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The Center for Jewish Studies hosted two Visiting Professors during the fall 2007 semester. With the support of visiting professorships and certain other endowment funds, the Center is able to host leading scholars in Jewish studies to supplement the courses offered by our full-time faculty at Harvard.

JEFFREY GUROCK, Libby M. Klaperman Professor of Jewish History at Yeshiva University, was sponsored by the Joseph Engel Fund. Professor Gurock offered two courses on American Jewish history: “American Jewish History” and “The Social History of American Judaism: Research Seminar.”

STEVEN ZIPPERSTEIN, The Daniel E. Koshland Professor in Jewish Culture and History at Stanford University, was sponsored by the Leon I. Mirell Lecture Fund. Professor Zipperstein taught “Jews in the Modern World” and “Jews and Communism in Russia: 1880 to the Fall of the Soviet Union.”

BRENNA WELLS
AT CARNEGIE HALL

CJS’s own Brenna Wells was selected as one of 30 singers to participate in the Ton Koopman Workshop [ON DATE]: Handel Choral Works for Singers as part of the Weill Music Institute Professional Training Workshops at Carnegie Hall. They performed Handel’s Dettinger Te Deum and Ode on St. Cecilia’s Day in the Zankel Hall with the Orchestra of St. Luke’s.

Brenna was also recently chosen as one of two singers to perform in the Egida Sartori and Laura Alvinci Early Music Seminars under the Fondazione Giorgio Cini in Venice, Italy this May. Bravo, Brenna!
President George W. Bush awarded the prestigious National Humanities Medals for 2007 to Professor Ruth R. Wisse during a November 15 ceremony at the White House. In total, nine distinguished Americans and one cultural foundation were honored for their exemplary contributions to the humanities and were recognized for their scholarship, preservation efforts, philanthropy, and literary works. Immediately following the ceremony, the medalists, their families, and friends joined the president and first lady Laura Bush for a reception held in their honor.

The National Humanities Medal, first awarded in 1989 as the Charles Frankel Prize, honors individuals or groups whose work has deepened the nation’s understanding of the humanities, broadened U.S. citizens’ engagement with the humanities, or helped preserve and expand Americans’ access to important resources in the humanities. The Humanities Medal is the signal award for the humanities. Over the past decade, including this year’s recipients, the National Humanities Medal has been awarded to 98 individuals and seven organizations. Among those recognized during this period are Bernard Lewis, Judith “Miss Manners” Martin, Madeleine L’Engle, Harvey Mansfield, and John Updike. Medal recipients do not compete for this award but are specially selected by the president for their lifelong achievements in their diverse areas of expertise.

Wisse, the Martin Peretz Professor of Yiddish Literature and Professor of Comparative Literature, was recognized for “scholarship and teaching that have illuminated Jewish literary traditions. Her insightful writings have enriched our understanding of Yiddish literature and Jewish culture in the modern world.” Wisse has written several books on literature, including The Schlemiel as Modern Hero, A Little Love in Big Manhattan: Two Yiddish Poets, and The Modern Jewish Canon: A Journey through Literature and Culture. Her edited works include The I. L. Peretz Reader and (with Irving Howe) The Best of Sholem Aleichem. A frequent contributor to Commentary magazine and commentator on cultural and political affairs, she has published two political studies: If I Am Not for Myself: The Liberal Betrayal of the Jews and Jews and Power. Professor Wisse served as Director of the Center for Jewish Studies from 1993-1996 and is a current member of its Executive Committee.
A college class on Sholem Aleichem with David Roskies sparked Eitan’s interest in Yiddish. Leaving Jewish day schools in eighth grade to attend a secular, private high school “made me more interested in studying Jewish studies,” he explains. Making friends with people of different backgrounds increased his awareness of his own Jewish heritage.

Until recently, Eitan had little interest in the work of his grandfather, Berel Frymer, a prominent Yiddish writer who worked for the Labor Zionist Association of America, wrote a column in a Yiddish newspaper, and published two volumes of essays in Yiddish, and one in English. Now Eitan is reading his grandfather’s written work, examining his prose style, and imagining “what would have been the continuation” of his work if he had lived longer. As a child, Eitan took no more interest in the Yiddish theater in which his grandmother worked. Though Jewish tradition was important to Eitan’s family growing up, their discussions emphasized the importance of traditional Hebrew texts rather than Yiddish. Eitan’s late mother was a professor of Bible at the University of Chicago, and his father is a rabbi.

