on Council before finalising my conversion in 2024. I first joined the Council as I think Sukkat Shalom is an amazing community and wanted to contribute more to its success.

**Helen Ford**. I grew up on the Morayshire coast before moving to Edinburgh for University. I am Autistic and an ambulant wheelchair user due to Symptomatic Hypermobility. As well as being on Council I am both an Engagement and Education volunteer for the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland at Edinburgh Zoo. I also really enjoy baking and crafting. I also enjoying going to the football. Finally I am human to Teddy the Assistance Poodle (4) and Frodo the overgrown poodle puppy (8). We enjoy doing different activities together.





**Samara Leibner.** I moved to Glasgow from Montreal in 2015, and joined Sukkat Shalom in 2023. I'm new to Council, and I'll be helping our community with burials and funerals too.

My background is in art and history, and I worked in art galleries and as an illustrator before becoming a funeral arranger, which I did for several years.



I now work for Good Life, Good Death, Good Grief, a third-sector organisation which aims to improve experiences and understanding of death, dying, caring and bereavement in Scotland.

In my free time I like to draw, paint, make comics, sew, embroider, and make things with my hands. I speak French, English and rusty Hebrew, and I'm working on building up my Yiddish. I don't think you're morbid if you have a question about death, and I'm always happy to talk about it.

**Barrie Levine.** I was brought up in an Orthodox family in Glasgow, cheder-educated with reasonably fluent biblical Hebrew. I was also a member of Habonim (a socialist, Zionist youth group) for most of my youth, including spending a year on kibbutz in 1973/74: a crash lesson in the politics of Israel/Palestine. Professionally, my background is in professional social work where I worked in various fields including child protection and homelessness. Now retired, I work part-time and also chair the board of trustees of Scotland's largest not-for-profit community law centre, based in Glasgow.

**Maurice Naftalin.** I've been involved with Jewish communal life since the 1990s, first with Glasgow Reform Synagogue and then with Sukkat Shalom, which I helped to set up 20 years ago. I still do some of the IT administration for the community, and, jointly with Nick Silk, I help organise and lead services. I have four sons; the youngest is in a residential community near Dunkeld for people with learning disabilities (I'm a trustee of this community). My working life has been spent in the computing industry, as a developer, trainer, manager, and writer, but I'm nearing retirement now.



**Gillian Raab.** I was a founding member of Sukkat Shalom, and have been active in the community in various roles. I retired as professor of Applied Statistics at Edinburgh Napier in 2008 and since then have worked part-time on various projects. My current research area is the creation and evaluation of synthetic data for disclosure control. I live with Charlie Raab and we have two children and 3 grandchildren.



**Nick Silk.** I was born in 1960 in Nottingham where our family were members of the Nottingham Liberal Synagogue. As is not uncommon, our family wasn't so active in the community until my *bar mitzvah*, after which the whole family became involved, and we've never looked back since! I went to Birmingham University where I met Kate, and we moved via York (and Birmingham and Leeds shuls) to Linlithgow where we've been since. We've got two sons, two daughters-in-law and one grandchild, and since moving to Scotland I've been actively involved in shul life, both as Chair of Glasgow Reform Synagogue and of course Sukkat Shalom.



**Han Smith** is a council member of Sukkat Shalom and joined the community in 2021 with their wife, Jen Andreacchi. Starting in the spring of this year, they will take part in running Sukkat Shalom's social media accounts. They are a psychotherapist in Leith and conduct research into trans experiences and intergenerational transmissions at the University of Edinburgh.



I'm **Andrea Torres**. Originally from Texas and Mexico, I have happily lived in Edinburgh with my husband Rolando since 2022. In my spare time, I enjoy landscape photography, trying my husband's latest cooking and wine pairings, and quilting gifts for friends and loved ones. During my time here, I have been an active member of the shul and have helped the council in leading our social media and planned our 20th anniversary celebration. This past AGM, I was elected the 6th Chair to ELJC, and I look forward to contributing more to our community and learning a lot! I am always an email away for community members who may have questions, ideas for new programming, or are just looking for ways to get involved. [chair@eljc.org](mailto:chair@eljc.org)

**Phil Wiltshire**

converted in 2023 and serves as our synagogue's trainee *shamash*.

**Daniel Naftalin** grew up in Sukkat Shalom and currently serves as our Treasurer.

## *Chag Sameach!* A New Year for the Trees



**T**his year we welcomed Rabbi Robyn Ashworth-Stein, along with her husband Anthony and son Gabriel to celebrate Tu B'Shvat with us and lead our seder with its multi-faith participants.

Paying homage to Scotland, where we live, Sukkat Shalom member Gillian Raab has devised a unique fusion dish for this festival (which sometimes even coincides with Burns Night) – a Tu B'Shvat haggis!

Rabbi Robyn led our Shabbat morning service the next day, where she gave [a memorable d'var Torah](#).

# Address to a Tu B'Shvat Haggis

Gillian Raab

Fair fa' your honest sonsie face  
Within yer skin nae meat finds place  
Wi' oats and all ye're fine for kashrut.  
But whit for 15 nuts and fruit?

Weel nane o' then mak greenhouse gases,  
Unlike the beasties wha live on grasses,  
Tu B'shevat maks us aware  
Of Tikkun Olam our world to repair.

This haggis, ecological food  
Helps to put us in the mood  
Tae think aboot oor planit heatin'  
And change the fare that folk are eatin'.



