



**The Canadian Jewish Literary Awards Announces the 2023 Recipients  
The Public Is Invited to Join the Celebration on October 15**

**New Award Honours the Memory of Historian Irving Abella**

The Canadian Jewish Literary Awards is pleased to announce its winners for 2023, recognizing books with Jewish themes and subjects.

This year, for the first time, we present the **Irving Abella Award in History**, celebrating the best Canadian writing in Jewish history. The Award, which will be given annually, has been established by friends and admirers of Irving Abella z”l, of blessed memory – the eminent author, scholar, professor and advocate – honouring his lifelong contribution to Jewish studies in Canada.

The Canadian Jewish Literary Awards is the ideal venue to celebrate the life and accomplishments of Irving Abella. The Awards recognize the finest Canadian writing on Jewish themes and subjects. They build pride in the individuals being honoured and in their creative achievements.

Now celebrating its ninth year, the Canadian Jewish Literary Awards has selected winners in the categories of fiction, biography/memoir, poetry, history, Jewish Thought and Culture, Yiddish, scholarship, Holocaust, and books for children and youth as well as two special awards. This year’s award winners represent all parts of Canada and the world. They share their talents and insights in Toronto, Montreal, Edmonton, Nova Scotia, Hamilton, Boston, Texas, Israel, and Australia

“We received the most submissions in the history of the awards, and the quality of the submissions is exemplary,” says Edward Trapunski, the Chair of the Jury. “The Jury had to make tough decisions to honour these exceptional books.”

We are also pleased to announce a Special Achievement Award for **Michael Posner** for his contribution to Jewish culture in Canada. A founder of the Canadian Jewish Literary Awards, Posner is a distinguished writer, playwright, and journalist. His most recent work is a three-volume oral biography of Leonard Cohen. His books include *The Last Honest Man*, his bestselling biography of Mordecai Richler, for which he won a Canadian Jewish Book Award.

As well, *Juifs de la Révolution tranquille : regards d'une minorité religieuse sur le Québec de 1945 à 1976* by **Simon-Pierre Lacasse** receives a special citation for its exploration of the Jewish community in Quebec during the Quiet Revolution.

The Canadian Jewish Literary Awards ceremony will take place at 2 pm on Sunday, October 15 at the Tribute Communities Recital Hall, Accolade East Building, York University. It will be available for later viewing on the [Canadian Jewish Literary Awards YouTube channel](#). Winning authors will be present to speak about their books and sign them at the reception afterward. Canadian Jewish Literary Awards welcomes everybody to attend the Awards ceremony without charge.

## **THE HONOUREES**

### **The Irving Abella Award in History**

**Between God and Hitler: Military Chaplains in Nazi Germany** (Cambridge University Press) by **Doris Bergen** examines the role of the 1,000 Protestant and Catholic military chaplains who served in Germany from Hitler's rise to power, to defeat, collapse, and Allied occupation. They were witnesses to the atrocities and by their presence helped normalize extreme violence and legitimize its perpetrators. The military chaplains played a key role in propagating a narrative of righteousness that erased the victims and transformed the aggressors into noble figures. With this book, Prof. Bergen advances beyond the traditional approach of historical research in official sources and archival material. She draws on a wider array of sources – chaplains' letters and memoirs, military reports, Jewish testimonies, photographs, and popular culture. This book offers insight into how Christian clergy served the cause of genocide, sometimes eagerly, sometimes reluctantly, even unknowingly, but always loyally.

### **Biography/Memoir**

**If Walls Could Speak: My Life in Architecture** (Atlantic Monthly Press) by **Moshe Safdie** is a memoir that you will want to read and reread, digesting slowly his thoughts about architecture, geography, art and life. This is a book of many parts, illuminating various aspects of his complex mind. He mentions many of his iconic projects – Habitat 67 in Montreal, the Wailing Wall Plaza in Jerusalem, Marina Bay Sands in Singapore, Kansas City's Kauffman Centre and Exploration Place, the Yad Vashem Holocaust History Museum, and the National Gallery in Ottawa, to mention a few. His memoir is about more than five decades of imagining and designing. It is a

philosophy of Safdie's architecture and of his life. "Life and architecture are bound together, and the principles that guide one as an architect, cannot be separated from the principles that guide one as a human being," he writes.

