



From the Director

The Berman Legacy Continues

In August 2004, the Berman Center received a \$1 million bequest from **Muriel Mallin Berman** to establish the Philip and Muriel M. Berman Center for Jewish Studies Endowment Fund. This generous gift ensures financial stability for the center that the Bermans established in 1984. It will provide a strong fiscal base for our programs and will enable us, with the help of future donors, to expand the range of our activities.

Upon being approached by Lehigh President Peter Likins in 1983 to help establish a position in Jewish studies at Lehigh, Muriel and Phil decided to significantly expand the scope of the project. In addition to endowing a chair in Jewish studies, they set up a center for Jewish studies at Lehigh that subsequently became known as the Philip and Muriel Berman Center. Several years later, they created a second endowed position at Lehigh, the Philip and Muriel Berman Chair of Jewish Civilization. Owing to their foresight and generosity, generations of Lehigh students—past, present, and future—have an opportunity to study Jewish culture, religion, and history with scholars

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Friends Gather to Honor the Memory of Muriel Berman



Nancy Berman (left) accepts a watercolor of the ceremonial hanukiah presented to Lehigh by Susan Beckerman (right) and Mark Beckerman in honor of Muriel Mallin Berman.

Friends of the Berman Center gathered in April at the home of Lehigh President **Gregory Farrington** to commemorate the one-year anniversary of Muriel Berman's death. Faculty and Center supporters used the occasion to pay tribute to **Philip and Muriel Berman** and their 21-year patronage of the Jewish studies program at Lehigh.

Following introductory comments by President Farrington, **Susan Balenzweig Beckerman '65W and Mark Beckerman** presented the Berman Center and Lehigh with a ceremonial hanukiah (menorah) to serve as a lasting monument to the Bermans' generosity. Commissioned by the Beckermans, the hanukiah was created by **Amy Forsyth**, a professor in Lehigh's Department of Art and Architecture, and will be used in future Hanukah celebrations at Lehigh.

According to Susan Beckerman, the text associated with Hanukah, *Nes Gadol Hayah Sham* (A great miracle happened there), could also be applied to Philip and Muriel Berman. "Their vision in creating the Center for Jewish Studies at Lehigh University was transformative, both at the institutional level and in the individual lives of members of the community, students, and residents of the Lehigh Valley," she said.

Nancy Berman, daughter of the Bermans and member of Lehigh's Board of Trustees, was presented with a watercolor of the hanukiah. When expressing her appreciation, she noted that the old friends and new who gathered that evening should not only commemorate her parents' initiative that established the Center, but also celebrate the bright future of Jewish studies at Lehigh. She

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Berman Legacy

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of international reputation. For a period of ten years, the Bermans also contributed funds that enabled Lehigh to bring to campus each year a visiting Israeli professor. Seeking to expand the range of the Berman Center internationally as well as interreligiously, they established in 1995 a visiting position in Jewish studies at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, a leading Jesuit institution of higher learning.

In keeping with Muriel and Phil's humanistic vision and wide range of interests, Jewish studies has become an integral part of the Liberal Arts program at Lehigh. Consistent with their commitment

to the local community, the Berman Center regularly reaches beyond the boundaries of the campus to make available to members of the general Lehigh Valley community a variety of programs that include major speakers and writers, films, art exhibits, and musical performances.

The endowment recently provided by Muriel Berman's bequest will guarantee that the Berman legacy continues long into the future. Lehigh University and the Jewish Studies program have been blessed to have the support of Philip and Muriel Berman. May their memory be for a blessing!

—Larry Silberstein

Director, Philip and Muriel Berman
Center for Jewish Studies

Friends Gather

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paid tribute to the Center's ever-expanding circle of friends, like Susan and Mark Beckerman, who have made the work of the Berman Center a priority of their philanthropic endeavors. Besides creating scholarships for study-in-Israel in honor of Susan's late husband, Howard Ballenzweig, Susan and Mark fund the Center's writer-in-residence position, which made it possible to add Jewish literature to the course offerings at Lehigh. They have also hosted meetings across the country to inform parents, alumni, and friends about the Berman Center. According to Susan, she and Mark understand firsthand the difference the Bermans made in the life of the University, the Lehigh Valley community, and Jewish cultural life.

The theme of transformation and growth was repeated in a poem read by Berman Center writer-in-residence **Ruth Knafo Setton**. "A House without Walls," written by her for the occasion, describes how Philip and Muriel Berman, through the creation of the Center for Jewish Studies at Lehigh 21 years ago, planted a ray of sun that still burns bright in the hearts and minds of students, teachers, and friends. In this contemporary midrash, Ruth sought to capture the essence of the Bermans' vision of what a Jewish studies center should be—a gathering place for teachers, artists, and scholars from all over the world who share their love of Jewish philosophy, history, art, and literature with their students.

