



## **Canadian Jewish Literary Awards Celebrate 2020 Winners in Online Ceremony October 25**

The Canadian Jewish Literary Awards is honouring nine outstanding books for 2020. Now in its sixth year, the Canadian Jewish Literary Awards recognizes and rewards the finest Canadian writing on Jewish themes and subjects.

“Even during this year of isolation, choosing only nine Award winners from the depth and breadth and quality of the submissions was a challenge,” said Jury chair, Edward Trapunski. “Although the annual Awards ceremony will be online it will show the vibrancy of the culture and the appeal of Jewish themes for fiction and non-fiction writers.”

Winners have been declared in the following categories: fiction, biography, Jewish thought and culture, poetry, history, books for children and youth, Yiddish, scholarship, and Holocaust.

The Awards ceremony will be presented on the Canadian Jewish Literary Awards and the Israel and Golda Koschitzky Centre for Jewish Studies YouTube channels on October 25, 2020, at 2:00 pm. The ceremony will be available for later viewing on these channels. You will see and hear winning authors speak about their books.

### **The Honorees**

#### **Fiction**

**Through Shadows Slow** by Abraham Boyarsky (8<sup>th</sup> House Publishing) is a love story about memory and forgiveness. Daniel, a Holocaust refugee, is diagnosed with tuberculosis and sent to a renowned sanatorium in the Laurentian mountains. He meets and falls in love with a more assimilated woman who grew up in Canada. He marries her but he is haunted by doubts about her fidelity because of her worldly nature. In the twilight of his life, he finds salvation and redemption on the Israeli fortress at Masada.

## Biography

**Mahler's Forgotten Conductor: Heinz Unger and His Search for Jewish Meaning, 1895–1965** by Hernan Tesler-Mabé. (University of Toronto Press). The Berlin-born orchestral conductor Heinz Unger devoted his life to the music of Gustav Mahler. In 1948, Unger settled in Canada and was celebrated for his Mahler interpretations with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, the Promenade Symphony Orchestra and, most significantly, the CBC Symphony Orchestra. The book explores the way a German Jewish musician understood and expressed his dual identity by way of his allegiance to music and how Jewish cultural values from Europe manifested themselves in Canada.

## Jewish Thought and Culture

**Waste Not: A Jewish Environmental Ethic** by Tanhum Yoreh (SUNY Press). The Jewish prohibition against wastefulness and destruction is an ecological ethical principle by contemporary Jewish environmentalists. *Waste Not* is an intellectual history of this concept, offering a detailed and studious analysis of the Jewish prohibition against wastefulness and destruction (*bal tashhit*), blending close readings from traditional texts, beginning with the Bible, and moving through rabbinic, medieval, and contemporary Jewish environmentalist commentaries. Tanhum Yoreh, Assistant Professor in the School of Environment at the University of Toronto, draws on the study of religion, ethics, and ecological thinking for a timely meditation on a subject deserving the world's attention. The connection between contemporary environmental thought and Jewish principles creates a foundation for an environmental ethic for today.

## Poetry

**Swoon** by Elana Wolff (Guernica Editions). This collection of poems explores a variety of subjects but returns again and again to our longing for transcendence. Informed by Jewish texts and contexts, with a sure-handed control of language and image, the poems are passionate but mature, precise and curious, willing to risk everything for a chance to slip behind the curtain of the familiar to get a glimpse at the divine. The poems in *Swoon* are philosophical considerations, meditations on the sacred and profane with a subtle understanding of one's own connection to the world. It is a subtle, sensual book of observances pleasing to the ear.

## History

**Theodor Herzl: The Charismatic Leader** by Derek Penslar (Yale University Press). This work by an eminent Canadian-American historian masterfully blends a richly textured biography about the father of Zionism with an insightful analysis of the ways that Herzl fits into and struggled with both European social and intellectual currents and the Jewish publics with whom he was both connected and disconnected. Prof. Penslar has written an accessible, deeply thoughtful, carefully crafted, and thoroughly enjoyable book about one of the giants of modern Jewish history.

## Children and Youth

**A Boy is Not a Bird** by Edeet Ravel (Groundwood Books) is a fictionalized story based on what the author's fifth grade teacher, Mr. Halpern, used to tell her class about his childhood in Soviet occupied Zastavna, Romania. The compelling story recounts the events that marked the life of 11-year-old Natt Silver, his family, friends and neighbours, just before and during their deportation to Siberia in 1941. Natt is a sweet kid who just wants to belong and yet he must endure the horror of living under the influence of Stalin and Hitler. While the book is recommended for readers age 9+, it is a memoir a reader of any age could enjoy.

