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**Maimonides for the Masses? Chaim Kruger,
Yiddish Journalism, and Medieval Jewish
Philosophy**

Abstract

In the early twentieth century, the Jewish community in Montreal created its own religious, cultural and intellectual spaces, including synagogues, schools, a library, and a Yiddish language daily, the Keneder Adler. Behind these varied but complementary institutions was a group of remarkable people who collectively built a Jewish community with considerable cultural creativity. One of the most interesting among them was Chaim Kruger (1877–1933). He was a shoḥet [kosher slaughterer], rabbi, teacher, and journalist on the staff of the Keneder Adler. He was also a serious scholar of Jewish philosophy. In the Keneder Adler, Kruger shared the results of his deep and extensive reading and study. He wrote series of articles on widely-ranging subjects such as Philo Judaeus, Saadia Gaon, Moses Maimonides, Isaac Luria, and Ḥayyim of Volozhin. His columns on Maimonides were collected into a book, Der Rambam, zayn leben un shafn [Maimonides: His Life and Works], published in 1933. The Maimonides book forms the basis of our analysis of Kruger's thought. This article examines Kruger's attempt to popularize Maimonides' philosophy and make a thinker noted for the esoteric nature of his thought into someone accessible to the readership of the Keneder Adler. It also investigates Kruger's attempt to compare Maimonides with modern philosophers, especially Kant and Nietzsche, in the context of contemporary attempts to incorporate modern philosophy into the task of understanding Judaism. Kruger's work contributes to our understanding of the intellectual milieu of the Montreal Jewish community as well as the reception history of Maimonides in the twentieth century.

Résumé

Au début du XXe siècle, la communauté juive de Montréal a créé ses propres espaces religieux, culturels et intellectuels, notamment des synagogues, des écoles, une bibliothèque et un quotidien yiddish, le Keneder Adler. Derrière ces institutions variées mais complémentaires se cache un groupe de personnes remarquables qui, ensemble, ont bâti une communauté juive dotée d'une créativité culturelle considérable. L'un des plus intéressants d'entre eux était Chaim Kruger (1877–1933). Il était shoḥet [abatteur casher], rabbin, enseignant et journaliste au sein de l'équipe du Keneder Adler. Dans le Keneder Adler, Kruger partageait les résultats de ses lectures et études approfondies et étendues. Il a écrit des séries d'articles sur des sujets très variés tels que Philo Judaeus, Saadia Gaon, Moïse Maïmonide, Isaac Luria et Ḥayyim de Volozhin. Ses chroniques sur Maïmonide ont été rassemblées dans un livre, Der Rambam, zayn leben un shafn [Maïmonide : sa vie et ses œuvres], publié en 1933. Le livre sur Maïmonide constitue la base de notre analyse de la pensée de Kruger. Cet article examine la tentative de Kruger de populariser la philosophie de Maïmonide et de faire d'un penseur connu pour la nature ésotérique de sa pensée une personne accessible au lectorat du Keneder Adler. Il étudie également la ten-

tative de Kruger de comparer Maïmonide aux philosophes modernes, en particulier Kant et Nietzsche, dans le contexte des tentatives contemporaines d'incorporer la philosophie moderne dans la tâche de comprendre le judaïsme. Le travail de Kruger contribue à notre compréhension du milieu intellectuel de la communauté juive de Montréal ainsi que de l'histoire de la réception de Maïmonide au vingtième siècle.

In the early twentieth century, the Jewish community in Montreal created its own religious, cultural and intellectual spaces, including synagogues, schools, a library, and a Yiddish language daily, the *Keneder Adler*.¹ Behind these varied but complementary institutions was a group of remarkable people who collectively built a Jewish community with considerable cultural creativity.²

One of the most interesting of these people, and not the least significant, was Chaim Kruger (1877–1933). Kruger, who arrived in Montreal in the first decade of the twentieth century, played many roles in the development of that Jewry. His main occupation was *shohet* (kosher slaughterer). However, that demanding role did not impinge on his engaging in several other significant activities. He was at various times in his Montreal career a rabbi, a Hebrew teacher, a teacher of Talmud, and a journalistic mainstay of the *Keneder Adler*. Beyond all these pursuits, he found the time to become a serious scholar of Jewish history and philosophy.

Kruger demonstrated his enduring love of Judaic studies by sharing with the readers of the *Keneder Adler* in the 1920s and early 1930s the results of his deep and extensive study. He wrote a numerous series of articles that generally appeared in the newspaper's Friday edition on page 5 (the op-ed section), concerning widely ranging subjects such as the Jewish calendar, Philo Judaeus, Josephus Flavius, Judah Halevi, Saadia Gaon, Moses Maimonides, the Kabbalists of Safed and Isaac Luria, and Ḥayyim of Volozhin. His newspaper columns on Maimonides were collected into a book, *Der Rambam, zayn leben un shafn* (Maimonides: His Life and Works), published in Montreal in 1933. Though he intended to publish more of his studies, the Maimonides book was the only one he managed to see in print. That book will form the basis of our analysis of Kruger's thought in this article.

Through that analysis, we will have the opportunity to examine Kruger's attempt to popularize Maimonides' philosophy in his newspaper columns, and make a medieval Jewish thinker most often noted for the esoteric nature of his thought into someone accessible to the general readership of the *Keneder Adler*.³ In that context, we will investigate Rabbi Kruger's perceptions of this primary audience. This article will also deal with Kruger's attempt to compare Maimonides' teachings with modern philosophical teachings, especially those of Kant and Nietzsche, whose works Kruger had evidently closely studied.⁴ It will compare Kruger's understanding of these figures, and their relationship to Maimonidean thought, in the context of other modern

Jewish attempts to incorporate modern philosophical study in the task of understanding Judaism. This article, therefore, seeks to use Kruger's work on Maimonides to contribute to our understanding of both the intellectual milieu of the Montreal Jewish community in the early twentieth century as well as the reception history of Maimonides in that period.⁵

Chaim Kruger's Biography

I. Early Life

According to Zalman Rejzin, Chaim Kruger was born on April 5, 1875 (*Erev Rosh Hodesh Nisan, 5635*).⁶ Family tradition, however, fixes his birthdate as 1877, and this tradition is consistent with Kruger's statement upon his acquisition of Canadian citizenship in 1910 that he was 33 years old, and with his statement in the 1911 Canada census that he was 34 years old.⁷ Rejzin states that Kruger was born in Mezishok, in the district of Kovno, Lithuania, then under the rule of the Russian Empire. Here as well, there is contradictory information, as Kruger stated in his Canadian citizenship document that he originated in "Ponivez, Province of Covno (sic), Russia." The naturalization document would seem to indicate that his hometown was Ponevezh (Panevezys), which was then part of the Kovno Gubernia (*Kovenskaja gubernija*) of the Russian Empire. Alternatively, perhaps Kruger substituted Ponevezh on the government form as the nearest major city to the smaller town of Mezishok.

As to his surname, family tradition states that the family name was not originally Kruger, but rather Lazar, and that the name "Kruger" was adopted during the process of Chaim Kruger's emigration from Russia, whose purpose was to avoid serving in the Russian Army during the period of the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905) and the succeeding First Russian Revolution.⁸

Rejzin states that Chaim Kruger's father, Samuel Isaac, was Mezishok's *shohet* (kosher slaughterer), an occupation that required considerable rabbinic learning as well as manual skill and placed him in one of Eastern European Jewish society's secondary learned elites.⁹ Growing up, Chaim Lazar would have studied the traditional Jewish curriculum consisting of Hebrew, Torah, and the elements of rabbinic literature. According to Rejzin, as an adolescent Chaim Kruger studied Talmud on an advanced level at the Lithuanian yeshivas of Ponevezh (Panevezys), Kupishok (Kupiskis), and Telz (Telšiai). By age 16, Rejzin adds, Kruger came to live in Shavel (Šiauliai), where he devoted himself to the study of modern Hebrew (*Haskala*) literature, as well as acquisition of the Russian and German languages, thus supplementing his yeshiva education, as did many of his peers. As well, Rejzin states that at this time he became active in Zionism and functioned as an itinerant propagandist for the movement. Family tradition affirms that on one of his preaching tours, he met his future wife,

Sarah Caplan Kruger (1882–1951).