Signaling the delight that Muriel Berman took in the many and diverse educational programs offered by the Center, the evening in her honor culminated with a thought-provoking production by Theatre Ariel entitled "Ten Imaginings of Sarai and Hagar." The event drew together the various constituents of the Center—students, faculty, and members of the public.

A House without Walls

Ruth Knafo Setton

Tonight we honor Phil and Muriel Berman, who planted a ray of sun and built a house where there was none.

I don't understand, said the first student. How did they catch the sun?

When they opened their hands, the ray flew between their palms and nestled like a bird.

But how did they plant the sun? asked the second student.

They dug a hole in the ground and seeded it with their bare hands, nourished the earth with their dreams, and watched the ray glow.

Then what did they do? asked the third student.

In the circle of light and heat, they built a house.

What kind of house? asked the fourth student.

They built a house without walls, that spanned a city or a continent, a center large enough to house all Jews together.

Who came to this magical center? asked the fifth student.

Teachers and artists and scholars came from near and far, from Asia and Africa and South America, from every country under the sun.

What did they do when they got here? asked the sixth student.

They shared their love of Jewish philosophy, history, art and literature with students like you.

Ah! said the seventh student. And how did we respond?

Like all good students everywhere, you argued with your teachers, and studied and flourished, and began to understand the profound richness and beauty of Jewish thought and culture. Then you went into the world to share what you had learned, and more students came and thrived.

Does the ray of sun still burn? asked the eighth student.

Look around you. It burns in the hearts and minds of all of us—students, teachers, friends—who have been touched by the great miracle that happened here. This light, this center, this vision, Phil and Muriel left us to give to our daughters and sons, to give to their daughters and sons, holding us together. We thank you, and we promise to keep the eternal flame burning bright.

Dr. Xu Xin Serves as Scholar-in-Residence



John Kish IV

Xu Xin (right) talks with students at a reception following his Lehigh talk.

Dr. **Xu Xin**, professor of history of Jewish culture and director of the Center for Jewish Studies of Nanjing University in China, recently served as a scholar-in-residence at the Berman Center. At Lehigh, Xu Xin presented a lecture on the Jewish Diaspora in China and visited two Asian Studies classes, where he discussed Shanghai and life in China today. He spoke on the Jews of China at a reception hosted by Nancy Berman for friends of the Berman Center. Nancy and her husband, Alan Bloch, had met Xu Xin during a trip to China and had enthusiastically recommended him as a speaker. Xu Xin also gave a talk on the current relationship between Israel and China at a “lunch and learn” program sponsored by the Jewish Federation of the Lehigh Valley.

During his Lehigh presentation, Xu Xin recounted the history of Jews in China, who, he said, have had a continuous presence there for the last one thousand years. He focused on two areas: the premodern Jewish community of Kaifeng, which dates back to the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127), and Jewish life and culture in China after 1840, with an emphasis on the Jewish communities in Shanghai and Harbin. He concluded by discussing the Jewish refugees from Central Europe who fled to China during and prior to World War II. It is estimated that ten thousand Jews arrived in Shanghai between 1937 and 1940.

A former member of the Red Guard during the Cultural Revolution, Dr. Xu gleaned most of his initial knowledge about Jews and Judaism through American Jewish literature, which he discovered following the awarding of the Nobel Prize

in Literature to novelist Saul Bellow. His interest in Judaism increased after he met an American Jew who invited him to the United States, where he lived with a Jewish family from 1986 to 1988. This provided him the opportunity to immerse himself in Jewish life and culture. “I came to realize that Judaism and Jewish culture made many contributions to the world in general and to Western civilization in particular, and I started to see many lessons for the Chinese,” he said. After he returned to China, he introduced the study of the history of Jews and Jewish culture at Nanjing University.

According to Xu Xin, there are now ten centers for Jewish studies in China. The center that he directs at Nanjing was established in 1992 to meet a growing demand for Judaic studies in China and to promote a better understanding between the people of Israel and China. His center regularly offers courses on Judaism, Jewish history and culture, and the Holocaust. More than one hundred students attend most courses.

Xu Xin is president of the China Judaic Studies Association and editor-in-chief and major contributor to the Chinese edition of *Encyclopedia Judaica*. He is the author of *Legends of the Chinese Jews of Kaifeng; The Jews of Kaifeng; China: History, Culture, and Religion;* and *Anti-Semitism: How and Why*. He has organized many exhibits in China on topics related to Jewish issues, including the First International Conference on Jewish Studies in China in 1996, which was co-sponsored by Tel Aviv University.

Xu Xin’s visit to Lehigh was sponsored

by the Berman Center and the Philip and Muriel Berman Foundation in cooperation with Lehigh’s Asian Studies Program and the Jewish Federation of the Lehigh Valley.

Deborah Lipstadt Appointed 2006 Master Visiting Professor

Deborah E. Lipstadt of Emory University has been appointed the 2006 Richard and Susan Master Visiting Professor of Jewish Studies at the Gregorian University’s Cardinal Bea Institute of Judaic Studies in Rome. She is the fourth American scholar to teach at the Greg through a collaborative program administered by the Berman Center and funded by Richard and Susan Master of Bethlehem, Pa.