# Recipe: Tu B'Shvat Haggis

Gillian Raab



**A**ll quantities below are approximate and other ingredients, apart from those starred, can be added or removed for variation. This should make one large haggis. I made four times this quantity for our Tu b'Shevat seder. This version has 15 different fruits or nuts contributing to the recipe. To make it haggis-like you will need to ask a butcher to supply you with a skin that is used for vegetarian haggis and some butcher's string to tie it up.

## Ingredients

- 200 g black (Beluga?) lentils\*
- 1 onion\*
- Olive oil\*
- 1 crushed garlic clove\*
- 100g coarse pin-head oatmeal\*
- Vegetable stock\*
- 1 apple (cored and chopped)
- 1 pear (cored and chopped)
- Zest of 1 orange
- Dried fruits (total about 80 g)
- Raisins, figs, dates, apricots, prunes

- Chopped nuts (about 50g)
- Walnuts, hazelnuts, almonds
- Pistachios and/or pine nuts – a spoonful of each – I left them whole
- Pomegranate molasses – tablespoonful
- 2tsp ground coriander
- ½ tsp ground cumin
- About ¼ of a block (25g) of creamed coconut, grated
- Salt and pepper to taste

### Method

Cook the lentils in salted water until they are soft (about 20 minutes) and drain. Finely chop or grate the onion and fry gently in the olive oil without letting it brown, add the oatmeal, garlic, stock (just enough to make the mixture into a fairly thick paste) and chopped apple and pear, and cook, while stirring, for

around 10 minutes. The oatmeal should be cooked but still retain its texture. Then stir in the lentils and everything else. Put the grated coconut cream in last (it is standing in for the suet in traditional haggis) and mix in well. Taste to adjust seasoning.

You are now ready to stuff your haggis skin. Tie it up well. It will keep well like this until you are ready to serve. It is then best reheated by bringing slowly to the boil in a pan of cold water and simmering for about 10 minutes. I usually wrap it in silver foil in the pan so as to avoid it turning to porridge if the skin leaks. Alternatively, the mixture makes a nice filling for stuffed peppers and I am sure you can think of other possibilities.

Warm thanks to one of Edinburgh's renowned butchers, **Findlays of Portobello**, for their supply of vegetarian haggis casings.

# Chag Ha'Ilanot: A Diasporic Celebration of the Trees

Ellen Galford

On the gloriously spring-like Shabbat afternoon of 8th March, a group of twelve Sukkat Shalom community members, friends and two impeccably well-behaved dogs gathered in the Meadows to celebrate a specifically Scottish variation on the traditional festival of Tu B'Shvat, the New Year of the Trees.

We came together to adapt this ancient celebration to the place and time where we are now: at the point in the year when our Scottish trees begin to wake up from the sleep of a harsh North Atlantic winter. And no one who lives here needs any explanation of why this moment takes place somewhat later in the year than it did in the warmer, drier climate of ancient Palestine.

Our motivation for

creating this event was to reflect on the concept of *Doikayt*, a Yiddish word that in literal translation means “here-ness”. The term was first used by the Bundists, the movement of internationally-minded Jewish radical thinkers and activists that emerged in Eastern Europe in the late 19th century. “Here-ness” in this context is about focusing our Jewish identity and sense of community around the places where we live now, being both intensely local and intensely global.

To plan the afternoon, we took inspiration from the beautiful Tu B'Shvat seder created by the 16th century Kabbalist Yitzkhak Luria of Safed, and modelled it on a present-day *Haggadah* composed by Rabbi Rachel Barenblat (creator of the



website The Velveteen Rabbi).

We created a short *Haggadah* of our own, with a statement of our intentions and aspirations, and our own version of the Four Questions, reflecting the imagery of the Four Worlds in medieval Jewish literature, and expressing our own spiritual, ethical, political and environmental concerns in the here and now:

Why is *Bal Taschit*, the concept of “Thou shalt not destroy” (derived from Deuteronomy 20:19), important in Judaism and particularly at this moment? What does it mean to make a home where we are what sustains us? What does *Tikkun Olam*, repair of the world, require?

In the tradition of all good celebrations, the words and thoughts were only part of it. We accompanied our deliberations with live music, old and new versions of liturgical songs and the consumption of seasonally Scottish tree nuts, fruits and juices appropriate to each of our themes.

In the tradition of every properly Jewish occasion, this ceremonial feast was followed by a more substantial meal, in the seasonally and geographically appropriate form of a picnic. Finally, as the warm sunshine gave way to a much chillier but equally seasonal East Coast *haar*, we celebrated *Havdalah* under the trees of Middle Meadow Walk.





# Chag La'Ilanot

## A Diasporic Tu B'Shuat Celebration and Picnic

**8th March** (9th of March rain date), **3pm, the Meadows** near Middle Meadow Walk

Join us for a celebration of our local trees waking from their dormancy.

**Within the four worlds** of the traditional Tu Bishvat seder, we will explore the themes of Palestinian liberation, doikayt, sustainability and Tikkun Olam.

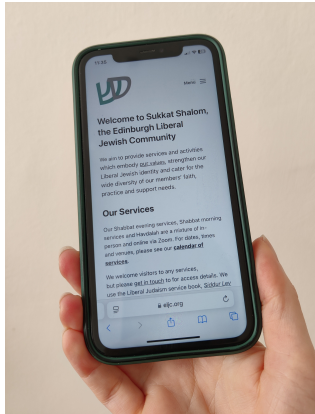
Havdallah will follow our celebration at sunset.

In the spirit of sustainability, and if you are able, please bring your own plate, cup and cutlery, and some food or drink to share.