Now in his second year of Harvard’s doctoral program in Jewish studies, Eitan is particularly interested in post-war Yiddish literature in the broader context of American literature and culture. He explains, the United States “was the center of Yiddish literature after World War 2,” but the rise of English Jewish literature (by writers like Philip Roth, Saul Bellow, Bernard Malamud) seemed to overshadow it. This summer, Eitan hopes to study Yiddish in Vilnius, with the support of the Center for Jewish Studies, and to examine archives of American Jewish writers such as Bellow, I.B. Singer and Roth in Chicago, Texas and Washington, respectively.

Eitan feels fortunate to be at Harvard, where “there are amazing resources, ...especially the professors who always make themselves available.” He describes his advisor, Ruth Wisse, as “one of the most open people; she listens to your ideas, no matter how crazy they are.” He lists some particularly helpful opportunities provided by the Center for Jewish Studies, including as Avi Matalon’s class on deconstruction and Jewish identity, Visiting Professor Ray Scheindlin, last year’s conference on Jewish education, and a lecture by Patricia Grieve which provided background for a paper. “The various research opportunities provided by the Center for Jewish Studies have had a significant influence on my scholarly development.” Eitan hopes to pursue an academic career, and perhaps also to follow in his grandfather’s footsteps by writing Yiddish newspaper articles or short fiction.

A music major at Columbia University, Jessica Fechtor took her first Jewish studies class after graduating from college. In a postgraduate program at Oxford University, Jessica was “captivated” by classes on Hebrew and Yiddish literature. “I was interested in how the Hebrew language was renewed and reinvented in the modern period, how new questions of Jewish identity were created through both Hebrew and Yiddish literature. The authors and their editors saw literature as a means for redefining what it meant to
be Jewish.” During a year of study in Israel at the Pardes Institute, she called Professor Ruth Wisse to discuss her interest in studying Yiddish and Hebrew language and literature at the doctoral level.

Currently a third-year doctoral student, Jessica is focusing on bilingual writers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Her interests include the “language politics” between Hebrew and Yiddish, the “stylistic developments” of both languages, and “how these literatures reflect the intellectual climates of the time and place in which they were written.”

Jessica applauds Professor Ruth Wisse as “everything a graduate student could hope for in an advisor.” Jessica is grateful that she can “have a foot in the Literature Department” while housed in the Near Eastern Languages department, and for the “phenomenal collection” of Judaica at Widener Library. Working as a teaching fellow at Harvard “has been one of the absolute highlights” of her Harvard experience. Teaching Harvard undergraduates who engage both intellectually and personally with the texts “is a wonderful and inspiring reminder that ideas matter,” and confirms her desire to pursue “academia as a career path.”

Currently, Jessica is co-organizing an interuniversity conference planned for this spring at Harvard, New Approaches: Home, Nation and Landedness in Modern Jewish Identity. The interdisciplinary conference, which has attracted participants from the United States, Europe, and Israel, is sponsored in part by Harvard’s Center for Jewish Studies. Jessica was thrilled by the response to the conference announcement and the opportunity to gather around this theme as a community of scholars.

M ishy Harman grew up and went to school in Jerusalem through high school. After three years of service in the Israeli army, coming to Harvard was a “happy adjustment” for him. “I was excited to devote all my time to school,” he says, unlike college students in Israel, who must work and maintain an apartment.

Mishy has fond early memories of his father taking him to archeological digs in Israel as a child. After his military service, Mishy’s attention was piqued by a book, Unearthing the Bible by Israel Finkenstein, that claimed “very little evidence exists for most momentous Biblical stories that are main cultural references. What if King David wasn’t a king as described? What if Moses didn’t lead the Jews from Egypt?” Mishy returned to a question raised by this book while shooting a short film for a class at Harvard two summers ago, based on the debate about the historicity of King David and exploring his significance in contemporary life, which was shown in the Jerusalem Film Festival. “David is the fourth most popular name in Israel. It is such a symbol.” Next year, Mishy plans to study archaeology at Cambridge University next year, and received the Harvard-Cambridge Scholarship.