Lipstadt will offer a course on the Holocaust. Using Holocaust memoirs as the material focus of their inquiry, students will examine what it means for a text about the Holocaust to be at one and the same time a historical document and a narrative creation. The readings will concentrate on the Holocaust from the perspective of Jewish experience, including memoirs of the first generation, who experienced the Holocaust, and later generations who live with it “post-memory.” The students will also screen a number of films including *Shoah* and *Partisans of Vilna*.

At Emory, Lipstadt is the Dorot Professor of Modern Jewish and Holocaust Studies and director of the Rabbi Donald Tam Institute for Jewish Studies. She is the author of *History on Trial: My Day in Court with David Irving*, the story of her libel trial in London against David Irving, who sued her for calling him a Holocaust denier and right-wing extremist. She is also the author of several volumes on the Holocaust including *Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory*, the first full-length study of those who attempt to deny the Holocaust, and *Beyond Belief: The American Press and the Coming of the Holocaust*, an examination of how the American press covered the news of the persecution of European Jewry between 1933 and 1945.

Recent Jewish Studies Courses at Lehigh

Literature

American Jewish Literature (Setton)
Contemporary Israeli Literature (Setton)
Fantasies, Fears and Fellowship: Literary Encounters between African Americans and Jewish Americans (Yellin)
Israeli Women Writers (Setton)
Jewish Women Writers (Setton)
Multicultural Women's Literature: Jewish/Indian/Asian (Setton)
Philip Roth's Complaint (Setton)

Philosophy

Jewish Philosophy (Weiss)
Medieval Philosophy (Weiss)

Language

Elementary Modern Hebrew I (Piltch)
Elementary Modern Hebrew II (Piltch)
Intermediate Modern Hebrew I (Piltch)
Intermediate Modern Hebrew II (Piltch)
Hebrew Press (Piltch)

International Relations

United States and the Middle East (Cohen)
Arab-Israeli Conflict and Peace Making (Cohen)

Religion Studies

Basic Jewish Texts (Weissler)
Beginnings of Judaism and Jewish Origins (Wright)
Dead Sea Scrolls: Windows into Ancient Judaism and Christianity (Wright)
Hasidic Tales (Weissler)
Holocaust: History and Meaning (Pettit)
Israel: Religion, Culture, National Identity (Silberstein)
Jewish Folklore (Weissler)
Jewish Scriptures/Old Testament (Wright)
Jewish Tradition (Weissler)
Jews, Christians, and Buddhism: The Turn to the East in American Culture (Silberstein)
Judaism in the Modern World (Silberstein)
Kabbalah: The Jewish Mystical Tradition (Weissler)
Poles Apart: The Jewish Experience in Poland (Cohn)
Responses to the Holocaust (Silberstein)
Sources for the Life of Jesus: The Jewish and Christian Context (Wright)
The Spiritual Quest in Contemporary Jewish Life (Silberstein)
Women in Jewish History (Weissler)

Urban Studies

American Jews: Politics and Culture (Amidon)

New Courses Add Variety to Jewish Studies Program

In addition to regularly offered courses, the Jewish studies program hosted two visiting faculty during the spring semester.

Dr. **Robert Cohn**, the Philip and Muriel Berman Professor of Jewish Studies at Lafayette College, taught *Poles Apart: The Jewish Experience in Poland*. The course explored the development of Jewish civilization in Poland, which was the spiritual and demographic heart of Judaism until it was destroyed in the Holocaust. Students examined the distinctive Jewish religious, political, and social movements and institutions that developed in Poland and the flowering of secular Jewish culture in the early 20th century. The controversial question of Jewish-Polish relations before, during, and after World War II was considered, as was the impact of Roman Catholicism, anti-Semitism, and communism.

Dr. **Peter Pettit**, who directs the Institute for Jewish-Christian Understanding at Muhlenberg College and is a member of the College's Religion Department, taught a course on the history and meaning of the Holocaust. Students explored the background of the Holocaust in European, German, and Jewish culture and then assessed the impact of the Holocaust on moral reasoning, Jewish identity, Christian theology, Jewish-Christian relations, and other aspects of contemporary culture.

Also offering a new course during the spring semester was the Berman Center's writer-in-residence, **Ruth Knafo Setton**. Entitled *Philip Roth's Complaint*, the course was designed to take students on a voyage into the world of Philip Roth, who dominated the 20th-century literary scene and became one of its most respected masters. According to Setton, Roth's fictional explorations of Jewish identity and, in particular, Jewish male identity have resulted in some of the most provocative, fearless, hilarious, and brilliant prose ever written.



Avi Setton

Max Apple (center left) visits students in Ruth Setton's (center right) class.