**Musical instruments welcome.**

# A New Website for Sukkat Shalom

Rob Westwood



When I interviewed for the part-time position of Sukkat Shalom’s Administrator, there were some questions about redeveloping the website. This would soon become a welcome creative challenge.

I’m quite passionate about “the old Web,” the network of thousands of interlinked websites that existed long before social media took over the Internet. So I joined the Web Development council subcommittee, who would guide the process, and we got to work.

Given that a website is an organisation’s shop window to the world, we needed to consider who the site is for: who is most likely to look at it and how to speak to them. In short, the people visiting Sukkat Shalom are most likely to be members, potential members, potential converts, and visitors or students looking for a synagogue while away from home. We would prioritise information for these groups, making it clear where to find the information they’re most likely to be looking for.

As Administrator, I had access to the main Sukkat Shalom email inbox (contact@eljc.org), so I gradually built a picture of what people most commonly got in touch to ask about. When people have to ask a question by email, it's usually because they can't find what they want to know online. In the interests of better serving these people (and reducing the volume of email we receive and have to respond to), we made sure this information was easy to find. Sometimes this was a matter of clear signposting; other times it required an entry into the [new FAQ page](#). The FAQ is linked to the contact page with the suggestion that people seek "a speedy answer at our FAQ" before emailing.

Content was created in collaboration with the community members who knew best: Gillian Raab, for example, for the membership page and Nick Silk for the interfaith page. The [Community Information](#)

[Directory](#), updated just a few months earlier, was also instrumental in updating older information. While I gladly served as the pair of hands capable of building a well-organised and intelligently-presented website, the actual words are the collective voice of Sukkat Shalom.

A page dedicated to conversion to Judaism was a new addition to the website. This was accompanied by a new "everything you wanted to know about conversion but were afraid to ask"-type PDF booklet. I worked on this with Rabbi Mark who, in turn, based the text on an older Liberal Judaism conversion explainer.

The new website features [an events calendar](#), currently populated with every Shabbat and festival service between now and the end of 2025. This is hopefully proving useful to visitors and members alike: a place where dates, times, and venues can be checked.

Another key new area is

the [blog](#): this incorporates several sections from the old website, now organised as individual posts with their own URLs and datestamps. The blog is updated every week using content from the *What's On* weekly email. This way, we we can have fresh content at the site with minimal additional effort. The relationship between the website and *What's On* is useful more generally, with the opportunity to provide links in the email to “more information” at the website. As well as the relationship with *What's On*, the website also has a useful new relationship with *Etrog*. We can link from *Etrog* to website items when we want to. The [new \*Etrog\* archive](#) is a thing to behold: once it was decided to open up this archive, every file had to be transferred from the old website to the new. This revealed gaps in the record, almost all of which were filled by asking founder members to submit any missing copies they still had

on file. This included copies of a newsletter pre-dating the 2004 founding of Sukkat Shalom, back into 2002! Our community history is writ large in this archive, now open for all to see.

Thanks to the flexibility of Wordpress—initially chosen because all members of the Web development group were familiar with it—our website works nicely on any internet-connected device.

And so we have it. A new website for Sukkat Shalom in 2025. Future plans include a closer relationship between the website and our social media, and a project to beautify the website with photography and artwork: while a minimalist interface is good for information retrieval, we also want people to know that we're a community of creative and friendly human beings.

*The new website can be explored at [www.eljc.org](http://www.eljc.org).*

# Introducing...

## Heather Valencia and Edinburgh's Yiddish Group

Sue Bard and Elaine Samuel



Edinburgh's Yiddish Group has been on the go for a while. Heather Valencia, its teacher from the start, recently found her early lesson plans and the date of the first class: Sunday 5th October 2005. Stephanie Brickman, founder of the musical group Yiddish Song Project and Klezmer musician Simon Carlyle got it going, advertising around Edinburgh, and classes took place to start with at the Vet College (now Summerhall)

where Simon was a lecturer.

That Heather would become the esteemed Yiddish teacher, translator, researcher and literary critic that she is today was not obvious. She joined Stirling University's newly established German department as a lecturer in 1972, at which point she says "I was completely ignorant about Yiddish," adding "there was nothing Jewish in my background. I didn't know a thing about Judaism or what it was like

to be Jewish." Today she says "I wouldn't say I feel myself to be Jewish. I've never thought of converting, but now it's an essential part of my whole life."

Two key encounters propelled her in the direction she took. She met and married another of Stirling University's new lecturers, sociologist Mike Valencia. Mike was not then involved with organised Judaism but is described by Heather as "always Jewish to his core." Returning part-time to the German department in 1984 after being at home with young children, she told its polymath Head of Department that she'd really like to do a PhD, regretting an earlier unfinished thesis. He said, "Why don't you learn Yiddish?" And plucking a copy of *College Yiddish* off his shelf along with some photocopies of Avrom Sutzkever's poetry added, "You go away and learn Yiddish and study this poet.

He's a great poet, and I'll be your supervisor."

Heather says, "I didn't realise I was recklessly plunging into the work of just about the most complex and difficult of the Yiddish poets." She reflects that focusing on the imagery and themes in Sutzkever's earlier work meant that her limited knowledge of Yiddish literature and of Judaism at this point was not such a stumbling block as it might have been.

Thirty years on, and Heather is the editor and translator of the anthology *Still My Word Sings*. The first bilingual edition of Sutzkever's work, it contains a range of poetry from all periods of his creative life, ranging from 1935 until 2000. Heather values the long relationship she and Sutzkever established, corresponding over many years and meeting several times in Tel Aviv before his death in 2010, aged 96.

