

SPECIAL ISSUE: CANADIAN JEWISH WOMEN WRITERS

EDITOR'S FOREWORD

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Michael Greenstein's melodic writing draws on John Hollander's idea of transumption in his consideration of Anne Michaels' *The Winter Vault* (2009), an important novel that has received little critical attention. He comments that "as characters and readers listen to soundscapes and stories of devastation, patterns of repetition emerge into moments of recognition. The shared recognition of past catastrophe eventually leads to a cathartic community of echoes that wash away, without erasing, bone cave or winter vault. For every echo of recent trauma, the writer draws upon a counter-echo of literary tradition that offers continuity and consolation" (XX). Indeed, this text pushes the boundaries of "literary" with an intertextuality that skilfully and knowledgably expands to music and painting.

Connie Braun picks up on the synesthetic Mobius echo that loops through all of Michaels' writing, remembering past trauma and searching unendingly for redemption (Greenstein this issue, XX). Braun explores *Correspondences: A Poem and Portraits* (2013), *All We Saw* (2017), and *Infinite Gradation* (2017), seeking to flesh out an epistemology of the body in a dialectic of corporeal presence and absence. Memory and consciousness, love and loss, language and art are themes that reverberate along the Mobius. Perhaps especially memory, resonating with Greenstein's use of John Hollander's idea of transumption, that backward leap into historical continuity in the face of rupture: Transumption invokes embodied tradition and through it offers some post-traumatic consolation.

Memory is central to the Jewish worldview and Abraham Ofir Shemesh analyses foundational Jewish texts that address the preservation of this human ability. Albeit in the modern world it is possible to store information digitally, the works of Jewish Canadian women writers attest the profound significance of embodied consciousness, remembering and expressing events and related emotions with aesthetic sophistication.

Some memories are particularly challenging; Chava Rosenfarb's "Edgia's Revenge" is an unsettling short story. Caufield focuses her commentary on the use of the literary technique of an unreliable narrator in the first-person voice. The protagonist does possess heroic traits: She survived the concentration camp, she learned English, she became a very successful

businesswoman in a country that was foreign to her. Yet beneath the cultured poise lurks a hidden, Jekyll-like side, typical of gothic style. A dark and disquieting tone pervades. Edgia becomes the damsel in distress, held captive first in a physical camp and later in a social community, suffering at the hands of the villain Rella. Each character does find redemption: one in death, the other in renewed life.

Jesse Toufexis observes that in *The Mystics of Mile End* Sigal Samuel integrates Jewish tradition into a cohesive narrative of early twenty-first century Montreal. The hybrid Mile End neighbourhood exhibits tensions between tradition and modernity, a significant issue in many contemporary Jewish communities. In *The Mystics* Samuel subverts the archetypal “Knower;” Knowers are people with an ability to reach or experience the Other world through ecstatic experience, dreams, visions, late-night waking, intense study, or intense trauma. Iterations of Knowers from different times in the history of Jewish literature serve as threads for one of the patterns evident in this novel and provide the focus for Toufexis’ analysis.

Simone Grossman considers intergenerational relationships across the boundary of this world and the Other world in Elaine Kalman Naves’ autobiographical novel *Shoshanna’s Story: A Mother, a Daughter and the Shadows of History*. A girl baby born after the war is dressed in the clothes that belonged to murdered children. As layers of strudel dough made by the protagonist and as swaddles enveloping the baby, generations overlap. It is women who serve as primary links between generations. Places, eras, and generations mix, like ingredients for strudel dough, baking the autobiographical narration into a grieving process, transforming the mixture into a reflection on overcoming resistance and the transmission of pre-Shoah stories, repeated and re-experienced in the post-World War period.

The Reflections from the Field section of this issue is comprised of four pieces written for this issue by creative authors, reflecting on their work, identity, and issues that concern them as Canadians, women, and Jews. Each of their pieces mentions but a few of their works; fuller bibliographies can be found here: <https://cwrc.ca/project/canadian-jewish-women-writers>

After more than ten years of service to *Religious Studies and Theology*, first as Book Review Editor and the last six as Editor, I will be turning over the reins to Dr. David Atkinson. Dr. Atkinson has held faculty positions in English and Religious Studies, serving as Dean of Arts, University of Saskatchewan and as President at Brock, Carleton, and Kwantlen Universities. He has recently retired from the presidency of MacEwan University in Edmonton. We are thrilled to have him *back* on board with Religious Studies and Theology, where he previously served as Editor from April 1995–June 1997.