16:00-19:00 Modern Monsters I
Chair: Christian Wiese (Frankfurt)
Cathy Gelbin (Manchester)
Joela Jacobs (Tucson, AZ)
Jay Geller (Nashville, TN)

Monsters, Gender and Race in Early German Cinema
A Jewish Frankenstein? Making Monsters in Modernist German Literature
‘Der Volf’ or The Jew as Outsider of the Law

19:30 Dinner

Tuesday, 24 May 2016

9:30-11:30 Modern Monsters II
Chair: Mirjam Thulin (Mainz)
Vered Weiss (Urbana, IL)
Kobi Kabalek (Jerusalem)

Modern Monstrous Others: Locating Liminal Jewish Identities from S. Y. Agnon to Nir Baram
Monsters and Ghosts in Testimonies of Holocaust Survivors

11:30-12:30 Concluding Open Discussion
Chair: David B. Ruderman (Philadelphia)

12:30 Lunch

Participation is free, no registration is required

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Monsters are creatures of the dark. They conceal themselves under children’s beds or in deep closets, emerging only after we turn out the lights. At the same time, these shadowy creatures have a kind of unique revelatory power, allowing them to bring to light some of the most well hidden truths. The very word “monster” is derived from the Latin “monstrare” meaning to show, to demonstrate, or to reveal. It is this unique revelatory power of the monster which makes it such a powerful ally to the historian. The trans-historical presence of the monster is an ominous sign of continuity in history, and at the same time, a reminder of the complete and utter strangeness of past cultures and ways of thought. The monster is a compulsive border-crosser, which bears powerful testimony to the artificial nature of rigid distinctions. So transgressive, so untamable, it defies all our attempts to define it, to contain it within a single genre, period or space. From the pages of novels and broadsheets, folktales and archival documents, science books and theological works, it reaches out to us, mocking our tales of secularization, modernization, or rationalization and offering us a different history – not one of unfolding narratives, but of shifting anxieties, of fears that are at once primordial and particular, ancient and new.

Perceived throughout much of history as monsters or wonders in their own right, European Jews invoked images of monsters, demons and wonders in their texts, art, and folktales. This conference attempts to unravel the history and the idiosyncrasies of these images from a variety of perspectives, and to pinpoint their political, cultural and religious uses from the medieval into the modern period.