Heather's career has spanned a period that has



seen a resurgence of interest in Yiddish language and culture. Before World War Two there were almost 11 million Yiddish speakers, most of them in Eastern and Central Europe. Now Unesco classes Yiddish as an endangered language in that few children learn the language as their mother tongue at home. Estimates of the current number of Yiddish speakers vary. YIVO reports between half a million and a million Yiddish speakers in the world, mostly Hasidic and Haredi (strictly Orthodox) Jews, living mainly in the US, Canada, Europe and Israel.

However, the study and celebration of the Yiddish language and culture has been sustained through organisations that continued to draw on their Bundist and secular roots, like YIVO, founded in Vilna in 1925, transported to New York in 1940 and dedicated to the study of Eastern European Jewry. And there's the

Yiddish Center Medem Library in Paris founded in 1929 by immigrants from Eastern Europe and now the most significant Yiddish centre in Europe. Deserving a mention too is the Yiddish Book Center at Amherst founded in 1980 by Aaron Lansky who, realising that vast numbers of irreplaceable Yiddish books were being discarded by American-born Jews unable to read the language of their Yiddish-speaking parents and grandparents, organised an international network of *zamlers* (volunteer book collectors) and launched a campaign to save the world's remaining Yiddish books. Now, digitisation and the pandemic that propelled so many organisations to operate online, has made the reach of such institutions global.

Heather's academic work continues. She's currently working on the archives of Polish born Yiddish poet Avrom Nokhem Stencl who in 1936 escaped from Berlin

to London where he was celebrated for his monthly newsletter *Loshn und Lebn* (*Language and Life*), for his Friends of Yiddish Saturday afternoon literary society meetings and for his many acclaimed publications of Yiddish poetry. Here in Edinburgh, the Yiddish Group continues too, playing its vibrant and inimitable part in keeping Yiddish language and culture alive. Longtime member Elaine Samuel describes it: "We've seen members of Heather's Edinburgh Yiddish group pass through, and sometimes, unfortunately, pass on over the past 20 years... coming from almost every country in which Ashkenazi Jews have settled, from a broad variety of Jewish backgrounds or none, and with an even wider range of academic backgrounds and interests. Over the pandemic, we resorted to meeting by Zoom and this only increased our heterogeneity. While hopefully not constituting a

clique, there endures a core group of enthusiasts who now consider themselves not just co-learners or even Yiddishists, but a *chevrah* in every sense of the word. We retreat into the country together for a few days every year to meet, walk and study a specified text and we gather several times a year for the day in Edinburgh where we indulge in our other area of mutual interest: home produced food and wine selected by our very own sommelier, Daniel Lines.

"Over our almost two-hour weekly meetings," continues Elaine, "Heather and our local publishing and computing maven, Oron Joffe, provide us with a wide variety of Yiddish materials to feed our diverse interests: poetry, plays, fiction, documentary writings, puzzles, grammar and syntax. She need not worry. Heather's selections invariably manage to set us going off into unintended directions, each of us



following our own interests  
and inclinations.  
'Digressiye', we hear  
Heather sternly calling out.  
We never have ascertained  
whether this is a bona fide  
Yiddish word or made up by  
Heather to put us back on  
course. But does it really  
matter?"

*Responding to local demand,  
Heather has recently started  
a Yiddish class for  
beginners. If you'd like to  
know more, get in touch with  
us on [contact@eljc.org](mailto:contact@eljc.org) and  
we'll pass you on to Heather.*

## Chag Sameach! A Purim Photo Album

Purim was celebrated with verve and included crafts and games, a special *megillah* reading (with a script written by cheder member Tamar Kandlik Eltanani), a *hamantaschen* competition, a lucky dip *mishloach manot* (gift exchange) and of course a *purimspiel*. Spot kent faces in disguise!

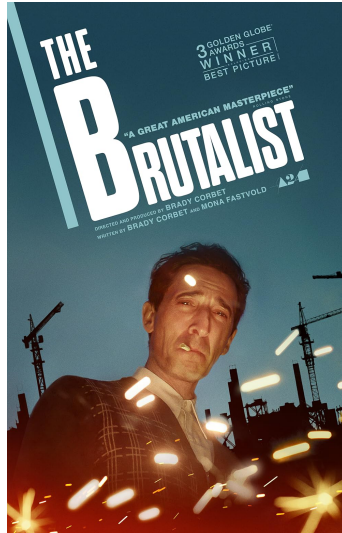




## Film

# Sense and Sensuality: Meeting up with *The Brutalist*

Ellen Galford



If you haven't already seen *The Brutalist* (2024), please find the time to do so - preferably on a full-sized cinema screen such as Edinburgh's Cameo One. Its visually stunning cinematography and the overall production design will knock your socks off. In spite of that well-publicised running time of

215 minutes (including an interval that feels less like an interruption than an integral element in the narrative) it flows faster and more coherently than many movies half its length.