According to Rejzin, to earn his livelihood, Chaim Kruger became a kosher slaughterer, like his father, in the district of Suwalk (Suwałki, *Suwalkai*), until he immigrated to Canada in 1906 or 1907.¹⁰

Chaim Kruger may have started his publication career at about that time. Thus, Fox indicates that in 1902 Kruger contributed articles to the Hebrew periodical press, including *ha-Tsefira* (Warsaw) and *ha-Zman* (Vilna).¹¹

II. Reverend Hyman Kriger (1906/7–1933)

When Chaim Kruger arrived in Canada in 1906 or 1907, he joined his sister, Sarah Lee, and his uncles, Nehemiah and Yudel, who were already living in Montreal.¹² He came to North America with his wife, Sarah, their five sons—David, Mark, Irving, Joe, and Sam, as well as Sarah's younger sister, Tzippah, and her mother, Bubbe (Grandma) Caplan.¹³ In Canada, Chaim Kruger initially settled not in Montreal, but rather in the nearby satellite community of Lachine, Quebec, located some 14 kilometres from Montreal, which had its own small Jewish community. For official purposes, Chaim Kruger changed his first name to Hyman, a common anglicization of Chaim, and in this period, his surname was mostly, but not exclusively, spelled Kriger and not Kruger.¹⁴

Chaim Kruger evidently came to Lachine to serve the needs of the Jewish community that, like other small immigrant Jewish communities of North America at the beginning of the twentieth century, wished to hire one man to fulfill all its varied religious needs. He thus served the Lachine Jewish community in three major capacities. He became the community *sho et*, supplying the Jews of Lachine with fresh kosher meat, at a time when the prominence of meat in the diet and the lack of adequate refrigeration made shopping for meat an almost daily occupation for housewives, and when Eastern European Jewish immigrants, regardless of their personal observance of the myriad rules and regulations of Orthodox Judaism, generally preferred to buy meat from a Jewish source.¹⁵ He also served in the community's Beth Israel synagogue as its cantor and preacher. He declared in the 1911 Canadian census form that his place of employment was the "synagogue." That Chaim Kruger regularly preached on Sabbaths and holidays is indicated by Rejzin's report that he had in a manuscript book of sermons. Kruger also declared in his 1910 petition for naturalization as a Canadian citizen that his occupation was "minister," and appropriated for himself the title of "Reverend," which identified him as a Jewish religious functionary performing religious functions at a lower level than that of a rabbi. Finally, he became the local teacher of Hebrew to the community's children, and thus described himself as "Jewish teacher" in the *Lovell's Directory* to Lachine.

Reverend Hyman Kriger was first listed as a resident of Lachine in the 1909–1910 *Lovell's Directory* for Montreal and its environs. He remains listed in the *Lovell's Directory* for Lachine through its 1917–1918 edition. He describes himself as “Jewish teacher” in the period 1909–1913, and thenceforth as rev(erend). He changed addresses several times, from 46 7th Avenue (1909–10) to 105 Notre Dame (1910–11), to 34 7th Avenue (1911–1913), and 29 Lasalle (1913–1918).

He is missing entirely from the *Lovell's Directory* from 1918 to 1920. This is consistent with the fact that Hyman Kriger is listed as co-responsible (together with Montreal chief rabbi Hirsh Cohen) for maintaining the Beth Israel Synagogue official register of births, deaths, and marriages from 1915 to 1918, at which time he was succeeded in this task by Rabbi Issachar Shabasson.¹⁶ Perhaps during this “missing” period, Kruger took a position similar to the one he filled in Lachine in another small Jewish community in Canada or the United States.

In any event, Chaim Kruger reappears in the Montreal *Lovell's Directory* for 1920–1 as “Kruger H (rev) rabbi 923 Cadieux.” His reappearance in Montreal closely coincides with his contract with the United Shochtim of Montreal, the association that governed the elite *shohtim* of the city, dated 15 January 1920.¹⁷ His move to Montreal proper, therefore, seems to have been connected with this contract, which specifically indicates that it was his initial contract with the United Shochtim, and this must be considered the beginning of his functioning as a member of this group of cattle slaughterers. It is perhaps evidence of his slim finances at that time that his 1920 contract specifies that while he was obligated to pay the sum of \$1500.00 to the United Shochtim as his initiation fee, this amount was reduced to \$1000.00, of which he paid only \$200.00 in cash, obligating himself to pay the rest from deductions from his wages as *shohtet*. In any event, from 1920 Kruger now resided and worked in Montreal proper.

In his Montreal period, Kruger identified himself in *Lovell's Directory* as “rabbi” (1920–1, as well as in the 1921 census form), “teacher” (1922–1925) and “reverend” (1925–1933). He lived at 923 Cadieux (1920–1), 93 Pine Avenue, East (1921 Census) 911 Cadieux (1922–1927), 3719 de Bullion (1927–1929), and 5433 Jeanne Mance (1929–1933). Beyond his occupation as *shohtet*, Kruger apparently functioned as a Talmud teacher (*Rosh Yeshiva*) in the Yeshiva of Montreal (also known as the Hebrew Academy), which was one of the first attempts outside New York City to transplant advanced Talmudic learning to North America.¹⁸ The Montreal yeshiva, which did not survive the economic crisis of the 1930s, and of which we know precious little, was affiliated with the United Talmud Torahs and was located at 412 Ave. Henri Julien. It was likely his yeshiva teaching that gained Kruger a place on the United Talmud Torah Board of Education in 1930–1931.¹⁹

III. Chaim Kruger at the *Keneder Adler*

Most importantly for our story, in 1921 Chaim Kruger became a member of the journalistic staff of the Yiddish language daily newspaper in Montreal, the *Keneder Adler*. How he came to be on the newspaper's staff is not known, but he soon became a mainstay. As Mordecai Ginzberg stated in his obituary of Kruger, he was involved with almost all the departments of the newspaper.²⁰ His prominence on the staff is evident in two staff photographs, one of them dated 1927 and the other undated. In both of them, Kruger appears in a prominent position. In the 1927 photograph, he appears seated at the end of the first row which also contained Hirsch Wolofsky, the publisher and editor-in-chief in the center, and in the other he appeared in the central position in the top row, next to the poet and cultural editor J.I. Segal on one side, and L. Cheifetz, the city editor, on the other.²¹ He is readily identifiable as an Orthodox Jew, the only person in either picture (including Rabbi Charles Bender) to wear a prominent yarmulka.

As a strictly Orthodox Jew, he stood out from the rest of the newspaper's staff, whose level of observance varied, but generally ranged from moderately traditional to non-observant. His *Keneder Adler* colleagues definitely saw him as an Orthodox Jew. Thus, Mordecai Ginzberg's obituary spoke of Kruger as a traditional Judaic scholar (*talmid hakham*) of colossal erudition, with which he combined "an enormous supply of non-religious scholarship (*wissenschaft*)."²² For Ginzberg, Kruger evoked the widely-known image of poet Hayyim Nahman Bialik's traditional Talmud scholar of Eastern Europe in his influential poem "*ha-Matmid*."²³ Henry Broker's obituary in the *Canadian Jewish Chronicle* likewise portrayed Kruger as a "staunch adherent of Traditional Judaism, content at all times to walk in the old paths, and deeply concerned for the maintenance of religious life as he had been reared to understand it." Broker nonetheless added that Kruger "possessed a wide tolerance and respect for the opinions of others."²³

At the newspaper, Chaim Kruger wrote under his own name and utilized several pseudonyms²⁴ as well, as was common in Yiddish journalism. His contributions to the newspaper were, to say the least, wide-ranging: Apparently on a daily basis, he translated the "telegrams" (i.e. wire service reporting) of items of national and international interest so that the newspaper's Yiddish-speaking readership could find out the general news of the country and the world. This task involved mastery of English, the language of the wire service, as well as the ability to easily and quickly translate from English to Yiddish to meet the printer's ever-looming deadlines. He wrote articles analyzing political and economic developments in Canada.²⁵ He wrote on issues related to Zionism.²⁶ He wrote feuilletons on cultural subjects, using the pseudonym *Heker* (investigation). He wrote articles for the newspaper's children's department, "*Kinderland*," under the pseudonym *Feter Borukh* (Uncle Boruch).²⁷ He

published serialized novels under the pseudonym Hyman Zinman. He published *de-rashot* (sermons) for Shabbat and Jewish holidays.²⁸ Under the pseudonym A. Rokeah, he published a weekly column entitled “*fun’m Rebins tish*” (from the rabbi’s table), containing “good, short words on the weekly Torah portion to read at the Shabbat table.”²⁹ He wrote a column on the weekly Torah portion.³⁰ He wrote the *Keneder Adler’s* advice column, “*Der Shpiegel fun lebn*” (the mirror of life) under the pseudonym of Dr. Rattgeber (Advice giver). He wrote a series of short articles on the vocabulary and grammar of Modern Hebrew entitled “*Limdu ‘ivrit*” (learn Hebrew).