Award-Winning Jewish Authors Share Their Stories

Alicia Ostriker, poet and midrashist, and **Max Apple**, writer and humorist, came to Lehigh as part of the Berman Center's Writer-in-Residence program. Each author met with students in Jewish literature and creative writing classes and gave a public reading. Their visits were jointly sponsored by the Berman Center and Lehigh's departments of English and Women's Studies.

Ostriker read from and discussed her provocative book *The Nakedness of the Fathers*. This magical combination of midrash and autobiography was written in the context of Jewish feminism and the ongoing renaissance of midrash writing in America today. She told the audience that Jewish imagination has flowered through midrash, in which ancient tales yield rewarding new meanings for each new generation. The Rutgers English professor is not surprised that many midrashists today are women. "The texts," she said, "plainly beg and implore women to read them as freshly, energetically, and passionately—and even playfully—as they have been read by men."

Ostriker, who has taught midrash writing in the U. S., England, Italy, and Australia, conducted a midrash workshop for several composition and literature classes. "When I write and when I teach midrash workshops," she told the students, "it is always on the assumption that the Bible is an ancient archaic work and also that it is

totally contemporary—that anywhere you look in the Bible you will find information about yourself, your own experience and the world that you are living in right now." Students had the opportunity to select Bible stories and write and share their own midrash.

Besides *The Nakedness of the Fathers*, Ostriker's publications dealing with midrash include the volume *Feminist Revision and the Bible*, which examines the role of biblical women in scripture and contemporary midrash by women. A major American poet known for the brilliance and compassion of her vision, Ostriker is the author of ten volumes of poetry including *The Imaginary Lover*, which won the William Carlos Williams Poetry Award. Her work is anthologized in many collections of Jewish poetry.

Max Apple visited Ruth Setton's seminar, Philip Roth's Complaint: The Work of Philip Roth, where he discussed the writings of Roth, an author he particularly admires, as well as his own journey as a writer. After the class, Apple gave a public reading of one of his short stories and a nonfiction piece, "The Jew as Writer/The Writer as Jew," in which he reflected on his dual identity as Max, the American writer, and as Mottele, Yiddish author:

"Without Mottele," Apple read, "Max knows that he would be a pale imita-

Filmmaker Introduces Hank Greenberg Documentary

Filmmaker Aviva Kempner introduced and discussed her documentary, *The Life and Times of Hank Greenberg*, at a program sponsored by the Berman Center in cooperation with the Allentown Jewish Community Center's Jewish and Israeli Film Series. She devoted thirteen years of her life to writing, directing, and producing this witty and compelling documentary that explores how a young Jewish baseball player challenged Babe Ruth's home-run record and became an American hero. A sports legend, Hammerin' Hank Greenberg of the Detroit Tigers transcended religious prejudice and served as a beacon of hope to American Jews facing bigotry during the Depression and World War II.

Kempner, who has investigated the untold stories of Jewish heroes in several films, gave two reasons for choosing to make a film about Greenberg. First, and most important, he was her father's hero. As many immigrant Jews became American, they came to love baseball and idolize baseball players. Second, she realized that a film about Greenberg would be the metaphor for the American Jewish experiences in the 30s and 40s.

The Life and Times of Hank Greenberg won numerous awards including the Peabody Award, Best Documentary from the National Board of Review of Motion Pictures, and the New York Film Critics Choice for Best Non-Fiction Film.

Ms. Kempner also produced *Partisans of Vilna*, about Jewish resistance against the Nazis, and the tragicomic film *Today I Vote for My Joey*, about the 2000 Palm Beach election results. She is currently writing a script about Gertrude Berg, the creator of *The Goldbergs* on radio and television.

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Gerald Cromer Looks at Outcome of Disengagement

At a faculty seminar sponsored by the Berman Center and International Relations Department, **Gerald Cromer**, Associate Professor of Criminology at Israel's Bar-Ilan University, analyzed the implications of the recent disengagement of Israel from Gaza for Israel's future. Cromer is the author of *The Writing Was on the Wall: Constructing Political Deviance in Israel*, *Narratives of Violence*, and *A War of Words: Political Violence and Public Debate in Israel* (forthcoming). His articles on topics relating to deviance, violence, victimization, and extremism have appeared in numerous journals and anthologies in England, the United States, and Israel.

While describing the recent withdrawal from Gaza, accomplished with a minimum of violence, as an amazing success, Cromer believes that the crisis is far from over. It is clear, he said, that the argument surrounding the disengagement is rooted in much deeper problems in Israeli society. He noted that opponents of the disengagement seek not only to oust Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and resettle the areas that they have been forced to

leave, but they are also engaged in a full-scale cultural war with their opponents. In the rhetoric used by the settlers, Cromer hears echoes of the radical discourse of Meir Kahane and his followers.