If you're at all interested in cinema, you'll know already that the story begins at the end of World War II, when a fictional Holocaust survivor

—a Hungarian-Jewish architect called Laszlo Toth (played in an Oscar-winning performance by Adrien Brody) emerges from a concentration camp and arrives in America, damaged in both body and mind. Although he learns that his wife and now-orphaned niece have also survived (and are still struggling with bureaucracy to establish their own connection with each other in hopes of eventually being allowed entry into America together), his own first steps into this new life carry him onto shaky ground. He quickly discovers that the hospitality initially offered by an enthusiastically-assimilated American cousin has some problematical strings attached. However, it also brings Toth into contact with the larger-than-life and apparently mega-rich industrialist who will, after a disastrous beginning, offer him a return to his once-brilliant pre-war architectural career,

dangling the prospect of an adventurous and overweeningly ambitious commission. End of intentionally fragmentary plot summary. Talking about what follows the above would leave me liable for the critical crime of far too many spoilers. So I'll just encourage you to abandon preconceptions and savour the journey into some very unexpected places, even if the emotional colours are dark and the surprises not particularly pleasant ones. The rest is, or should be, cinema history. But what interests me almost as much as Brady Corbet's film itself lies in its current aftermath: the range and variety of responses from those who—collectively or individually—feel they have a stake in the story. Architects are now arguing about which, if any, of the giants of 20th century modernist design should be seen as the “real” Laszlo Toth, with some asserting that the film got the facts

about their preferred model “wrong.” Artists working in other disciplines mull over the sometimes queasy relationships with rich and powerful funders.

People concerned with issues of sexual abuse (and sexual politics in general) reflect on the ways in which lust and violence—from the predictable to the totally unexpected—rear their heads, raising the question of who is doing what to whom, and why. Meanwhile some technologically-knowledgeable cineastes are protesting against the use of AI to ensure the accuracy and authenticity of Hungarian pronunciation in several lines of dialogue spoken in Toth’s mother-tongue.

And, last but certainly not least, Jewish groups and

individuals with widely differing views on the history of Zionism and on the subsequent evolution of the Israeli state, have launched into discussions in print and online, exploring the ways these questions are raised, however subtly, in the course of the film and disagreeing about whether or not it gives any answers.

No matter how you read its rich array of possible meanings and messages (and you’ll find interpreters and commentators out there to support you in all directions), *The Brutalist* is a serious piece of work, and one that might open the way into serious conversations on a number of cultural and political issues—some obvious, some less so—that we need to be having.



# Film

## *A Real Pain* (2024)

Maurice Naftalin



One of the famous sayings of the American baseball coach Yogi Berra—trivial or deep, depending on your viewpoint—was that “you can observe a lot by just watching”. The film *A Real Pain* is a terrific demonstration of the truth of this. Nothing much happens, but as the film follows the two main characters, two New York cousins on a Jewish heritage tour of Poland, you observe—by just watching—their relationship

and how their lives in America are shaped by the tortured history of Poland. This short description may make the film sound heavy and depressing, but in fact it’s funny and often very light, keeping a perfect balance between its difficult themes and the witty and fluent comedy of the main characters.

The people in the foreground are David and Benji, who are visiting Poland on a group tour in

homage to their grandmother, a *Shoah* survivor who has recently died. The cousins are polar opposites in their personalities: David is conventional and controlled, while Benji is extrovert and free-spirited. Their different paths in life have separated them and strained their once-close relationship, but their continuing love for each other is at the heart of the movie. Benji's unpredictable and uninhibited behaviour is at times attractive and at times shocking to the other members of the tour, and torments his cousin, who tells the group, "I love him, and I hate him, and I want to be him". In one memorable scene, the group visits the monument to the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, where Benji's ability to draw the whole group into posing with the heroic sculptures leaves David an isolated spectator to the light-heartedness that Benji can create. (A moment at which I

personally really identified with David!)

That scene is also an example of the film's deft balance in framing the cousins' relationship in the historical context of Poland's Jewish heritage. Scenes like that at the monument and at the Majdanek extermination camp are used as framing for the foreground action, although there is a careful balance of the richness of Polish Jewish life with the events of its tragic end. In the final scene in Poland, David and Benji visit the house their grandmother grew up in. She survived the *Shoah*, because of "a thousand miracles" as David puts it, and this pilgrimage symbolises their respect. Even there, though, everyday life intrudes to provide a slyly comic reminder that real people live on among our memories.

Benji's relationship with the grandmother embodies the difficult relationship of the Ashkenazi diaspora with



“*der heim.*” For Benji, she was the only person who understood him fully, but we learn not only that her death has unmoored him, but also that the relationship was more complex than he had imagined. The revelation of his suffering is especially effective because we only gradually come to see it past his defences of comedy and mischief. The real pain of the title refers not only to him but also to what he is experiencing.

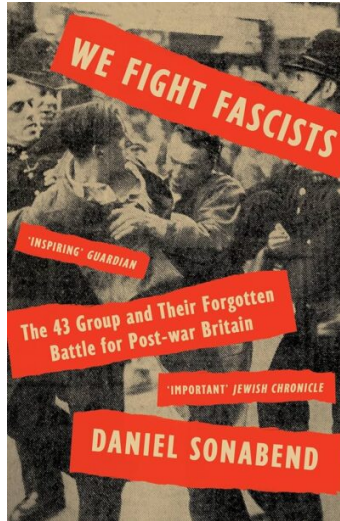
*A Real Pain* works exceptionally well on a number of levels, all made entirely credible by the low-key realism of the style, which sometimes feels almost like a documentary. The supporting characters—

the tour group and their English guide—feel like real people with their own stories. (A special mention is due for the Rwandan Jewish convert, who describes movingly how he came to Judaism through his experience of the Rwandan genocide). Above all, though, it is the relationship between the leads that makes this film stand out. It’s a star turn for Jesse Eisenberg, who also wrote and directed, and Kieran Culkin, who captures the contradictions of the mercurial Benji perfectly. *A Real Pain* might be hard to catch it in the cinema now, but it’s available on several streaming services. Don’t let it go by!