As if all these contributions were not enough, Chaim Kruger also published in the newspaper numerous series of articles on Judaic studies that generally appeared in the newspaper’s Friday edition. These included collections of articles on subjects such as: The Jewish calendar, Philo Judaeus, Josephus Flavius, “Saadia Gaon as Talmudist and Thinker” (1927), Judah Halevi’s *Kuzari* (1928), Maimonides, the Kabbalists of Safed and the Ari (Isaac Luria), and Rabbi Hayyim of Volozhin (1933).³¹

Kruger’s published articles in Judaic studies did not at all exhaust his literary activity. Rejzin, writing in the late 1920s, indicated that Kruger had a “scientific” commentary on all the *aggadot* (non-legal material) of the Talmud entitled “*ha-Ma’or she-be-Ya-hadur*”, as well as a book critiquing Heinrich Graetz’s interpretation of the Talmudic era in the *History of the Jews*, in manuscript. It thus seems clear that Chaim Kruger as a scholar of Judaic studies thought he could contribute to the area of rabbinic studies as well as medieval Jewish thought.

Shortly before his death, Kruger planned to visit British Mandatory Palestine and write a series of articles on his trip. However, his diagnosis with terminal cancer brought these plans to nought. His very last completed project was the publication of his collected articles on Maimonides in book form. He dated the book’s preface 24 Menaḥem Av, 5693 (16 August 1933), and the book, with the active cooperation and aid of Hirsch Wolofsky and the *Keneder Adler*, was printed in Fall 1933.³² After the publication of the Maimonides book, Kruger originally had in mind to publish similar books from his article series on Saadia Gaon, Philo Judaeus, and Judah Halevi, but it was not to be.³³ According to Ginzberg, Chaim Kruger’s Maimonides volume appeared in print just in time for him to see the first copy shortly before he died.

IV. The Maimonides Book

Maimonides in Yiddish

Among Eastern European Jewish intellectuals of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Chaim Kruger was hardly unique in his appreciation of modern philosophy and his attempt to apply its teachings to a greater understanding of

Maimonides and medieval Jewish thought.³⁴ However, Kruger differed from most of them in his desire to present his material in Yiddish, as opposed to Hebrew, the traditional Jewish language of scholarship, or a European language.

When stating his reasons for writing the book, Kruger wrote that Maimonides was not well known to most contemporary Jews, especially those whose primary language is Yiddish. There were, he stated, entire libraries written about Maimonides in many languages, including English, French, German, Italian, and Arabic. However, he continued, in Yiddish there existed only short works that gave a merely superficial idea of Maimonides' ideas and of the opposition to them among Jews.³⁵

For his book, Kruger consulted a wide variety of sources in Hebrew, Yiddish, German, and French.³⁶ However, as might be expected from a Yiddish author, Kruger seems to have greatly depended on the Yiddish-language *History of Jewish Literature* written by the Russian-Jewish scholar, Dr. Israel Zinberg (1873–1939), which Kruger described as “wonderful.”³⁷ He also had much good to say concerning the “great scholar” Isaac Hirsch Weiss (1815–1905) and his magnum opus, *Dor Dor ve-Dorshav*.³⁸ His extensive discussion and criticism of Aḥad Ha'am on Maimonides will be discussed below.

Examining the state of Maimonidean scholarship in Yiddish later in the twentieth century, Jacob Dienstag shows that Kruger was essentially right about the dearth of Yiddish works on Maimonides. Dienstag records only a sparse literature in Yiddish on Maimonidean thought in general, and on the *Guide* in particular.³⁹ The major exception to this is Aaron David Oguś' (1865–1943) work on Maimonides' *Guide* that was published in 1935, after Kruger wrote his book.⁴⁰

In examining Chaim Kruger's decision to write in Yiddish, it is important to note as well that he chose not to write in Hebrew.⁴¹ This is an important consideration, since Kruger was fluent in Hebrew and, like many Jewish intellectuals of his generation, he would have been capable of writing his work in the historical language of Judaic scholarship. His choice demonstrates that his position on the editorial staff of the *Keneder Adler* was more than a mere job to him. Indeed, if it were merely a question of making a living, his position as an elite *shohet* in Montreal would have sufficed, as it did for most of his colleagues. However, he evidently possessed a sense of the worthiness of the project of creating a Judaic culture in Yiddish that characterized Montreal Jewry in the early to mid-twentieth century, according to David Roskies.⁴² The genesis of Chaim Kruger's publication on Maimonides was likely a manuscript he had written, as reported by Rejzin in 1929, of a popular Yiddish translation of Maimonides' *Guide*. However, in his published work he did not stick to a simple translation of the *Guide*, though much of the eventual book does consist of Yiddish translations of excerpts from Maimonides' books. The work was first serialized in

the *Keneder Adler*. Once the articles were published in the newspaper, the type was retained and utilized to print the volume. This procedure of initial serial publication in a newspaper was typical of Yiddish publications of all sorts in the absence of established Yiddish book publishers.⁴³

What does Kruger's Maimonides book tell us about its author? One of the primary things the volume conveys is the author's intention to bring the full range of Maimonides' oeuvre to a Yiddish-reading public that would have been familiar with the name Maimonides, but hardly aware of the full range of his teachings. Traditional Jewish thinkers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries perforce confronted Maimonides and came to a wide range of conclusions.⁴⁴ As Alex Sztuden wrote, "In light of Maimonides' overwhelming influence in shaping Judaism, the contemporary significance and application of Maimonidean ideas to our own times bec(a)me crucial desiderata."⁴⁵ For Kruger, Maimonides clearly mattered.

In writing his book, Kruger evidently hoped to restore Maimonides, philosophy and all, to a central place in the consciousness of contemporary Jews. In this goal, Kruger had an eighteenth-century predecessor in Germany, Israel ben Abraham, who has been described as Kruger himself might be characterized, as "a relatively marginal cultural agent." Israel succeeded in reprinting Maimonides' *Guide* in 1742, for the first time since the sixteenth century, and thereby aimed to contribute to a restoration of the *Guide* to the central place in the Jewish library he thought it deserved. Israel's effort has been characterized by Shmuel Feiner as a "conscious effort at cultural rehabilitation."⁴⁶ A similar characterization would fit Kruger's effort.

Kruger stated in his introduction that the book's general purpose was to provide an adequate summary of Maimonides' ideas as expressed in all his major works for a "wide public" (*brayte masn*). Indeed, the newspaper format within which Kruger created required him to keep the work on a relatively accessible level. Kruger further remarked in the introduction that his declining health did not allow him to revise for the book publication, and thus he stuck with the copy he wrote to the newspaper's deadline, a situation that did not allow him to contemplate his subject at leisure.

Kruger divided the book into four sections. In the first (p. 9–74), Kruger outlined Maimonides' biography as well as his works that would have been relatively meaningful and inspiring for his audience including his "Letter on Apostasy" and his "Epistle to Yemen." The second section (p. 75–112) dealt with issues in Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah*. Section three (p. 113–230) spoke of Maimonides the philosopher, while the fourth and final section (p. 231–278) detailed Maimonides' influence and the controversies surrounding his works, particularly the *Guide*.