The settlers, viewing their opponents as nihilists, consider themselves to be the authentic Zionists and legitimate representatives of Judaism, Cromer explained. Committed to the settlement of the complete land of Israel on both sides of the Jordan River, they have been forced by their opponents to abandon settlements. Insofar as Jewish law (halakhah) forbids handing over control of any part of the land of Israel to non-Jews, those who advocate disengagement are, in the eyes of the settlers, in violation of that law.

Cromer described the strategy of religious Zionists in this culture war as threefold: (1) Working toward empowering a religious prime minister and becoming a major player in establishing a ruling coalition. (2) Striving to transform institutions within Israeli society to operate in accordance with halakhah. (3) Gaining support for their position among the general population.

Award-Winning Jewish Authors

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tor, a John Updike without Protestants. And Mottele alone would be exactly that—Mottele alone. Born into Yiddish at the exact moment that murderers were extinguishing it, he would have the language without the people. He needs Americans to populate his shtetl.”

Max Apple has published two novels, *Zip* and *Propheteers*; two collections of stories, *The Oranging of America* and *Free Agents*; and two books of nonfiction, *Roommates: My Grandfather's Story* and *I Love Gootie: My Grandmother's Story*. In *Roommates*, which was made into a major motion picture starring Peter Falk, Apple tells the story of his 103-year-old grandfather, Rocky, who shared a room with him on a college campus in the 1960s. Uplifting and unforgettable, it is a true tale about the extraordinary connection between a grandfather and grandson.

Five of Max Apple's books have been *New York Times* Notable Books. His stories and essays are widely anthologized and have appeared in *Atlantic*, *Harpers*, *Esquire*, and in *Best American Stories* and *Best Spiritual Writing*. His essay, “The American Bakery,” was selected by the *New York Times* as one of the best to appear in the first 100 years of the *Book Review*. Apple currently teaches in the English Department at the University of Pennsylvania.

According to Professor Setton, “providing Lehigh students with the opportunity to work with and get to know writers as talented, courageous, and generous as Alicia Ostriker and Max Apple encourages them to expand their definitions and awareness of what constitutes a Jewish American writer.”

Yaffa Eliach Works to Restore Jewish Past

In a recent lecture, Dr. **Yaffa Eliach**, a pioneer in Holocaust studies, discussed her life's work as restoring the vanished past of the Jews of Eastern Europe. Her talk was sponsored by the Berman Center and Lehigh's departments of History and Religion Studies.

Eliach told the audience of her incredible experiences during World War II. Although she and her family were liberated from the concentration camps in 1944, when they returned to their home in the shtetl of Eishyshok in Lithuania, they were attacked by Polish partisans and her mother and brother were killed. Her father, imprisoned by the Russians and facing an uncertain fate, urged Eliach to “always remember” and to tell everyone about the Holocaust to prevent it from ever happening again. He further entreated her to focus, not on death, but on life and love and learning.

Eliach, now a professor emerita from Brooklyn College, achieved everything her father asked of her. The founder of the first Center for Holocaust Documentation and Research in the U.S., she introduced Holocaust studies on American campuses and is the author of several books on the Holocaust.

Yaffa Eliach is perhaps best known for creating the “Tower of Life” photographic exhibit at the U. S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington. Within a soaring three-story space, her collection of 1500 photographs exposes visitors to the faces of a *living* Jewish past. While collecting the photographs, she began to write her monumental book *There Once Was a World: A 900-Year Chronicle of the Shtetl of Eishyshok*, in which she movingly recorded the history of this same vanished people.

Eliach explained that besides reading about the Jewish past, she wants people to be able to participate in every element of Jewish life and culture destroyed in the Holocaust. As a result, she has undertaken her most ambitious project to date—the construction of a full-size replica of an East European shtetl. The shtetl and a living history museum, currently under construction in Rishon LeTzion in Israel,

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Special Thanks

Susan and Mark Beckerman have increased and extended their support of the Berman Center's writer-in-residence program for an additional four years. Their recent gift assures the continuation of the courses offered by Ruth Knafo Setton, who serves as a Professor of Practice in the English Department and Berman Center Writer-in-Residence. Setton's offerings include courses in Jewish and Israeli literature and creative writing. The writer-in-residence program, which Ruth directs, brings to the Berman Center presentations and readings by authors and poets, many in cooperation with the Department of English.

Richard and Susan Master have pledged their continued support for the Visiting Professorship in Jewish Studies at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome beyond their original five-year commitment. The program, administered by the Berman Center, represents an unusual form of cooperation between a Jewish Studies center and one of the world's leading Jesuit academic institutions. During 2005, Dr. Michael A. Signer, Abrams Professor of Jewish Thought and Culture at the University of Notre Dame, served as the Master Professor at the Gregorian, teaching a course on Christianity in Jewish terms. Dr. Deborah Lipstadt, Dorot Professor of Modern Jewish and Holocaust Studies at Emory University, will teach a course on Holocaust memoirs in 2006 (see p. 3).