## Books

### Daniel Sonabend's *We Fight Fascists* (2019) at The Lit

Charlie Raab and Shlomo ben Avraham



On the 9th March, Daniel Sonabend gave a talk to the Lit about the opposition to Fascism's reappearance on the British scene from 1946 to 1950, when Oswald Mosley once again led the forces of the far right in the different domestic and international circumstances of the post-war years. The Jewish ex-servicemen and

many others from across the political and social spectrum, comprised the "43 Group," and fought fascism in London by means of surveillance operations upon the far right, the disrupting of rallies and meetings, and even assaulting Mosleyite activists. Daniel's book, *We Fight Fascism* (Verso Press, 2019), based on interviews

and archives, was the source of his fascinating illustrated talk of a nearly forgotten historical moment of bravery and resourcefulness, which nevertheless raises many perennial questions about resistance, protest and activism. [CR]

One such question concerns the ethics of physical confrontation with the enemy. Around the time of the book's publication, left-wing activists were slinging milkshakes at Brexit Party figureheads, and a White Supremacist called Richard Spencer was memorably thumped in the face on live television. To the burly working-class 43 Group there was no question: their lives depended on shutting down the rise of British Fascism, a need now born out by history. The Fascists want to do more to us than to douse us in milkshake: they want to use the State as a weapon to destroy us. The counterargument, I suppose,

if we want to lead the world towards a more refined era and away from the idolisation of Trump and Farage, we must consider whether joining in with brutality defeats the object of resisting it.

*We Fight Fascists* is brilliant. Verso has a mildly chequered history with publishing books about Judaism. *Red Rosa* (2017) stinks. Their introduction of *Revolutionary Yiddishland* (1983) to the English-speaking world in 2016 is superb. Daniel Sonabend hones warm relationships with the surviving members of the Group and delves skillfully into press and archive material to piece their story together. If I had to criticise, I'd say I learned as much about Mosley than I did the actual 43 Group but that's the Fascist cult of personality for you. Sonabend puts together a first-rate history of a vibrant and radical resistance moment at a very timely moment. [SbA]

# Food

## Cholent: A Bubbling Pot of Comfort

Rolando Trapero



The first time I had cholent, I was asleep half an hour after finishing my bowl. There really is something to having a hearty, hypnotic stew to take away the temptation of doomscrolling on your phone on Shabbat. Beans, meat (if you fancy it), potato, and fat will all conspire to make your head feel so heavy, sinking into a pillow

will be the only cure.

Cholent is very likely a culinary descendant of *hamin*, the Shabbat stew that originated in medieval Sephardic communities, which then made its way to nearby Provence and the rest of Europe beyond the Pyrenees. The consumption of beans, like those in *hamin* and cholent, is

so characteristically Jewish that even now in Spain, several kinds of beans are known as *judias* or “Jewish [beans]”. When cholent made its way to Hungary centuries ago, it stayed even after the Jewish community was very nearly wiped out by the Holocaust and is still eaten there as *solet* (pronounced “sholet”), which is derived from *shalet*, a Yiddish word for cholent. According to Gil Marks in the *Encyclopedia of Jewish Foods*, the concept of the Shabbat stew started as a type of barley porridge in the Land of Israel to adhere to Shabbat laws. Interestingly, nowadays *harissa* is the word for a grain porridge with succulent meat beaten into it that is often eaten in contemporary Arabic and Armenian cultures. Maybe it’s a distant relative! Regardless of the many roads and names it has taken in the world, having cholent on Saturdays is participating in a long tradition of loving a very intentional, honest-to-goodness Jewish comfort food.

Ashkenazi cuisine is great. If the only gefilte fish you’ve had came out of a jar or if your matzah balls come from a powder packet, don’t even think about slandering it. Shmaltz, *lokshen*, tough cuts and offal, the trusty herring, heaps of chopped dill, and pickles alive with acidic energy are the strengths of Ashkenazi cookery. These foods, like those from their sister cuisines from Central and Eastern Europe, are amazing if they are done right.

Having said that, a small caveat: I need spices in my life. We are not in the harsh deprivation of a shtetl in the Pale, with only peppercorns, salt, and sugar to embellish our Shabbat delights. Cardamom, cloves, paprika, and all the other kinds of accessible aromatic species we have now to breathe vitality into the kitchen. If I had a spice rack, it would take up half the kitchen. Spice bags and jars overcrowd my cabinets instead. At our place, we even make *Havdalah* with cumin,

not cloves or cinnamon.

Thankfully, not many of these luxuries will break the bank and that makes the possibilities exciting!

So, I've had to find a balance. My cholent at home has become "middle of the road." Its Ashkenazi roots are plain for all to see, but it has enough spices that your great-bubbe would have raised an eyebrow.

### Recipe (serves 6)

for a 3.5 L slow cooker,  
adjust as needed

- 1 kg tough cuts (e.g., beef chuck, lamb shoulder, osso buco, etc.)
- optional: if you're veg, instead add in 1 can of chickpeas and/or 1 can of lentils
- 1 can baked beans (like Heinz or Rakusen's)
- 2 diced yellow onions
- 2 pressed garlic cloves
- 1 diced large carrot
- 1 diced large celery stalk
- 2 chopped medium-sized potatoes
- 6 sliced mushrooms
- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup pearl barley

- 2 tbsp chicken/duck/goose fat or extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 tbsp sun-dried tomato puree
- Kosher salt, to taste

### My cholent spice mix

- 2 tsp turmeric powder
- 2 tsp cumin powder
- 2 tsp smoked paprika or pimentón
- 1 tsp chili or Aleppo pepper flakes
- 1 tsp dried thyme
- 1 tsp coriander seed powder
- 1 tsp Baharat powder
- Freshly cracked black pepper, to taste.

