



Dear Woolf Friends,

Most teenagers who found themselves growing up in the drab suburbs of South East London in the mid-1960s felt the need for escape. Skiffle music and American Rock and Roll were popular. But not with me.

I was captivated by the mysterious world of the novelist and short story writer Franz Kafka: in *Metamorphosis* Gregor Samsa wakes up to find that he has been transformed into a huge insect; in *The Trial* Joseph K is dragged into a courtroom without being told the charges against him; and in *The Castle* a land surveyor called only K, travels to a snowy, remote village dominated by the eponymous, mysterious castle and spends the rest of the novel (which ends in midsentence) unsuccessfully trying to get in, so that he can do what he came to do.

The fascination with Kafka has never left me. That is why I was delighted to go along to the Woolf Institute lecture given by fellow Kafka fanatic Shalom Auslander, the author of the acclaimed novels *Beware of God* and *Foreskin's Lament*. Auslander is the first recipient of the newly established Peter Gilbert Prize for his essay in *Jewish Renaissance* magazine *The Day Kafka Killed His Iphone*. This bi-annual prize will be sponsored jointly by *Jewish Renaissance* and the Woolf Institute.

Shalom started his lecture by reading a passage from his short story about a beetle which wakes up to find that it has been transformed ... into a human, thus inverting the plot of Kafka's most famous story. The beetle is repelled and disgusted when he looks

down at his human body and Shalom believes it is that very self-loathing which is at the heart of Kafka's work.

Where does it come from and why does Shalom share it?

To explain, he launched into what was nothing less than a vigorous deconstruction of Abrahamic theology. For millennia, he argued, we've been telling ourselves stories about original sin and the fall of man. Is it any surprise that so many, raised in this tradition, suffer from crippling low self-esteem? Fathers pass it on to sons and daughters. Both Shalom Auslander and Franz Kafka wrote about their hatred of a patriarchal, tyrannical father. Such inter-generational *angst* is graphically symbolized in the troubling story of Abraham and Isaac. As Bob Dylan put it so poetically:

Oh God said to Abraham, "Kill me a son"
Abe says, "Man, you must be puttin' me on"
God say, "No." Abe say, "What?"
God say, "You can do what you want Abe, but
The next time you see me comin' you better run"

And that brings me back to my South East London bedroom. I didn't like Elvis or Lonnie Donegan but I loved Bob Dylan. Back in Catford, I had two secret allies, Kafka and Dylan. Perhaps both men are saying in their different ways, it's time to stop obsessing about aggressive patriarchy and start telling ourselves different stories. Shalom Auslander would go along with that.

Best wishes,

David Perry
Woolf Media Consultant & Producer



Upcoming Events

7 March

The Topology of
Antisemitism: from
Definition to
Identification



27 March

Barbarians and
Romans: dynamics
of integration in Late
Antique Hispania



30 March

Iftar



4 April

Antisemitism from
without and Racism
from within.



27 April

Woolf Institute in
New York



6 June

Woolf Institute
Garden Party



Woolf Institute In New York

27 April 2023



THE WOOLF INSTITUTE IS GOING TO NEW YORK

At the end of April, The Woolf Institute will be visiting New York. We will be meeting alumni and friends, and Dr Katherine O'Lone will be giving a talk entitled '*Belfast; Have the Ghosts Left?*' based on her research. This will take place at the Cambridge in America premises at 1120 Avenue of the Americas.

This year marks the 25th anniversary of the signing of the Good Friday Agreement. In this talk, Dr Katherine O'Lone will explore the psychological and moral landscape of post-conflict Northern Ireland. Dr O'Lone argues that we can better understand peace by exploring the patterns surrounding how people think about reconciliation, forgiveness and justice in the aftermath of violent conflict. In Northern Ireland, despite the passage of twenty-five years since the GFA, the scars of 'The Troubles' continue to influence how people reason and think about moral issues, such as fairness, harm and justice. The conflict has ended but this talk suggests the ghosts are still there.

The talk will be followed by questions and discussion, and a reception to which all are welcome.

FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT FLORA MOFFIE

WEBINAR 7 MARCH @ 15:00

ISGAP-Woolf Institute Lecture Series

The Topology of Antisemitism: from Definition to Identification



ISGAP

As part of ISGAP's landmark Fellowship Training Programme on Critical Antisemitism Studies, Discrimination and Human Rights at the Woolf Institute, ISGAP is pleased to announce the ISGAP-Woolf Institute Series titled "Creating a Conceptual Framework for the Critical Study of Contemporary Antisemitism."

The series will allow ISGAP Visiting Scholars to deliver their latest research to the broader Cambridge community. It will also bring ISGAP's network of

scholars to the Woolf Institute, allowing for new ideas to be integrated into one of the most important academic institutions on issues of contemporary antisemitism. The seminar series will include presentations from top experts in the field of contemporary antisemitism.

The speaker will be Dr. Naya Lekht, Scholar and Educator, Los Angeles, U.S.

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The Medieval Mediterranean
Local & Global Perspectives

Woolf Institute & Society for the Medieval Mediterranean

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The Medieval Mediterranean Local & Global Perspectives

The Woolf Institute together with the Society for the Medieval Mediterranean invite you to attend their monthly webinar series.

All past lecture can be found on our [website](#) and our YouTube channel.

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GOOD LUCK

Naked Reflections Podcast x The Woolf Institute

A LIGHT- HEARTED DISCUSSION ABOUT
POSITIVE THINKING IN BAD TIMES...

PODCAST: GOOD LUCK

A light- hearted discussion about positive thinking in bad times.

Can positive thinking create its own momentum, or to put it another way, does negativity reap its own bad harvest? Dr Esther-Miriam Wagner and Robert

Tombs read the runes.

[CLICK HERE TO LISTEN](#)

COMING SOON

Naked Reflections Podcast x The Woolf Institute

THE POLITICS OF MUSIC

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Woolf Institute | Madingley Road, Cambridge, CB30UB United Kingdom

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