Yaffa Eliach

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will represent a thousand years of Jewish life, both Sephardic and Ashkenazic, in approximately eighty buildings.

Noting the significance of Eliach's work, Berman professor Robert Cohn (Lafayette), who teaches a course on the Jews of Poland, observed: "The memory of the Holocaust still very much colors our view of the Jews of Eastern Europe. To give in to the tendency to collapse that world to the few years of its destruction falsifies the memory of a great and noble culture. . . . Yaffa Eliach has struggled mightily against this tendency in a multi-pronged effort to restore this nearly lost world."

Gifts

The Philip and Muriel Berman Center for Jewish Studies recognizes with gratitude the individuals listed here. These generous contributors have greatly enhanced the academic, cultural, and programmatic offerings of the Berman Center and Lehigh University.

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BCJS Faculty 2004–2005

• **Laurence J. Silberstein**, Philip and Muriel Berman Professor of Jewish Studies, Dept. of Religion Studies, Lehigh University, *Responses to the Holocaust, Modes of Jewish Identity in the Modern World, The Spiritual Quest in Contemporary Jewish Life, Israel: Religion, Culture, National Identity*

• **Robert L. Cohn**, Philip and Muriel Berman Professor of Jewish Studies, Dept. of Religious Studies, Lafayette College, *Hebrew Bible, Biblical Narrative, Jewish Responses to Catastrophe*

• **Ruth Knafo Setton**, Writer-in-Residence, Berman Center for Jewish Studies and Dept. of English, Lehigh University, *Jewish Literature*

• **Chava Weissler**, Philip and Muriel Berman Professor of Jewish Civilization, Dept. of Religion Studies, Lehigh University, *Jewish Folklore, Hasidic Tales, Modern Judaism, Mystical Tradition in Judaism, Women in Jewish History, Gendered Jewish Lives*

• **Benjamin Wright, III**, Dept. of Religion Studies, Lehigh University, *Hebrew Bible, Judaism in the Greco-Roman World, Archaeology and the Bible in the Land of Israel*

Affiliated Faculty Lehigh University

• **David Amidon, Jr.**, Urban Studies Program, *American Jews: Politics and Culture*

• **Bunnie Piltch**, Dept. of Modern Languages and Literature, *Hebrew Language, Hebrew Press*

• **Roslyn Weiss**, Dept. of Philosophy, *Jewish Philosophy*

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• **Robert Weiner**, Dept. of History, *Modern Jewish History*

Faculty Notes

Robert Cohn presented a paper entitled “Constructions of the Kielce Pogrom” at the Western Jewish Studies Association meeting in Tempe, Arizona. In Spring 2005 he offered a new course, Poles Apart: The Jewish Experience in Poland, at Lafayette College and Lehigh (see p. 4). During the summer, he studied Polish at the Cracovia Academy of Polish Language and Culture.

Bunnie Piltch taught a new course in Fall 2005 entitled The Hebrew Press. Students selected, read, and discussed headlines and articles on Israeli culture and society that appeared primarily on Hebrew internet news web sites. A multi-level course, it was conducted entirely in Hebrew.

Ruth Knafo Setton, Writer-in-Residence for the Berman Center, was recently appointed as a Professor of Practice at Lehigh. She was the recipient of a Moulin a Nef Fellowship, an international artist residency award in Auvillar, France, in Summer 2005, where she completed her second novel. Her poem “Gypsy Moth” won First Prize Poem of 2004 in the poetry contest sponsored by the literary journal *Margin: Exploring Modern Magical Realism*.

Her creative nonfiction, fiction, and poetry have recently appeared in the *Schocken Book of Modern Sephardic Literature, Matzo Balls for Breakfast and Other Memories of Growing Up Jewish, and Studies in American Jewish Literature*. In the past year, she has traveled widely, giving lectures on Sephardic-Jewish identity, readings from her work, and creative writing workshops at the American Institute for Maghreb Studies (AIMS) conference, “Rethinking Jewish Culture and Society in the Maghreb,” in Tangier, Morocco; Nextbook Writers Series in Chicago; ALA Jewish American Literature and Holocaust Literature Conference in Boca Raton; AWP (Associated Writers Programs) Conference in Vancouver; Florida International University; Middlesex College; and Simpson College.

While on sabbatical in Spring 2005, **Laurence J. Silberstein** completed two-articles to appear as chapters in *Modern*

Judaism and Historical Consciousness: Identities - Encounters - Perspectives (Brill, 2006) and *Deleuze and the Contemporary World* (University of Edinburgh Press, 2006). He also contributed an expanded article on Martin Buber to the newly revised edition of the *Encyclopedia of Religion*. His review of Baruch Kimmerling’s *The Invention and Decline of Israeliness* will appear in the forthcoming issue of *Israel Studies Forum*. In January 2005 he spoke at the University of Florida on “Postzionism as a Critique of Power.”