### Instructions

Put the vegetables, fat, tomato puree, and meat in a mixing bowl. Add in some kosher salt, mix it all up, and place the salted ingredients in the slow cooker.

In the emptied bowl, pour one cup of water and add in the cholent spice mix. Mix the spices into the water thoroughly.

Pour in the spiced water into the slow cooker and add additional water until the food is covered, making sure to leave some space for steam in the slow cooker.

To cook it, switch on the cooker to high heat and leave it for 3-4 hours. Then, switch the heat setting to medium heat and leave it overnight.

After it is done cooking, mix it thoroughly with a ladle to thicken up the starches and adjust the salt. Now it's ready to serve!

## Wine Pairing

If you're looking for a wine to cut through the stodge, I'd recommend a Rioja Crianza, Primitivo di Manduria, or Côtes du Rhône-Villages. In short, something full of juicy red and black fruit flavours and strong enough to be refreshing with all the savoury and fatty flavours, but not so strong that it blows out your palate.

## Theatre

### *The Merchant of Venice* (2024)

Sue Fyvel, Carol Levstein and Gillian Raab



The recent Royal Lyceum production of *The Merchant of Venice* (MoV) was part of an imaginative exchange programme between the Lyceum and Theatre for a New Audience (TFANA) in Brooklyn, New York.

Ahead of the first performance David Greig and his staff at the Lyceum proactively sought out Jewish people in Edinburgh to give them the opportunity, not only to see it—with free tickets!—but also to be invited to participate in two outstanding pre-performance discussions. These included the director Arin Arbus and John Douglas Thompson, shown here, who played Shylock.

At the end of the play Shylock and Jessica stood forward on either side of the stage and recited the *Kol Nidrei* prayer. The scene between Jessica and Lorenzo at the end of the play was preceded by Lorenzo apparently abusing Jessica. We all had different reactions to it and we are sharing three of them here.

#### Person 1

For me the high spot of the production was the outstanding performance of John Douglas Thompson, both as a Shakespearian actor in general and in his distinctive interpretation of Shylock as a “proxy for the other.”



As he said, “Shylock for me represents all those others” (TFANA interview). I thought he succeeded brilliantly in integrating an authentic portrayal of a Jew, with his Blackness reinforcing the position of the universal “other.”

In my opinion the rest of the cast, and the production in general, though very brave and thoughtful, didn’t quite match up to Thompson’s acting and ability to honour the genius of Shakespeare’s poetry and prose. Also the production, while it clearly had very worthy and creative intentions, tried to address too many other issues which didn’t quite come off for me.

These would be my reasons for only giving it 4 rather than 5 stars. However, overall, the production has remained with me as other perhaps more polished productions might not. This is because of its thoughtful and respectful interpretation both of the universality of persecution of the other and the particularity of Jewish persecution, both of which are with us today, no less than they were in Shakespeare’s time.

Unpleasant memories of school readings of *The Merchant of Venice* filled me with conflicting emotions as the lights dimmed. However, the apparent modern attire and use of mobile phones suggested to me that this was about to be a different experience. I was not disappointed. John Douglas Thomson’s portrayal of Shylock was confident, skilled and engrossing. The interpretation of the original script, I felt, portrayed many of the 16th century Italian male characters as frankly chauvinistic, discriminatory and homophobic, and finally, rather than conveying a feeling of the antisemites being victorious, it portrayed them as being lacking. The final scene between Jessica and Lorenzo surprising in both his maltreatment of his newly converted wife, and her subsequent unhappiness, was, I felt, tragic but inspired, lending an even more emotional tone to the speaking of the addition to the original play, the defiant *Kol Nidrei* declaration in which all personal or religious vows between the person and Hashem are annulled. In this way it was suggested that both Jessica

and Shylock would in future be true to their Jewish roots.

There was also humour: the portrayal of the Prince of Monaco, as he made his choice of casket in his quest for Portia's hand whilst flirting with the male servant in the background, and the portrayal of the drunken but sincere Gratiano. Additionally, the warm relationship between Portia and Bassanio felt convincingly genuine.

My thanks to Arin Arbus and her exceptional cast for showing MoV in this new and stimulating interpretation.

### Person 3

When I read MoV at school my sympathies were completely with Shylock; I felt little empathy with Portia whom I thought over-privileged and unkind. This was over 60 years ago, before I converted to Judaism. So I did not have a personal identity reaction to the antisemitism of the play, unlike those of other Jews who have seen it.

I was puzzled by the final scene between Jessica and Lorenzo, and it is only after speaking with others that I understand the

interpretation. Lorenzo had effectively stolen and raped her and forced her to convert to Christianity. My memory of the text was of a romantic moonlight scene, but rereading it now, after seeing the play, there are passages in the text where one can find a different reading. Jessica's verse:

"On such a night  
Did young Lorenzo swear he loved  
her well,  
Stealing her soul with many vows  
of faith,  
And nêr the true one."

is followed by Lorenzo calling her a shrew, although he forgives her. So, the recital of *Kol Nidrei* at the end makes sense in terms of Jessica and Shylock annulling their forced conversions. A common, but disputed, theory is that the *Kol Nidrei* may have been a reaction to the forced conversion of Jews. Its origins were in 9th-century Palestine and it has [a mysterious history](#). Talking to friends after seeing the performance has helped me to understand the play and to have a better understanding of our Yom Kippur liturgy.