Because the book was being written on a popular level, Kruger refrained from explaining all of Maimonides' halakhic output and all the chapters of the *Guide*.⁴⁷ As he noted:

It is impossible to go into all the details [. . .] What has been written so far, however, is enough to show the average reader how broadly each topic is treated.⁴⁸

In another chapter, Kruger similarly stated:

[. . .] we have to interrupt ourselves, without being able to go any further in our summary. The rest of the books (of Maimonides' Code) deal with laws with all their various levels of detail that are of great importance for a scholar [*lamdan*] but not for the average [*durkhshnitlek*] reader. The writer of these lines had in mind to present summaries of *Hilkhot Sanhedrin* and *Hilkhot Melakhim*, in order to show how much this code of laws endures to the present-day.⁴⁹ On the other hand, I gave up that thought because of lack of space and especially because of a fear of deviating from the main goal of writing only about Maimonides and his accomplishments.⁵⁰

Catching the attention of the average *Keneder Adler* reader without doubt also spurred him to include a chapter of folkloristic stories about Maimonides.⁵¹

Kruger's Presentation of Maimonides

Kruger understood that Maimonides wished to unite Torah and philosophy, like the Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria before him. On the other hand, Kruger presented Maimonides as writing not for philosophically adept readers, such as those for whom Kruger imagined Philo of Alexandria wrote, but rather for the essentially traditional Jews of Babylonia (Iraq), Germany and France.⁵² It may be questioned whether this was indeed Maimonides' intent in writing the *Guide*, which in the conventional scholarship on Maimonides is presented as a letter written to a specific philosophically-educated disciple who was perplexed concerning the seemingly opposed claims of the Torah on the one hand, and science and philosophy on the other.⁵³ Indeed, in another chapter, Kruger presents the contradictory opinion that Maimonides wrote for those who had abandoned the old *beit midrash* (traditional house of study) to seek newer ways.⁵⁴ Without doubt, however, Kruger understood himself to be addressing contemporary Jewish readers who were mostly philosophically unsophisticated. In any event, issues of philosophy were highly important to Kruger, and his Maimonides book does not avoid numerous technical philosophical details that he had to know would go over the heads of most of his prospective readers and would try their patience.⁵⁵

Maimonides in the Context of Later Philosophers

Kruger was highly conscious of the fact that Maimonides' Aristotelian-influenced philosophy is not by any means the last word in the development of philosophical thought, and that contemporary philosophers often understood the opposite of their premodern predecessors. Thus, Kruger occasionally adds contemporary philosophical and scientific information that renders some of the Maimonidean construction of the cosmos out-of-date. He thus speaks of the Maimonidean description of the ten Ptolemaic astronomical spheres, but adds that that is what people then believed, while current astronomers have different understandings.⁵⁶

Of course, for Kruger, contemporary science itself had not satisfactorily explained all phenomena. On the contrary:

Thousands of years have passed since the Talmudic era, and we still don't know even a part of [the purposes of creatures], except, perhaps, for a few types of grasses and roots, where we have indeed succeeded in finding out their uses.⁵⁷

Kruger was careful to analyze Maimonidean thought in the context of early modern and modern philosophers he had evidently studied, such as Francis Bacon (1561–1626), John Locke (1632–1704), David Hume (1711–1776), George Berkeley (1685–1753), and, especially, Immanuel Kant (1724–1804).⁵⁸ This philosophical contextualization is important to Kruger because he wished to demonstrate to his readers that Maimonides was not merely Aristotle's disciple. On the contrary, on important points, Kruger asserted, Maimonides had advanced beyond his philosophical master. Indeed, Kruger expresses the opinion that if Aristotle had been able to access Maimonides' arguments in the *Guide*, his doubts on several issues might have been resolved. Kruger thus attempts to describe Maimonides' thought not as medieval and outdated, but as "modernistic" as in the following example:⁵⁹

Maimonides' hygienic advice is very interesting in terms of how every individual should conduct himself while eating, drinking, walking, sleeping, going to the bathhouse, and many more things. We marvel at these, knowing that in spite of all the tremendous progress that medicine and hygiene have undergone since his time, one can obviously still make use of his advice in many cases in the present day. The wonder is even greater, given the importance Maimonides attributes to bran at a time when people didn't have any concept of the newly-discovered vitamins, found in all produce, to which are attributed the highest nutritional power for people.⁶⁰

The study of modern philosophy, Kruger further asserts, enables one to understand Maimonides' philosophy in a way that earlier generations could not

comprehend. As he put it:

In the twentieth century, we have access to the writings of Francis Bacon, John Locke, David Hume, and, above all, Emmanuel Kant, who elevated philosophy to the greatest heights that the human mind can achieve. Just now, therefore, we are beginning to understand the depth of Maimonides' response to [divine] foreknowledge and [human] choice. It is only now that we see how far his ideas have gone, jumping over an 800-year gap, while standing within Aristotle's scholastic system, and within his generation, which still had absolutely no idea of transcendental philosophy and the art of critical thinking.⁶¹

Kruger finds high relevance in Kantian thought in particular, since it leads to a deeper understanding of Maimonides. In this, he had much in common with several prominent nineteenth and twentieth century Jewish thinkers such as Manuel Joel, Hermann Cohen, and Joseph Soloveitchik.⁶² In the German-Jewish intellectual context, there was a "strong nineteenth century Jewish affinity with the philosophy of Immanuel Kant," that "result[ed] essentially from the hope that, with the rise of rationalism and the acceptance of a universal system of ethics, all men would from now on be valued according to merit and not creed."⁶³

Kruger asserted that Maimonides had in fact anticipated Kant's critique of pure reason, coming to essentially the same conclusion as Kant albeit from another direction.⁶⁴ That meant that for Kruger it was essential for contemporary readers of Maimonides to read him in conjunction with Kant in order to understand him properly. As Kruger stated:

Over a number of years, most thinking people were [. . .] of the opinion that Maimonides, who did not have a sufficient answer, concealed himself underneath the wings of faith. However, in our time, Immanuel Kant created his *Critique of Pure Reason* theory that followed and expanded on what Maimonides posited, and thus now Maimonides' thought has been revealed in its greatness.⁶⁵

Among more recent philosophers, Kruger mentions Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860).⁶⁶ However, he is much more intrigued by the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), and most particularly by his ideas concerning the "superhuman" (*Übermensch*). Kruger draws parallels between Nietzsche's "*Übermensch*" and the Maimonidean concept of the "prophet:"

A superhuman, or—as we call him—a "prophet," is only a person in whom both of the previously mentioned powers harmoniously work: logic (the power of speech) and proper imagination (the power of imagination). This is the highest level that humankind can reach.⁶⁷

However, he ultimately reaches the conclusion that the concepts of Maimonides and Nietzsche are not equivalent.⁶⁸ As he states:

Superficially, one can possibly find a certain similarity between Maimonides' *übermensch* and that of Nietzsche. The latter also sees the main goal of Creation in the *übermensch*, and he also justifies his life lived on the account of the lowly masses. However, upon deep reflection, one only sees a similarity in name, not in character.

First, what Nietzsche, the spiritual Greek, sees as perfection is the complete harmony between the body and the spirit, while Maimonides' *übermensch* has nothing to do with the corporeal, and not even with spiritual qualities, but rather with the intellect, which obtains eternity through becoming engrossed in the eternally and consistently true disciplines.

Second, the relationship of Nietzsche's *übermensch* to society is entirely different from Maimonides' *übermensch*. The former looks for an expression for his powers in the world beyond him; he strives to bring about his current wish and doesn't want to have any obstacles in his way. Therefore, he always wages war against society, which wants to restrain him through its moral laws that weren't created for him but rather for the masses. On the other hand, Maimonides' *übermensch* doesn't strive to change the world order in accordance with his wish; rather, he develops his spirit in his personal world. Society isn't his enemy; on the contrary, he lives within its security, knowing that without its help, he can't accomplish anything. All that he desires from it are his material needs in order for him to be able to live peacefully. He wishes it success, knowing that its success is also his success.⁶⁹

Modern philosophy was not the only area in which Maimonides anticipated modernity, according to Kruger. He also asserted that Maimonides had anticipated certain aspects of Freudian psychology, making an identification between the "active intellect" of the *Guide* and Sigmund Freud's (1856–1939) concept of the "subconscious."⁷⁰ Kruger states:

Here, Maimonides came to the same conclusions as present-day psychologists. The testimony of the great scholars (in whose correctness nobody doubts), that in a dream one achieves such intellectual matters that—when one was awake—in no way would one be able to reach, is hereby confirmed. Some scholars made dreams into a marvelous apparition for adherents of spiritualism.⁷¹ However, present-day psychologists explain it in a simple way, just as Maimonides states, that the intellect reacts to the sensory pictures in one's mind, upon which it builds fresh intellectual images in the mind, accompanied by correct hypotheses

in connection with the future in accordance with the previous mental pictures that have passed [. . .] This can only take place for the intellect during sleep, when the senses don't impede it with constantly new perceptions.⁷²

For Kruger, not merely Freud but other modern psychologists also seemed to have reiterated concepts found originally in Maimonides. Kruger thus speaks of the imagination:

It is worthwhile to remark that a large part of that [Maimonidean] theory is accepted by great contemporary psychologists, such as Cesare Lombroso (1835–1909) [. . .] and others. Regarding people who are especially imaginative, the scholar Georg Christoph Lichtenberg (1742–1799) states: “There are unlearned visionaries who corrupt the world because of their great influence on surrounding people, and they have indeed brought many problems to humankind.” This is precisely what Maimonides states.⁷³

Clearly Kruger wished his readers to understand that Maimonides was highly relevant to them not merely in the historical context. For Kruger, Maimonidean thought needed to be understood as an integral, forward-looking part of contemporary thought as well. What Maimonides said mattered greatly in the here and now.