## Yiddish

**How Yiddish Changed America and How America Changed Yiddish**, edited by Ilan Stavans and Josh Lambert (Restless Books), considers the complex encounter between Yiddish and America through several different lenses. Essays, memoirs, songs, letters, poems, recipes, cartoons, and interviews represent a diverse selection of perspectives on Yiddish language and culture. The book features work by Isaac Bashevis Singer, Cynthia Ozick, Chaim Grade, Art Spiegelman, and many other lesser known cultural figures. It places them in a dynamic conversation around the interaction between Yiddish and American. The anthology also refreshingly expands the definition of “America” to include voices from Mexico, Cuba, Argentina, Colombia, and Canada, reflecting the unbounded history of modern Yiddish. Josh Lambert’s roots are in Canada. Arriving at a moment when Yiddish has entered a new phase in its long history, this book celebrates the complicated, tense, and delightful ways languages and cultures transform one another.

## Scholarship

**Athens and Jerusalem: God, Humans, and Nature** by David Novak (University of Toronto Press). This book by a distinguished professor of religion and philosophy at the University of Toronto examines the intersection of Greek philosophy and Jewish theology. The subject has long been controversial because of the conflict between monotheism on one side and pluralism on the other. But the Greek philosophers and the Jewish Talmudists were contemporaneous if not

contemporary and *Athens and Jerusalem* addresses how the influences must have spread through the region. As a theologian, ethicist, and Conservative rabbi, David Novak is well equipped to expound on the subject. He has written 16 books and hundreds of articles about how Jewish theology and Greek philosophy engage and he could have distilled existing knowledge. But academics and scholars will find that *Athens and Jerusalem* presents fresh ideas and insights.

## **Holocaust**

**Le Temps des orphelins** by Laurent Sagalovitsch (Buchet/Chastel) A young American rabbi, Daniel Shapiro, joins the Allied forces in April 1945 to liberate Europe. In Germany, he is one of the first to enter the Buchenwald concentration camp and experience the horror there. His descent into hell would have been without return if he had not met the gaze of a five-year-old child who is waiting for someone to help him find his parents. The novel, in French, by Vancouver-based author, Laurent Sagalovitsch, depicts with poignancy the atrocity of the camps and the disbelief of those who were the first to discover them. The child with oversized eyes who, without a word, convinces Daniel that life is stronger than horror. Towards the end of his life, Holocaust chronicler Elie Wiesel said: “From now on, art and literature will be the true way to express the Holocaust.” This moving novel based on fact offers a meaningful path to understanding the Holocaust.

**Le Temps des orphelins** de Laurent Sagalovitsch (Buchet/Chastel). Daniel Shapiro, jeune rabbin américain, s’est engagé dans les forces alliées pour participer à la libération de l’Europe. En Allemagne, un des premiers à pénétrer dans le camp de Buchenwald, il découvre et éprouve l’horreur cauchemardesque qui s’étale à ses yeux. Sa descente aux enfers eût été sans retour si ce n’est la rencontre du regard fixe et perdu qu’un enfant de cinq ans qui attend celui ou celle qui l’aidera à retrouver ses parents. Ce roman en français de Laurent Sagalovitsch, auteur qui vit à Vancouver, peint, dans un style simple, mais poignant, l’atrocité des camps et l’incrédulité de premiers libérateurs qui confrontèrent l’horreur absolue. Pourtant l’enfant aux grands yeux tristes convint Daniel, sans prononcer un mot, que la vie reste la plus forte. Elie Wiesel déclarait à la fin de sa vie : “Désormais, l’art et la littérature seront les vrais porte-parole de la Shoah”, en conséquence, la CJLA a jugé qu’il était temps d’accueillir cette forme d’appréhension de la Shoah.

The Canadian Jewish Literary Awards is grateful for the support of its generous donors. We thank all the members of the community who have contributed to sustaining Jewish literature and ideas in Canada.

### **The Canadian Jewish Literary Awards Jury for 2020**

**Edward Trapunski:** Chair, author of three books and winner of an ACTRA Award as best writer.

**Rona Arato:** Award-winning children's book writer and author of 15 books.

**Miriam Borden:** Doctoral student in Yiddish at the University of Toronto and researcher of Twentieth Century Jewish Torontonion culture in the Canadian Yiddish press. She has curated exhibitions about Yiddish language and culture at the Robarts Library and the Canadian Language Museum.

**Alain Goldschläger:** Director of the Holocaust Literature Research Institute and Professor of French at Western University, and former Chair of the National Task Force for Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research.

**David Koffman:** J. Richard Shiff Chair for the Study of Canadian Jewry at the Koschitzky Centre for Jewish Studies at York University

**Michael Posner:** Award-winning author and playwright and former reporter for the Globe and Mail.

**Adam Sol:** Author of four books of poetry and one book of essays, *How a Poem Moves*. He teaches at Victoria College, University of Toronto.

If you have any questions, contact Edward Trapunski, the chair of the Canadian Jewish Literary Awards jury, at 416-720-4700 or [info@cjlawards.ca](mailto:info@cjlawards.ca). For more information, please visit [www.cjlawards.ca](http://www.cjlawards.ca)