## Exhibitions

# Tarot at the Warburg Institute

Sue Bard



Who's heard of the Warburg Institute? Part of London University, it's long been a resource for scholars and artists but until this year it has had little public face. Recent renovation and expansion including spaces for

exhibitions and events will change that, and its opening international exhibition in the new Kythera Gallery 'Tarot – Origins and Afterlives' (running until 30 April 2025) has attracted unanticipated hordes of visitors.

The Warburg Institute is named after its founder, ground-breaking art historian and scholar Aby Warburg (1886 – 1929). Born in Hamburg into a Jewish banking family, at the age of 13 Aby gave his birth-right to the family business to his younger brother Max, in exchange for any book he ever asked for. Aby's private collection became the Warburg Library in Hamburg, evolving by 1921 into a research institute - *Kulturwissenschaftliche* (Cultural Studies) *Bibliothek* (KBW), alongside and as a resource for the contemporaneous Hamburg University.

Aby Warburg's work focused on tracing the roots of the Renaissance in ancient civilisations, developing concepts of how the memory of the past affects a culture and how images play a pivotal role in this process. He set out to physically map how images are transmitted across time and space. Described as "a

kind of analogue internet of photos, reproductions and newspaper clippings pinned to boards" part of this enormous "image atlas" can be seen in the current exhibition. Today, the Institute says of itself, "building on Aby Warburg's belief that the memory of the past activates the present, the Warburg examines the movement of culture across barriers – of time, space and discipline- to inspire, inform and connect."

In 1933 the Nazis came to power. The KWB's founder and many of its staff and scholars were Jewish, necessitating swift and wholesale evacuation. On the 12th of December 1933 two small steamers, *Hermia* and *Jessica* set off down the Elbe with their 531 boxes of books, slides, photographs and furniture, to disembark at Tower Bridge, where the Institute was installed initially in Thames House and eventually, having been given in trust by the Warburg family to the

University of London, in its own building in Bloomsbury. During the 1930s and '40s it was a principle channel and destination for Jewish refugee scholars and curators and is said to be the only cultural institution rescued from Nazi Germany to survive intact today.

*Tarot – Origins and Afterlives* is a fitting subject for the Warburg Institute's opening exhibition. The story of Tarot itself is global, historical and told in images – often of breathtaking beauty and ingenuity.

Aby Warburg was an early and serious collector of tarot cards and materials and a scholar of the evolution of Tarot. He devoted a whole panel of his "image atlas" to tarot, noting how a form "devoted to opening up the future takes us time and again, back into the past." I found the exhibition mind expanding; having given little thought to the subject of Tarot before, I began to

understand its potential for creative thinking, for reflection and for an alternative less stressful and more fruitful approach to decision making than I'm used to employing.

The exhibition is dynamic, chronicling Tarot's constantly shifting uses and perspectives. It culminates in a space devoted to contemporary Tarot, demonstrating the wide range of its design and use today, including by artists Courtney Alexander and Katie Anderson.

Courtney Alexander describes her arresting tarot deck—collage paintings including gold and holographic foils—as a "living tapestry that weaves together the historical narratives and modern culture of the Black Diaspora." The deck (pictured overleaf) has been produced and widely distributed as an educational resource.



Katie Anderson has created the satisfyingly rhyming "Barrow Tarot" deck of hand-drawn cards about identity and community in Barrow-in-Furness in Cumbria. The cards, described by their creator as "a conversational artwork" are arranged under the four "houses" of Community, Environment, Culture and Industry and emerged in the course of a local residency. The deck was launched with a series of events in Barrow Market, inviting "fortune-telling for a future town."

I find myself pondering whether tarot, with its

avoidance of the binary and its use of images rather than (increasingly unsayable) words could help us to look at our past, present and future together. Just a thought!

∞

Visit the [Warburg Institute's website](#) to find out more about the many in-person and online events connected to this exhibition, which is on until 30 April.

# Gardens

## Biblical Garden at Edinburgh Hebrew Congregation

Lesley Danzig

And God said, “Let the earth sprout vegetation: seed-bearing plants, fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it.” And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation: seed-bearing plants of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that this was good.

**Genesis 1:11-12**

**T**his project was launched in February 2024. With financial donations, contributions of building expertise, cuttings of plants from well wishers together with some digital input; three dedicated raised beds were built, a herb bed established, tubs filled and explanatory signage printed with QR codes were placed accordingly.

After a two year wait, funding also arrived from

Edinburgh City Council which enabled a purchase of a much needed greenhouse in 2025.

Between the Torah, the Mishnah and the Talmud over 500 plants are mentioned. The ones growing at EHC are plants that should be successful in the Scottish climate.

Plants were used for many purposes in Biblical times – rituals, offerings, tithes, dying, making soap, symbols,



metaphors, allegories, medicine, prohibitions, cooking and so on.

Our plants come with fascinating stories surrounding the reasons for their mention in the Bible. For instance did you know that Noah heralded climate change and that he grew all the trees himself to build the Ark?

And why did the Children of Israel think Manna looked like coriander? What were broad beans used for and what was the connection between bay leaves and cows? A tour of the garden will answer these questions with more Biblical plant stories to relate. A

suggested donation of £5 per person on the tour will help keep the project alive.

*Edinburgh Hebrew  
Congregation has generously  
invited members of Sukkat  
Shalom to visit this interesting  
and unusual garden on  
WEDNESDAY 18 JUNE  
5.30pm. Let us know  
([contact@eljc](mailto:contact@eljc)) if you'd like to  
reserve your place now. We'll be  
flagging it up again in our  
weekly what's on nearer the  
time*



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