Maimonides and “Orthodoxy”

As an Orthodox Jew, Kruger was sensitive to the fact that many scholars of both pre-modern and modern times had cast aspersions on the “orthodoxy” of Maimonides’ *Guide*.⁷⁴ Kruger deals with these issues somewhat gingerly. Maimonides, apart from his philosophy, was portrayed by Kruger as a “religious” person who believed in the divinity of Moses’ teaching.⁷⁵ Kruger further stated that he had omitted discussing in detail portions of the *Guide* that might harm the simple faith of traditional Jews. That simple faith, Kruger argued, pertained especially to medieval Ashkenazic Jews—people who were the spiritual and physical ancestors of the Montreal Jewish community—who believed “naively” in the plain sense of scripture.

On the other hand, Kruger did not evade certain problematic concepts in Maimonides. He states that Maimonides hinted that divine providence is for species and not individuals. Despite the opinion of commentator Isaac Abarbanel (1437–1508) who attempted to understand Maimonides differently, and whose opinion Kruger might have adopted as his own, Kruger preferred to avoid the subject, deferring it to a later part of the book.⁷⁶ Kruger stated that he would not summarize such “problematic” aspects of the *Guide* in that place because he thought that the concept would be difficult for those who did not have at least the elementary grasp of philosophy his book was attempting to supply to his “plain Jewish” readers in Montreal. As Kruger states:

Those who have studied Maimonides' *Guide to the Perplexed* in the original know that we haven't dealt with the entire book, but only with some individual topics. We have left out most of them. At times, this was because of their depth, which means that they aren't accessible to the average reader—someone who hasn't prepared himself with the necessary elementary knowledge that the study of philosophy requires. Other times, it was because the topics are based on verses and quotations that need to be explained allegorically or philosophically. Some of the topics are simply omitted altogether because their content can challenge an ordinary Jew's belief. Maimonides himself calls these the "crowns of the Torah" and emphasizes countless times that they shouldn't be imparted to everyone, but only to outstanding individuals.⁷⁷

Moreover, Kruger did not refrain from apologetically discussing certain problematic aspects of Maimonides' ethical teachings "liable to completely unsettle Jewish hearts!" As he stated:

The contemporary thinker indeed revolts against the severe sentence concerning the second group "that harbors wrong opinions." [. . .] The zealotry of every faith persecuted people with wrong opinions in a worse way than thieves and murderers, and it is no wonder at all that philosophy also positioned itself with respect to "wrong opinions," [. . .] with the same severity.⁷⁸

In particular, Kruger understood that for traditional Torah scholars Maimonides' opinion on the inherent superiority of philosophical study constituted a difficulty:

[N]one of the naïve rabbinic sages have been able to forgive him [Maimonides] for his placing the position of those engaged in Torah study on a lower level compared with the level of those who are engaged in metaphysical problems, and yet more: the naïve rabbinic sage's position as a devout person is lower than that of one who studies physics. Those who know on how high a level those who were engaged in Torah study stood in the eyes of the Talmudic masters and the sages of medieval France, together with all the Jews throughout the diaspora of the exile, are able to imagine what kind of anger such a division brought upon the *Guide to the Perplexed* and its author. It's therefore no wonder that the commentators note that "many scholars decided that Maimonides didn't write that chapter. If so, it needs to be set aside, and it would be better still to burn it."⁷⁹

Kruger's own nuanced take on Maimonides' philosophy comes out in his analysis of Judah ibn Alfakhar's letter during the Maimonidean controversy that expressed the opinion that it was impossible to reconcile Judaism with philosophy:

Alfakhar's entire letter was permeated with the firm conviction that the Jewish

people's faith in the heritage and traditions that have been affirmed for many generations is the only means for the Jewish national group, spread out all over the entire world and in all countries, to be tied together. The traditional observance of our customs in a literal sense brings together all generations—young and old, parents and their children.

However, rationalism, which relies on cold intellect, isn't accessible to everyone equally. It creates a dividing line between old and young and between scholars and the unlearned, and it gives total control to particular individuals, those of high spiritual development; these individuals are the only authorities over everyone. Thus, national unity is destroyed all around, especially when among two such authorities a difference of opinion arises.

Jewish history, in later years, has proven the rightness of the high-ranking and perceptive scholar Alfakhar. But at that time, those two camps were too engrossed in the dispute to be able to understand those rational words—until they went through the bitter experience towards which the dispute was leading.⁸⁰

As Kruger evaluated the complex issues of the Maimonidean Controversy, he came down subtly, but firmly, in sympathy with the faction of anti-Maimonists:

[...] it seems clear that the Maimonists made the Talmudic greats of France seem lowly in the public eye, simply because those French rabbis weren't preoccupied with philosophy and other disciplines. We present-day people see, in that sort of letter and the scathing aphorisms that remain extant, the best proof of the rightness of the anti-rationalists and their fight against harmful rationalism.⁸¹

Indeed, for Kruger:

The (Maimonidean) dispute calmed down, but it wasn't extinguished. As a matter of fact, the conflict has gone on to this day. Maimonides, as author of the *Yad ha-Hazakah*, has always stood high in everybody's eyes, whether those of his admirers or his enemies. However, the *Guide to the Perplexed*, along with the first part of the *Mishneh Torah* (*Sefer ha-Mada*), is still very hard to digest for a majority of the Jews to this day, just like in the past.⁸²

With respect to contemporary evaluations of Maimonides, Kruger spent the most time in dialogue with Ahad Ha'am's well-known essay on Maimonides, "*Shilton ha-Sekhel*" (the Rule of Reason), subjecting Ahad Ha'am to a lengthy and substantive critique. A major reason why he spends so much time critiquing this essay is that, of all contemporary Jewish evaluations of Maimonides' thought, it was Ahad Ha'am's that would likely have been most readily accessible to his readership. Secondly, Kru-

ger understood that Ahad Ha'am had portrayed Maimonides as the thinker "who brought him out of the deep religiosity in which he had been steeped from his youth onward."⁸³ As an Orthodox student of Maimonidean philosophy, Kruger could not let this argument stand. He therefore accused Ahad Ha'am of making of Maimonides a more radical rationalist and pure philosopher than he was. According to Kruger, Ahad Ha'am had:

Transformed the living God of Moses' Torah into an abstract notion of philosophy that doesn't utilize anything except a considerable number of "negatives." Ahad Ha'am transformed Maimonides, that righteous person according to Jewish concepts, into someone who achieved the "acquired intellect." This involved the extirpation [*karet*] [of Maimonides] from the Torah—doing away with the form when materiality dissolves, and so forth: everything is in accordance with the philosophical explanation without any change.⁸⁴

Kruger further charged that Ahad Ha'am didn't immerse himself in the study of the *Guide* as much as was called for, and didn't review the work's commentaries. As well, Ahad Ha'am had generally set the authority of the intellect too high.⁸⁵

It is clear, however, that Kruger's traditionalist apologia does not come at the expense of his demonstrating that Maimonides indeed espoused ideas that were far from palatable to most Orthodox Jews. Kruger states:

Maimonides confirmed [. . .] that whoever immerses himself in eternal divine concepts is on a higher level than one who studies Torah and observes the divine commandments in their literal meaning and who doesn't go any farther with his intellect. We have already shown that this concept was later bitterly resisted by almost all the sages of France, Germany, and Babylonia, and even by many in Spain.⁸⁶

Thus, for Kruger, Maimonides believed that one who engaged in contemplation of the divine (*ma'aseh merkava*) was indeed superior to one who occupies himself solely in legality (*halakhah*).⁸⁷