While conducting interviews with men named David for his film, Mishy encountered
the question which is the basis of his senior thesis. An Ethiopian man (named David) explained his ethnic group’s belief that they were descended from King Solomon and Queen Sheba. Mishy thus began to explore the question of the origins of the Falash Mura, a group of Ethiopian Falasha Jews who converted to Christianity beginning in the mid 19th century. Despite being religiously Christian, many Falash Mura still claim Jewish ethnicity and ancestry, and demand to be taken to Israel like their Jewish relatives. Though prompted to convert by missionaries, many Falash Mura maintained close social, cultural and work ties with their relatives who practiced Judaism, and “were never really accepted into the Christian majority.” Mishy’s senior thesis deals with the hotly contested debate about accepting the Falash Mura under Israel’s law of return.

Of his experience at Harvard, Mishy says with a smile, “I love being here.” He is grateful for the many academic resources and opportunities for travel for research and adds, “and above all, I met my girlfriend here.”

MISHY HARMAN, CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE
HEBREW LITERATURE AND HISTORY COURSES
For Undergraduates and Graduates

Hebrew 176. Aristotle's Ethics in Medieval Jewish Thought (New)

Hebrew 177. Introduction to Critical Talmud Scholarship (New)

Hebrew 191. From Jewish Literature to Israeli Literature: Seminar

*Hebrew 200r. Problems in the Literature, History, and Religion of Israel: Seminar

Hebrew 230. Midrash: The Figure of Abraham: Seminar (New)

*Hebrew 300. Classical Hebrew Language and Literature

*Hebrew 350. Postbiblical Hebrew Language & Literature

YIDDISH

Yiddish A. Elementary Yiddish

Yiddish Ba. Intermediate Yiddish I

Yiddish Bb. Intermediate Yiddish II

Yiddish Ca. Advanced Yiddish I

Yiddish Cb. Advanced Yiddish II

Yiddish 200r. Modern Yiddish Literature: Bashevis Singer and Grade: Seminar

*Yiddish 300. Yiddish Language and Literature

STUDY OF RELIGION

Religion 11. World Religions Today: Diaspora, Diversity and Dialogue

Religion 28. The Hebrew Bible and Its Worlds (New)

Religion 1004. Competing Fundamentalisms in the “Holy Land” (New)


Religion 1076. Religion and Politics in Current “Fundamentalist” Movements

Religion 1260. Midrash: Jewish Biblical Interpretation in the Rabbinic Period

Religion 1528. The German Church Struggle and the Holocaust (New)

HARVARD DIVINITY SCHOOL COURSES

1469 Reading Midrash

1881 Ritual, Gender, and Space in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity

3660 Gender, Justice, and Jewish Law

HARVARD LAW SCHOOL COURSES

Jewish Law: The Legal Thought of Maimonides

EXTENSION SCHOOL COURSES

FORE E-169 Modernity and Tradition in Jewish Literature (22770)

REU E-1076 Religion and Politics in Current Fundamentalist Movements (22767)
NOAM ZOHAR  
Associate Professor in Jewish Philosophy,  
Director of the Graduate Program in Bioethics,  
Chair of the Department of Philosophy at Bar Ilan University  
“Form, Content and Values in The Redaction of Rabbinic Texts”  
4:30pm. The Humanities Center, Room 133, Barker Center, Harvard University  
Yanoff-Taylor Lecture and Publication Fund

MARTIN GOODMAN  
Professor of Jewish Studies, the Oriental Institute, and Fellow of Wolfson College, University of Oxford  
“Rome and Jerusalem: The Origins of Anti-Semitism”  
5:00pm. Semitic Museum, Room 201, 6 Divinity Avenue, Harvard University  
Friends of the Center for Jewish Studies

STEVEN ZIPPERSTEIN (WITH RUTH WISSE, RESPONDENT)  
Daniel E. Koshland Professor in Jewish Culture and History, Stanford University and the Gerard Weinstock Visiting Professor of Jewish History, Harvard University  
“I Have Not Told Half of What I Saw”: On Reading Isaac Rosenfeld  
4:15pm. The Humanities Center, Room 133, Barker Center, Harvard University  
Joseph Engel Fund

JEFF GUROCK  
Libby M. Klaperman Professor of Jewish History, Yeshiva University and the Joseph Engel Visiting Professor in American Jewish History, Harvard University  
“The Diaries of Mordecai M. Kaplan and Early 20th Century American Jewish Religious Life”  
4:15pm. The Humanities Center, Room 133, Barker Center, Harvard University  
Joseph Engel Fund