## Scholarship

**Postcards from Absurdistan: Prague at the End of History** (Princeton University Press), by **Derek Sayer**, is a kaleidoscopic romp across five decades of intellectual, artistic, cultural, and political foment and creativity in Prague, from the Nazi Anschluss to the collapse of communism. Brilliant and addictively readable, *Postcards from Absurdistan* highlights the influences and contributions of Czech Jews on cultural and sociopolitical Prague. Franz Kafka, one of the best-known Jewish denizens of Prague, sets the tone through the often surreal world he depicts. The book offers a magnificent and expansive collection of close readings, insightful narratives, obscure gems, and sometimes-funny, sometimes-wrenching reflections on Prague's cultural elites, even as the geographic boundaries of the city itself cannot contain them. The Jewishness of these currents is steadily woven and subtly explored throughout the book. *Postcards from Absurdistan* represents the crowning achievement of Professor Sayer's prodigious scholarship on Czech modernity.

## Fiction

**The Ribbon Leaf** by **Lori Weber** (Red Deer Press) was submitted in the Youth category, but its poignancy transcends generations. This enthralling historical novel takes the reader into the events of the Holocaust through the experiences of two girls who are best friends growing up in Nazi Germany. Edie's family is Jewish. Sabine's father and brother rise in the Nazi hierarchy. Kristallnacht changes everything as Edie flees to Canada and Sabine makes a decision that goes against her family's beliefs and risks her life and freedom. Lori Weber puts her readers into the thick of World War II from two very different perspectives.

## Jewish Thought and Culture

**Demons in the Details: Demonic Discourse and Rabbinic Culture in Late Antique Babylonia** by **Sara Ronis** (University of California Press) explores a little-discussed aspect of Rabbinic culture in the age of the Babylonian Talmud. Demons (most commonly shedim, mazzikim and ruhot) still survive in folk culture and memories of Yiddish curses, but in this engaging and well-written work on the cutting edge of scholarship, Sara Ronis observes them in their own Talmudic and late Antiquity context and demonstrates how they can be understood as "things to think with" that helped the rabbis discussing them to construct and delimit categories of time, space, the body and others. The evolving descriptions of demons and how to live in a world full of potential dangers from these unseen intermediary beings become part of the evolving social construct of the rabbi as someone who can protect the community from these dangers. By granting demons the same reality as the rabbis did, *Demons in the Detail* makes

accessible to modern readers, without condescension, the contextual significance of beings that a contemporary worldview cannot accommodate. The book is full of illuminating insights and fascinating anecdotes. Demons emerge as far more complex than the single-minded malevolent beings in much of contemporary imagination. Rabbinic interactions with demons are not limited to exorcisms or their analogs but can sometimes even be quite positive. Surprises abound.

## Poetry

**The Most Charming Creatures** by **Gary Barwin** (ECW Press) is an eclectic and beautiful collection of poetry in which the poet expresses provocative thoughts about the boundaries and the purposes of his art. With curiosity and humor, the poems explore the contemporary while drawing on various registers of language and culture to bring out the marvelous with empathy and enchantment. Referring to Ernst Haeckel's *Monograph on Radiolarians*, a scientific essay published in 1862, *The Most Charming Creatures* shows a diversity of unconnected elements used to develop creature-poems in which composition is a key element. An outstanding contribution to the field of poetry by an important award-winning Canadian author.

## Children and Youth

**The Prisoner and the Writer** by **Heather Camlot** (Groundwood Books) is a powerful middle-grade story told from two perspectives. In 1895, Captain Alfred Dreyfus was accused of treason against France and exiled to a prison on Devil's Island. Émile Zola was a major French writer of the time. Zola risked his career by publishing *J'Accuse...!*, an open letter on the front page of a Paris daily explaining that Dreyfus was blamed, charged, tried and convicted only because he was Jewish. Written in verse, with graphic illustrations, this book is an excellent introduction to The Dreyfus Affair and the antisemitism that spawned it. Published in time for the 125th anniversary of *J'Accuse...!*, this book is a reminder that a person committed to truth, justice and equality must stand up and speak out against prejudice.