Robert Weiner published an 18-hour lecture course, “The Long 19th Century: European History from 1789 to 1917,” with the Teaching Company. The course covers most areas of European history from approximately 1750 to World War II, with a 200-page study guide and 36 half-hour lectures, one of which deals with European antisemitism. Issues and developments in Jewish history are included.

Roslyn Weiss’s article, “Four Parables about Peshat as Parable,” will appear in *Maimonides: A Man for All Ages*, Vol. 1, due to be published by Yashar Books.

Chava Weissler participated in a roundtable discussion on “The Future of Jewish Feminism and Jewish Feminist Scholarship” at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Jewish Studies. She offered a course on Folk Customs and New Practices for the High Holidays, a four-day adult education course at the National Havurah Institute at Franklin Pierce College, and presented her findings on the Jewish Renewal Movement at the Biennial Aleph Kallah. Her article, “The Meanings of Shekhinah in the ‘Jewish Renewal’ Movement,” will appear in Volume 10 of *Nashim: A Journal of Women’s Issues and Gender Studies*. She has recently contributed several articles on Tkhines (women’s prayers in Yiddish) to the *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jewish Life in Eastern Europe*, the revised edition of *Encyclopedia of Religion*, the revised edition of the *Encyclopedia Judaica*, and to *Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia*.

Benjamin Wright published several articles during the past year: “Perspectives on George W. E. Nickelsburg in Perspective” in *Review of Rabbinic Judaism* 8 (2005); “The Categories of Rich and Poor in the Qumran Sapiential Literature” in *Sapiential Perspectives: Wisdom Literature in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls*; “Wisdom and Women at Qumran” in *Dead Sea Discoveries* 11; and “Wisdom, Instruction and Social Location in Ben Sira and 1 Enoch” in *Things Revealed: Studies in Early Jewish and Christian Literature in Honor of Michael E. Stone*. He edited *Conflicted Boundaries in Wisdom and Apocalypticism* with Lawrence M. Wills.

He participated in the Third Enoch Seminar on “The Similitudes of Enoch” in Camaldoni, Italy, where he was a respondent to two major papers. In September he served as the Andrea and Charles Bronfman Distinguished Visiting Professor in Jewish Studies at the College of William and Mary, delivering four lectures to undergraduate classes and one public talk.

Andrea Squicimara, Stacy Ruggirello, and Eric Heydenberk, three students from Ruth Knafo Setton’s class on American Jewish Literature, enjoy lunch at the popular Katz’s Deli in New York City. The entire class went with Professor Setton on a day-trip to New York City. The trip included a tour of the Lower East Side Tenement Museum, which brought to life many of the immigrant stories they had read in class. The students also visited the Jewish Museum, where they viewed an exhibit on the many faces of American Jewish identity.



Anna Orchard

Gary Rendsburg Finds Women Heroes in the Bible

Gary Rendsburg, a renowned scholar in the field of Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East, presented a talk on “Unlikely Heroes: Women in the Bible.” Overall, he said, women in the Bible are the antithesis of what would be expected from a patriarchal society. Far from being demure and submissive, they are instead fearless and assertive. By and large the female figures in the Bible are portrayed in a positive light. These women stand for the greater entity, the people of Israel. Ruth, Sarah, Hagar, Tamar, and Moses’s mother, and so many other biblical female characters truly are all unlikely heroes.

Rendsburg shared his views as to why women are portrayed in the Bible in these unexpected ways and provided several examples of these unlikely heroes. Beginning with Yael, the hero of Judges 4-5, who slayed the King of Hazor’s general, he asked: “Why is the hero of this story a non-Israelite tent-dwelling woman?” He posed a similar question about the hero of Joshua 2, the non-Israelite prostitute,

Rahab, who manages to best several incapable spies. In both instances the Bible takes the life of a woman living on the margins of society and promotes that life to one of heroism.

Rendsburg contends that Yael and Rahab and other similar women in the Hebrew Bible are used as a symbol for the nation of Israel—reflecting Israel’s identification with the weak and lowly. Further, Yael and Rahab are not just socially marginal females—one a tent dweller, the other a prostitute—both are also non-Israelites. This reflects Israel’s position of the ultimate “other” both in reality and self-perception. Israelites were a unique people in the ancient world, forging a new religious movement centered around the worship of only one god, a god who could not be depicted as an idol or an image or associated with nature. These concepts were revolutionary in the ancient world. The biblical record makes it clear that Israel understood its unique status among the nations of the world. In

its literature, heroics are attributed not only to the lowly, but also to the lowly other. The two female characters of Yael and Rahab are the most obvious examples of the lowly serving as Israel’s heroes. Other instances of women serving in this role are less glaring.

Rendsburg is the Blanche and Irving Laurie Chair of Jewish History at Rutgers University. Before joining the Rutgers faculty, he taught at Cornell University for eighteen years. His publications include *The Bible and the Ancient Near East*, coauthored with Cyrus H. Gordon, *Israelian Hebrew in the Book of Kings*, *The Redaction of Genesis*, *Diglossia in Ancient Hebrew*, *Linguistic Evidence for the Northern Origin of Selected Psalms*, and more than 100 articles in scholarly journals and monograph collections.