Kruger attempted to defend Maimonides' Orthodoxy through an emphasis on his rejection of the proofs of Aristotle for an eternal universe and his seeking solutions consistent with the Torah:

Maimonides' proofs obviously also reject those of Aristotle. In any event, both proofs [for the eternity or the creation of the universe] remain equal, and faith may tip the scales "to the side of Creation."⁸⁸

Kruger further stated:

Maimonides, as a result, is now looking for a new way to deal with divine providence that could be maintained in a logical way and that could also be consented to in relation to our Torah's opinion specifically and to faith in general.⁸⁹

Kruger emphasizes that Maimonides intentionally wished to disperse his controversial ideas out of their logical order, so that only great scholars would be able to understand.⁹⁰ He has advice for his own discerning (*mevinim*) readers who wish to gain a better perspective and to see Maimonides in his "piously-true persona" (*emes-frumen gestalt*):

We advise experts to thoroughly study chapter 51 of the third part of his *Guide to the Perplexed* together with the annotations, according to the *Shem Tov* commentary and the comments of Rabbi Hasdai ben Abraham Crescas (c. 1340–1410/1).⁹¹ This would make it easier for them to see Maimonides in his piously true persona, despite his attempt in the entire *Guide to the Perplexed* to seem to be a cold philosopher who only rules from the intellect and with merciless, incisive logic.

Kruger accepts that Maimonides' concept of immortality is different from the concept of almost all Jewish sages of the past:

It's worthwhile to note that. . .one sees here Maimonides' position concerning the immortality of the soul, which is quite different from the conventional opinion of almost all the sages of Israel both before and after Maimonides. That opinion was one of the many arguments against Maimonides that the great rabbis pursued, even during Maimonides' lifetime.⁹²

With respect to Maimonides' controversial belief concerning the sacrifices, Kruger demonstrated a decided ambivalence.⁹³ He posited that Moses Narboni, a leading commentator on the *Guide*, whose ideas "often unpacked or radicalized (depending on one's perspective) the philosophical doctrine of Maimonides' text, often in an Averroist key,"⁹⁴ was closer to the truth than other commentators:

Maimonides' discussion of the sacrifices at that time provoked much commotion among traditional Jewry. The commentators struggled mightily to explain sacrifice in such a way that it would agree at least somewhat with the common Jewish conception. Rabbi Moses Narboni (ca. 1300–ca. 1362–68), whose opinion we have utilized in our explanation, is closer to the truth than the rest. The *Shem Tov* defends himself as follows: "I have only explained Maimonides' commentary and his reasoning. However, on this subject, I have an entirely different opinion than his, and God knows. . ."⁹⁵ Even the courageous commentator Narboni states:

“I, as a commentator, am only obligated to explain what Maimonides writes, but not to ascertain whether it is the truth.” The excuses of these commentators could also be considered that of the writer of these lines.⁹⁶

In the end, Kruger concludes that:

Maimonides, like all the other sages of Israel before and after him, strove with his enormous labour to make the Jewish faith into a fortress, inside which Jews would discover true protection for the entire duration of the exile. This is the only difference—whereas others discovered certainty “beyond reasoning,” Maimonides came and said: “No, the certainty is that Judaism is the same as reasoning.”

On the other hand:

[Maimonides] attempt to establish the entire basis of Judaism on dry reasoning wasn’t successful. Whatever large goal he set for himself in that area, experience shows that cold logic alone isn’t enough to keep all the suffering Jews within the limits of Judaism, except when they are aided by national and religious feelings.⁹⁷

Kruger thus demonstrated his willingness to present his readers with ideas that clashed with their various worldviews, such as Maimonides’ belief in the superiority of philosophical to halakhic study for traditionalists, or his refutation of Ahad ha’Am’s view that Maimonides as incompatible with traditional Judaism for those who had left the tradition. In so doing, Kruger showed that he was ultimately willing to confront these difficult issues in the spirit of the saying, *amicus Plato, sed magis amica veritas* (Plato is a friend, but the truth is a greater friend).

Kruger’s Apologia for Judaism

In his discussion of Maimonides’ views, Kruger not infrequently went beyond them to engage in apologia on behalf of Judaism. As he did in his discussion of Maimonidean thought, he tended to attribute to the Torah laws an anticipation of recent scientific discoveries, as the following examples will demonstrate.

One prominent example of this tendency is kashrut, about which Kruger stated:

We ought to know that all the foods that the Torah forbade are either disgusting or unhealthy. Pork is too fatty, and while still alive, pigs eat all sorts of disgusting food, even excrement. We obviously know that the Torah is particular about cleanliness even in military camps, let alone in the city. If Jews had been allowed to eat pork, and pigs would have strolled along the streets, like in “the coun-

try of France” (meaning in the Christian countries, as opposed to the Muslim countries—where Maimonides always lived—in which the people don’t eat any pork), then it would have been worse than a toilet everywhere. The prohibition of fat is on account of the type of fat that is difficult to digest and produces cold and thickly congealed blood. It’s more appropriate to thoroughly burn it than to eat it. (Here, this must refer to the protein and glucose that present-day food experts have discovered in fat, which renders the blood thick and leads to hardened arteries and high blood pressure, along with heart and kidney diseases.)⁹⁸

Thus, Kruger connected the Torah’s prohibition of the consumption of *helev* (tail fat) with modern scientific discoveries. The Torah’s prohibition of the consumption of meat and milk together was connected to the understanding by contemporary doctors that such consumption leads to indigestion.⁹⁹

A related example of Kruger’s apologetics concerns his own profession of *sheḥita* (kosher slaughtering) that was subject to criticism in his era as “inhumane.”¹⁰⁰ Kruger asserted that *sheḥita* had been found to be better than all other methods of slaughtering according to “the great learned men of our era.”¹⁰¹ Using his personal expertise in the area of kosher slaughter, Kruger further asserted:

Allowing the consumption of meat necessitates the process of killing a living creature, so the Torah chose the easiest of deaths, which is ritual slaughter [*sheḥita*]. To that end, it prohibited all of those methods that can lead to pain and suffering, such as tearing a limb from a living animal, stabbing [*nehirah*] [tearing the animal in two, instead of cutting it at the trachea]. It also did not allow a ritual slaughter gone wrong (in ways like pausing [*shehiyah*], pressing the knife [*derasah*], passing the knife under cover [*haladah*], cutting the animal’s throat in a slanting direction [*hagramah*], and tearing loose the windpipe and gullet before cutting [*ikur*]).¹⁰²

Even in the case of the sexually desirable non-Israelite woman who is taken captive by an Israelite soldier, described in Deuteronomy 21:10–14, Kruger finds grounds for an apologia on behalf of Judaism. The woman is allowed one month “to weep for her father and mother.” On the basis of rabbinic tradition, Kruger states that “in the month of her sadness, she can conduct herself however she wants, even worshipping idols in her house (a rare tolerance that has no parallel even today, thousands of years later).”¹⁰³

In connection with this apologia, Kruger expressed some strong antiwar sentiments, meant to highlight the difference between the mores of contemporary armies and the ancient Israelite warriors:

The “animal inside people,” which in peacetime is kept under wraps, runs wild and free during wartime, when that same public opinion is put to the test, and the war hero becomes the darling of the community. At that moment, that soldier is released from all human laws. Blood is less than water, and ethics is trampled under the soldier’s rough feet. Lives are made cheap. Borders are wiped off the map. The distinction between what is mine and what is yours is erased, and all is now mine. Even in our own time, moral laws are disregarded in the army. In previous eras, the soldier was worse than an animal, thanks to his reasoning and his weapons, which an animal doesn’t have and he does.¹⁰⁴

Chaim Kruger wrote about Maimonides and other Jewish thinkers for the *Keneder Adler*, at a time when the academic study of Maimonides, as well as Jewish studies in general, tended to take place almost exclusively in Jewish educational institutions, and was largely ignored by contemporary universities. Even in the Jewish settings that might have taken note of Kruger’s book on Maimonides, there was often prejudice against scholarship published in Yiddish. This means that Kruger’s book had significant built-in obstacles to overcome in order to be noticed at all.