## Holocaust

**The Survivor: How I Survived Six Concentration Camps and Became a Nazi Hunter** (HarperCollins) by **Josef Lewkowicz**, now 96 years old, not only offers testimony of how he survived six concentration camps but conveys how he could create a life of value after the horrors, thriving as a diamond merchant in South America, raising his family in Montreal and finally settling in Israel. After the Holocaust, as part of a covert operation, he helped to rescue hundreds of orphaned children who had been hidden by doomed parents during the ghetto clearances in Poland. He became a Nazi hunter, bringing to justice and testifying against his oppressors and tormentors who perpetrated the greatest crimes against humanity.

## **Yiddish**

**Yiddish Lives On: Strategies of Language Transmission** (McGill-Queens University Press) by **Rebecca Margolis** is a beautifully written account of the rise of postwar Yiddishism, its contemporary developments, and its promises for the future. As a book about the ongoing vitality of Yiddish as a living language for native speakers, heritage engagers and new language learners, the book deploys an impressive variety of scholarly tools to make sense of Yiddish today: history, ethnography, journalism, oral testimony, film, and cultural and new media studies. It makes the powerful case that contemporary Yiddish is best understood not in answer to the question “Is Yiddish living or dying?”, but as something worthy of careful attention in its own dynamic, continuous, and expanding right – and in the strategies that its users employ to ensure its perpetuation, transmission, and reimagination.

## **Special Achievement Award**

**Leonard Cohen, Untold Stories** (Simon & Shuster) by **Michael Posner** is the culmination of a life contributing to Canadian Jewish culture. In three thick volumes of oral history, he explores, excavates and celebrates the lyrical life of Leonard Cohen. He interviewed hundreds in Cohen’s orbit from Montreal, London, Hydra, New York, Los Angeles and the places in between. Relatives, friends, groupies, musicians, muses, managers, filmmakers, journalists, critics, classmates, bandmates, soulmates, bedmates, spiritualists, fellow travelers and sisters of mercy. Many have never spoken publicly before. Collectively, they offer a dazzling portrait of the tortured, stylish sensualist in a well-cut suit and fedora whose words and melodies resonate across the world. In the popular search for Leonard Cohen, *Untold Stories* is a landmark – revealing, unsparing, funny, poignant, erudite. It is a study like no other, a literary motherlode to be mined by future biographers wondering how the light gets in.

## **Special Citation**

**Les Juifs de la Révolution tranquille : regards d’une minorité religieuse sur le Québec de 1945 à 1976** by **Simon-Pierre Lacasse** (University of Ottawa Press) is an important contribution to the history of cultural pluralism in Québec during the Quiet Revolution. The book is especially intriguing since it describes a period during which Jews presented their own political and cultural claims to the French majority, thereby redefining the nature of intercultural relations in the province. Based on archival research in three languages, Lacasse’s book counters the unfounded opinions and popular assumptions that animosity and reluctance alone characterized Quebec Jews’ reaction to the Quiet Revolution. It reveals a more complex dynamic between Jews and French Canadians during this period of political turmoil.

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 2023 Canadian Jewish Literary Awards Jury:**

**Edward Trapunski** is the Chair of the Canadian Jewish Literary Awards. He is a writer and broadcaster and the author of four books, one of which was #1 on the Financial Post best-seller list. For over 20 years he was a producer for CBC Radio and Television, where he won the ACTRA Award as Best Writer, Radio Documentary for his work on the five-hour production *George Orwell: A Radio Biography*. He was nominated for an International Peabody Award. He was the senior producer of *The Arts Report* on CBC Radio, which won the Imperial Oil Award for Excellence in Arts Journalism in 1993. He was a founding member of Toronto Women in Film and Television and was an editor of the book *Changing Focus: The Future for Women in the Canadian Film and Television Industry*.

**Rona Arato** is an award-winning author of over 20 children's books, many of them dealing with the Holocaust and human rights. Her book *The Last Train, a Holocaust Story*, won multiple awards including the prestigious Norma Fleck Award as best Canadian non-fiction children's book and was a choice as Canadian Children's Book Centre Best Books. *The Ship to Nowhere* was honored by the Sydney Taylor Awards. Her most recent book, *Righting Canada's Wrongs: Anti-Semitism and the MS St. Louis*, received a starred review from the Canadian Children's Book Centre. Her forthcoming book is *Nothing Could Stop Her, the Courageous Life of Ruth Gruber*.