His talk was cosponsored by the Berman Center, the Religion Studies Department and the Lucius N. Littauer Foundation.

Nurith Gertz Discusses Early Israeli Cinema

Nurith Gertz, professor of cinema and literature at Tel Aviv University and the Open University in Israel, discussed Israeli cinema of the 1930s and 40s. In particular, Gertz discussed the contribution of cinema to shaping the newly emerging Hebrew identity in pre-state Palestine. Stationed at the top of this construction of identity, she said, was the Hebrew Israeli male, a fanciful ideal of perfect Hebrew masculinity. This image was basic to the new definition of “Hebrewness,” a forerunner to “Israeli-ness.”

Professor Gertz analyzed the ways in which the image of this “hero” was constructed in such films as *My Father’s House*, *Avoda*, and *He Walked in the Fields*. Using film clips, she illustrated how the camera adhered to the hero’s point of view and identified with it. The finest cinematic techniques of the time were used to amplify this image, she said, and to display the hero’s control of space. The depiction of the land beneath his feet and as the object of his gaze effectively

represented his connection with the homeland and his power to control it.

Gertz contends that this image of the Hebrew male had a basic role in shaping the dominant view of Zionist history, the structure of its narrative, and the masculine character of the Zionist order. Early Zionist national cinema portrayed the Israeli Zionist hero as a super-man who embodied a super-ideology and controlled his surroundings with his body and his eyes. At the same time, these films were unable to conceal the class, sex, and racial differences that this protagonist was meant to eclipse. From the 1960s on, these differences became increasingly visible in films that highlighted the Diaspora Jewish past, the Arab past of the country, and the feminine identity repressed by the unifying account of the Zionist male. The most interesting films in this category did not dismiss the Zionist voice. Instead, they turned Zionist discourse into one voice among a great cacophony of voices. These films thus contributed to shaping a tolerant Zionism that recognized multiple

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identities and spaces, including that of the Diaspora.

Gertz recently served as a fellow at the Center for Advanced Judaic Studies at the University of Pennsylvania. Among her books are *Myths in Israeli Culture* and *A Different Chorus: Holocaust Survivors, Aliens and Others in Israeli Cinema and Literature*. Her lecture at Lehigh was sponsored by the Berman Center and the E. Franklin Robbins Fund in Jewish Studies.

Israeli Professor Examines Dilemma of Israeli Left

At a Berman Center lecture, Professor **Hannan Hever** of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem sharply depicted what he sees as the impossible plight of the left-wing intellectual in Israel. Confronted by the continuing occupation, such intellectuals are torn between their commitment to universalist values, which render the demands of the Palestinians just and worthy of support, and their commitment to the survival of the State of Israel.

In an effort to explain the complexities of the situation, Hever turned to J. M. Coetzee’s novel *Disgrace*, which describes the plight of the intellectual in post-Apartheid South Africa. In Hever’s words, Coetzee depicts the ways in which “the collective lives of blacks and whites after apartheid are saturated with the indelible residues of violence.” To Hever, the Israeli intellectual, like the South African, “must face up to forces far more potent than any discrete effort to repair a long historical legacy of injustice and

violence.” In both cases, the intellectual is called upon to accept that beyond the formal political process, “the process [of reconciliation] is, in fact, an unending one.” Warning that Israelis should not view peace as a messianic solution, Hever insists that following the conclusion of a peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinian people, the Israeli intellectual will be compelled to confront the legacy of violence and oppression that marked the years of occupation.

In Hever’s view, the current plight of the Israeli intellectual is reflected in the case of Israeli journalist Gideon Levi, whose recent book graphically reports the sufferings of Palestinians in the occupied territories. At the same time, “as much as he identified with the suffering of the Palestinians, he never took their part entirely, and he never shrugged off his Israeli identity.”

According to Hever, those who recognize the universal justice of the Palestinians’ claim and oppose the occu-

pation cannot condone the war that Israel has been waging against the Palestinian people. Such individuals have had no choice but to join forces with the “enemy” in a war of conflicting nationalisms. The Israelis who signed a recent petition expressing support for the Palestinian intellectuals’ call for an end to the occupation and a negotiated settlement found themselves in such a position. Precisely in order to better serve their people, Hever concluded, these Jewish-Israeli intellectuals had to abandon their people.

A leading Israeli social and cultural critic, Hever is the author of numerous books and articles on Hebrew fiction and poetry. His publications in English include *Producing the Modern Hebrew Canon: Nation Building and Minority Discourse* in the Berman Center’s series *New Perspectives on Jewish Studies*. Besides teaching at Hebrew University and Tel Aviv University in Israel, he has served as a visiting professor at Columbia University, Northwestern University, and the University of Michigan.