It is little surprise, therefore, that Kruger’s book, written in Yiddish and published by the *Keneder Adler* locally in Montreal, did not receive much attention that can be traced. The major exception to this is its inclusion by Solomon Zeitlin in a 1938 *Jewish Quarterly Review* review article on Maimonides.¹⁰⁵ The book is also mentioned by Judah Even Shmuel (1876–1976), who had lived for a time in Montreal and presumably knew Kruger personally, in his 1935 book on Maimonides’ *Guide*.¹⁰⁶ Beyond that, the trail grows quickly cold.

While Kruger’s work on Maimonides, therefore, cannot be considered influential in a scholarly sense, it does clearly illustrate the myriad ways in which Maimonides and his thought was understood, misunderstood, appreciated, and ignored within the North American Jewish immigrant community of the early twentieth century. Whether Chaim Kruger succeeded in his ambition to creating a Maimonides for the masses or not, his interesting attempt to bring Maimonides’ philosophy to the attention of a mass Jewish audience helps us better understand the twentieth century reception of Maimonides, an exceedingly complex figure whose legacy for contemporary Jews remains to this day the subject of considerable debate and controversy.

1

On the Jewish Public Library of Montreal, see Ira Robinson, "Ninety-Nine Meetings: The Jewish Public Library of Montreal in its First Century," *Canadian Jewish Studies* 22 (2014), 16-31.

2

On the history of Jews and Judaism in Montreal, see Pierre Ancil, *History of the Jews in Quebec* (Ottawa, 2021); David G. Roskies, "A Hebrew-Yiddish Utopia in Montreal: Ideology in Bilingual Education," in Alan Mintz, ed., *Hebrew in America: Perspectives and Prospects* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993), 155-167.

3

Aviezer Ravitzky, "Maimonides: Esotericism and Educational Philosophy," in Kenneth Seeskin, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Maimonides* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 300-323.

4

Cf. Jacob Golomb, *Nietzsche, Zionism, and Hebrew Culture* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2002).

5

Reception history is an aspect of criticism that focuses on the audience and its experience as opposed to the author or the content of a work. For examples of reception history applied to Maimonides, see George Y. Kohler, *Reading Maimonides' Philosophy in 19th Century Germany* (Amsterdam, 2012); James T. Robinson, ed., *The Cultures of Maimonidianism: New Approaches to the History of Jewish Thought* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2009).

6

Zalman Rejzin, *Leksikon fun der yidisher literatur, prese, un filologye* (Vilna, 1929) volume 3, 747-748.

7

Mark Kruger, *Erin's Family History* (On Her Mom's Side) privately distributed, December 2021; Chaim Kruger's Canadian naturalization record can be found at: [https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/immigration/citizenship-naturalization-records/citizenship-montreal-1851-1945/Pages/image.aspx?Image=vol885-00005327-00000001&URL-jpg=http%3a%2f%2fcentral.bac-lac.gc.ca%2f.item%2f%3fd%3dvol885-00005327-00000000](https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/immigration/citizenship-naturalization-records/citizenship-montreal-1851-1945/Pages/image.aspx?Image=vol885-00005327-00000001&URL-jpg=http%3a%2f%2fcentral.bac-lac.gc.ca%2f.item%2f%3fd%3dvol885-00005327-0000000)

1%26op%3dimg%26app%3dnaturalisationmontreal&Ecopy=vol885-00005327-00000001; For Chaim Kruger's 1911 Canadian census data, see:

<https://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/.item/?app=Census1911&op=pdf&id=e002056483>

Rejzin, who claimed an 1875 birthdate, presumably got his information from Kruger. However, Rejzin may have wrongly transcribed the year. Alternatively, Kruger may have given him the year 1875, just as he was inconsistent and declared his age in the 1921 Canadian census as 42, which would indicate a birth year of 1879. See Kruger's 1921 Canadian census data: <https://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/.item/?app=Census1911&op=pdf&id=e002056483>
It is much less likely that Rejzin mistook the specific date, Erev Rosh Hodesh Nisan. In 1877, that date would correspond to 14 March, 1877.

8

Mark Kruger, *Erin's Family History*, 4.

9

Family tradition records the name of Chaim's paternal grandfather as David Lazar.

10

Zalman Rejzin, *Leksikon fun der yidisher literatur, prese, un filologye* (Vilna, 1929) volume 3, 747-748.

11

Chaim Leib Fox, *100 Years of Yiddish and Hebrew Literature in Canada* (Yiddish) (Montreal: Adler Printing, 1980), 250. This claim does not appear in Rejzin, and other claims that Fox makes about Kruger are inaccurate. Both ha-Tsefira and ha-Zman are digitized in the "Historical Jewish Press" project: <https://www.nli.org.il/en/discover/newspapers/jpress>. I have searched them and found no mention of Kruger. If he did publish in these periodicals, it would have likely been under a pseudonym.

12

Family tradition and Rejzin concur on the year 1907. However, Kruger's statement to the Canadian Census documents of 1911 and 1921 was that he came to Canada in 1906. However, in those same documents he stated that the date he became a Canadian citizen was 1909, whereas his citizenship petition clearly states that the date he acquired citizenship was 1910.

13

Mark Kruger, *Erin's Family History*, 5.

14

Thus, he is listed in the Lovell's Directory for his Lachine period; thus, he spelled his surname in his citizenship documents; and thus, he signed his contract with the United Shochtim in 1920. On the other hand, the 1911 Canadian census form records the name Kruger. For Lovell's Directory, see https://www.banq.qc.ca/a_propos_banq/salle_de_presse/nouvelles/nouvelle.html?language_id=1&n_id=de4ba7db-6486-4360-ba0b-b1e49f3b7d29

15

Kruger's contracts as a shoḥet from 1920 and 1933 are preserved in the Chaim Kruger Family Collection, Jewish Public Library Archives, fonds 1435. <https://www.cjhn.ca/en/permalink/cjhn75329>.

16

On Rabbi Cohen, see Ira Robinson, *Rabbis and Their Community: Studies in the Immigrant Orthodox Rabbinate in Montreal, 1896-1930*, (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2007), passim; Jewish Genealogical Society of Montreal, "Rabbis of Quebec, Canada." <https://jgs-montreal.org/rabbis.html>.

17

Chaim Kruger Family Collection, JPL Archives, fonds 1435. <https://www.cjhn.ca/en/permalink/cjhn75329>. It should be noted that in this contract, he signs his name "H. Kriger." On shoḥtim in Montréal, see Robinson, *Rabbis and Their Community*, passim.

18

D. Ashkenazi, "Di Montrealer Yeshiva" Keneder Adler, October 14, 1921, 4. Cf. Ira Robinson, "The New Haven Yeshiva, 1923-1937: an Experiment in American Jewish Education" *Studies in Judaism, Humanities and the Social Sciences Annual Revue 2021-2022*, 279-297.

19

The group photograph of the United Talmud Torah's Board of Education, 1930-1931 is found in Chaim Kruger Family Collection, JPL Archives, fonds 1435. <https://www.cjhn.ca/en/permalink/cjhn75329>.

In 1924, Kruger was a member of a delegation that inspected different Talmud Torahs in Montreal. Chaim Kruger, "Mayn bezukh in Milton Street T(al)muḏ T(orah)", Keneder Adler April 10, 1924, 5; idem., "Mayn bezukh in Beys Sefer Bialik" Keneder Adler April 16, 1924, 5.

20

Mordecai Ginzberg, "R. Ḥayyim Kruger, a'h," Keneder Adler, January 2, 1934, 4.

21

On Segal, see Pierre Anctil, *Jacob Isaac Segal: A Montreal Yiddish Poet and His Milieu* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2017).

22

On Bialik's poem and its impact, see Marina Zilbergerts, *The Yeshiva and the Rise of Modern Hebrew Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2022), passim.

23

Henry Broker, "Rev. Haim Kruger, Passes Away" *Canadian Jewish Chronicle* January 5, 1934.

24

Among his pseudonyms were H.K. Shokhat (alluding to his initials and his occupation of shoḥet), Double Kof, Rokeaḥ, a Gast (a guest).

25

E.g. a commentary on the recent Ontario elections, Keneder Adler July 3, 1923, 5; an article on agricultural policy discussions in the Canadian parliament, Keneder Adler July 25, 1923, 5

26

"un s'veyt kumen a tsayt tsu Herzls yohr tsayt," Keneder Adler July 4, 1923, 5.

27

Kruger's first appearance in this role was in Keneder Adler May 18, 1924, 5, where he signs the column "Onkel Boruch."