**Andrew Cohen** is a best-selling author, award-winning journalist, professor of journalism at Carleton University, and founding president of Historica Canada. His seven books of history, biography, and commentary range in subjects from Canada's constitutional politics to national character and Arctic exploration. *While Canada Slept: How We Lost Our Place in the World* was a finalist for the Governor General's Literary Award for Non-Fiction. His other books explore the legacies of Pierre Elliott Trudeau and Lester B. Pearson. *Two Days in June: John F. Kennedy and the 48 Hours that Made History*, his most recent book, has been nominated for three literary awards. A journalist of 45 years, writing at home and abroad, Cohen writes a weekly column appearing across Canada in Postmedia News. His essays and commentary appear in The Globe and Mail, The Toronto Star, Time, Foreign Affairs and the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette. He is consulting producer on *Kennedy*, an eight-hour documentary airing in November on The History Channel.

**Mark Freiman** holds a PhD from Stanford University in Modern Thought and Literature as well as a law degree from the University of Toronto. As an academic, he taught English Literature and Cultural Studies at the University of Toronto and Administrative Law and Legal Ethics at York University's Osgoode Hall Law School. As a lawyer, he served as a law clerk for the Chief Justice of Canada, Brian Dickson. He was Lead Commission Counsel for the Air India Inquiry. He served as Deputy Attorney General for Ontario and Deputy Minister of Indigenous Affairs.

He was elected president of the Canadian Jewish Congress in 2009 and served until the organization's dissolution in 2011. He practices law in Toronto and writes and speaks on the intersection of culture and human rights. Freiman has become an advocate for better preservation of a Ukrainian Holocaust memorial site where over 1,200 Jews were shot and buried in 1943. In 2019, he was awarded the Order of Ontario.

**David Koffman** is the J. Richard Shiff Chair for the Study of Canadian Jewry in the Department of History at York University. He is the author of *The Jews' Indian: Colonialism, Pluralism, and Belonging in America*, and the editor of and a contributor to *No Better Home? Jews, Canada, and the Sense of Belonging*. He served as the acting director of York's Israel & Golda Koschitzky Centre for Jewish Studies, and as the editor-in-chief of the journal *Canadian Jewish Studies / Études juives canadiennes*.

**Anna Porter** is one of Canada's most notable book publishers and editors. She is the co-founder of Key Porter Books and author of four novels and five non-fiction books including *Kasztner's Train: The True Story of Rezsó Kasztner, Unknown Hero of the Holocaust*, which won a Canadian Jewish Book Award. *The Ghosts of Europe* won the Writers' Trust Shaughnessy Cohen Prize for Political Writing. She is an Officer of the Order of Canada and a Member of the Order of Ontario.

**Chantal Ringuet** is an award-winning Canadian author and translator. After receiving her PhD in Literature, she published two collections of poetry (*Le sang des ruines*, which won the 2009 Jacques-Poirier literary award, and *Under the Skin of War*, inspired by the works of British photojournalist Don McCullin. She has written a cultural essay on Yiddish Montreal (*À la découverte du Montréal yiddish*), followed by an anthology featuring some of her translations, *Voix yiddish de Montréal*. With Gérard Rabinovitch, she published *Les révolutions de Leonard Cohen*, which received a 2017 Canadian Jewish Literary Award. With Pierre Anctil, she published a translation of the early biography of Marc Chagall, *Mon univers*. She has been a Fellow of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research in New York, Scholar-in-Residence at the Hadassah-Brandeis Institute at Brandeis University, and Writer-in-Residence and literary translator-in-residence at the Banff Centre for the Arts and Creativity for her work on Yiddish poets Rachel (Rokhl) Korn and Kadya Molodowsky. In 2019, she was the first to receive The Residency in Creative Writing at Reykjavík UNESCO City of Literature for her project *Treelessness*.

The Canadian Jewish Literary Awards, including the Irving Abella Award, are judged by an independent jury. The Awards are administered through York University's Israel and Golda Koschitzky Centre for Jewish Studies.

As an independent, volunteer-based organization, we rely on community support to ensure that the Canadian Jewish Literary Awards will thrive and continue to honour the best Canadian books on Jewish themes. We welcome donations of any size. The Israel and Golda Koschitzky

Centre for Jewish Studies at York University will provide a tax receipt for your contribution and acknowledge your generosity. Please visit [our donation page](#).

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If you have any questions, contact Edward Trapunski, 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).