28

E.g. "Der pakh ha-shemen," Keneder Adler December 15, 1922, 5.

29

This column commenced in Keneder Adler on Friday, August 3, 1923, 5.

30

"Dos alte un naye 'Identum," Keneder Adler commencing December 1, 1922, 5. Commencing with Keneder Adler October 5, 1923, the title was changed to "Di Sedrah fun der vokh."

31

An example of such a column is "ha-Emunos veḥa-de'os" Keneder Adler June 17, 1927,

5; "Hakima de-Yehudaei" (series on Rabbi Hayyim Volozhener) Keneder Adler May 26, 1933, 5.

32

The book lists its publication date as 5694, which began on September 21, 1933.

33

Kruger, Der Rambam zayn leben un shafn (Montreal: Keneder Adler, 1933), Acknowledgements, unpaginated.

34

Yehudah Mirsky, Towards the Mystical Experience of Modernity: The Making of Rav Kook, 1865-1904 (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2021); Francis Nataf, "Malbim's Paen to (Ben Azzai's) Kantian Ethics" The Lehrhaus, February 9, 2021. <https://thelehrhaus.com/scholarship/malbims-paen-to-ben-azzais-kantian-ethics/>

35

Kruger, Rambam, (7).

36

Kruger, Rambam, 163.

37

Originally published in Yiddish in eight volumes (Vilna, 1929-1937) as *Di geshikhte fun di literatur bay yidn*. Cf. Tsinburg, Yisroel" YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe. https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Tsinberg_Yisroel; Kruger, Rambam, 232.

38

Kruger, Rambam, 240.

39

Jacob I. Dienstag, "Maimonides in Yiddish Literature: a Bio-Bibliographical Survey" Yiddish 7, 1 (1987), 79-100.

40

A.D. Ogus, Kizzur Moreh Nevukhim, oder vos der 'Moreh Nevukhim' lern (New York: Ellul, 5695 (1935)).

41

Among contemporary rabbis in North America, Hayyim Hirschensohn published a commentary on part of the Guide in 1932 in Hebrew, entitled *Penei Hammah* in Five volumes (Jerusalem, 1932). Cf. Dov Schwartz, "Maimonides in Religious-Zionist Philosophy: Unity vs. Duality" in James T. Robinson,

ed., *The Cultures of Maimonideanism: New Approaches to the History of Jewish Thought* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2009), 398-406.

42

David G. Roskies, "Yiddish in Montreal: The Utopian Experiment," in Ira Robinson, Pierre Anctil and Mervin Butovsky, eds., *An Everyday Miracle: Yiddish Culture in Montreal*, (Montreal: Véhicule Press, 1990), 22-38; idem., "A Hebrew-Yiddish Utopia in Montreal: Ideology in Bilingual Education," in Alan Mintz, ed., *Hebrew in America: Perspectives and Prospects* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993), 155-167.

43

Rebecca Margolis, *Jewish Roots, Canadian Soil: Yiddish Culture in Montreal, 1905-1945* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011).

44

See James A. Diamond and Menachem Kellner, *Reinventing Maimonides In Contemporary Jewish Thought* (London: Littman Library, 2019).

45

Alex Sztuden, review of James A. Diamond and Menachem Kellner, *Reinventing Maimonides In Contemporary Jewish Thought Tradition*, 52, 3 (Summer 2020), 177.

46

Shmuel Feiner, *The Jewish Eighteenth Century: a European Biography, 1700-1750* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2020), 498-499.

47

Kruger, Rambam, (8).

48

Kruger, Rambam, 77.

49

Two parts of *Sefer Shoetim* (Judges), the last book of *Mishneh Torah*; not to be confused with the biblical Book of Judges in the Prophets. These two parts are respectively the laws of the Sanhedrin (the ancient Jewish high court) and of kings.

50

Kruger, Rambam, 97.

51

E.g. Kruger, Rambam, 26-27, 100.

52

Kruger, Rambam, 101-103.

53

For a summary of this conventional understanding of the person for whom the Guide was designed, see Joshua Levy, "The Guide Of The Perplexed" *European Judaism: A Journal for the New Europe* 37, No. 2 (Autumn 2004), 30-38.

54

Kruger, Rambam, 279.

55

Kruger, Rambam, 12, 110.

56

Kruger, Rambam, 79, 81.

57

Kruger, Rambam, 43.

58

Kruger, Rambam, 82-83, 91, 161-162.

59

Kruger, Rambam, 242.

60

Vitamins were discovered in 1912; Kruger, Rambam, 86.

61

Kruger, Rambam, 71.

62

Görge K. Hasselhoff, "Manuel Joel and the Neo-Maimonidean Discovery of Kant" in James T. Robinson, ed., *The Cultures of Maimonideanism: New Approaches to the History of Jewish Thought* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2009), 300.

63

George Y. Kohler, *Reading Maimonides' Philosophy in 19th Century Germany* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam Studies in Jewish Philosophy, 2012), 4. Cf. Paul W. Franks, "Jewish Philosophy after Kant: The Legacy of Salomon Maimon" *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Jewish Philosophy* Michael L Morgan and Peter Eli Gordon, editors, (Cambridge, UK, and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 53-79.

64

Kruger, Rambam, 91-94, 160.

65

Kruger, Rambam, 90-91.

66

Kruger, Rambam, 148.

67

Kruger, Rambam, 159.

68

Kruger, Rambam, 44, 47, 268.

69

Kruger, Rambam, 268-269.

70

Kruger, Rambam, 219. Cf. 83, 166.

71

Spiritualism is a movement that believes that the spirits of deceased persons interact with the living.

72

Kruger, Rambam, 163.

73

Kruger, Rambam, 165.

74

Cf. Michah Gottlieb, "Counter-Enlightenment In A Jewish Key: Anti-Maimonideanism In Nineteenth-Century Orthodoxy" in James T. Robinson, ed., *The Cultures of Maimonideanism New Approaches to the History of Jewish Thought* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2009), 259-287.

75

Kruger, Rambam, 269.

76

Kruger, Rambam, 108.

77

Kruger, Rambam, 224.

78

The reference is to Maimonides' parable of the king's palace in the Guide part III, chapter 51.

79

Kruger, Rambam, 274.

80

Kruger, Rambam, 255.

81

Kruger, Rambam, 246.

82

Kruger, Rambam, 261.

83

See Alfred Gottschalk, "Maimonides— An Evaluation By Ahad Ha-Am." Proceedings of the World Congress of Jewish Studies 1969. Volume III, Division III: The Spiritual Creativity Of The Jewish People; Jewish Thought, Mishnah And Talmud, Rabbinic Literature, Jewish Philosophy and Kabbala; Jewish Law; Hebrew Poetry and Literature (Jerusalem, 1969), 7-16.

84

Kruger, Rambam, 271.

85

Kruger, Rambam, 274.

86

Kruger, Rambam, 224.

87

Kruger, Rambam, 216.

88

Kruger, Rambam, 144.

89

Kruger, Rambam, 153.

90

Kruger, Rambam, 110.

91

A rabbi in Catalonia.

92

Kruger, Rambam, 221.

93

See Walter Orenstein, "The Maimonides Rationale for Sacrifice" Hebrew Studies 24 (1983), 33-39.

94

Abraham Socher, "The Spectre of Mainonidean Radicalism in the Late Eighteenth Century" in James T. Robinson, ed., *The Cultures of Maimonideanism: New Approaches to the History of Jewish Thought* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2009), 251.

95

Reference to the commentary to the Guide written by Shem Tov ben Joseph Ibn Falaquera (1225-ca. 1290 or 1295).

96

Kruger, Rambam, 182.

97

Kruger, Rambam, 278.

98

Kruger, Rambam, 207.

99

Kruger, Rambam, 208.

100

Robin Judd, *Contested Rituals: Circumcision, Kosher Butchering, and Jewish Political Life in Germany, 1843-1933* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2007).

101

Kruger, Rambam, 175.

102

Kruger, Rambam, 208.

103

Kruger, Rambam, 196-197.

104

Kruger, Rambam, 195-196.

105

Solomon Zeitlin, "Maimonides," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 28, 3 (January 1938), 273-278.

106

Yehuda Kaufman Even Shmuel, *More nevu'khim le-ha-Rambam* (Tel-Aviv, 1935).