



## **The Canadian Jewish Literary Awards Announces the 2024 Recipients**

The Canadian Jewish Literary Awards is pleased to announce seven outstanding winners for 2024. The accomplishments of these talented writers stand as a beacon of hope and resilience in these challenging times, when the Jewish community often feels under siege.

Marking its 10<sup>th</sup> successful year, the Canadian Jewish Literary Awards recognizes and rewards the finest Canadian writing on Jewish themes and subjects. Winners were selected in fiction, biography, poetry, Yiddish, Jewish thought and culture, and books for children and youth.

Especially significant was the presentation of the Irving Abella Award in History, given annually in honour of the late Irving Abella (1940-2022). The Award celebrates the best Canadian writing on Jewish history and is supported by friends of the giant of scholarship who left an indelible imprint on Canadian Jewish studies. The Canadian Jewish Literary Awards is the ideal venue to celebrate Abella's life and legacy.

Canadian Jewish Literary Awards founder and Jury Chair Edward Trapunski says "Recognizing the finest books, across genres, with Jewish themes and subjects by Canadian authors builds pride – not only in the individuals being honoured, but in creative achievements that reflect Jewish content and ideas. The quality of the submissions was exemplary, and the Jury made tough decisions to honour these exceptional books."

### **Honourees of the 10<sup>th</sup> annual Canadian Jewish Literary Awards**

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

*After the Nazis: The Story of Culture in West Germany* by Michael Kater. (Yale University Press) *After the Nazis* is a sweeping cultural history from 1945 to 1990. It is original, erudite and comprehensive – a study of the literature, theatre, art, music, cinema, journalism, and radio and television of West Germany as it tried to extinguish the ghosts of the Third Reich without

recreating Weimar. At heart is the question: how do a people move beyond the murderous horrors of Nazism to modern, liberal democracy? Michael Kater, Distinguished Research Professor Emeritus of History at York University, has spent his extraordinary scholarly career examining 20th century Germany. He presents his answer in the novels of Heinrich Böll and Gunter Grass, composers Hans Werner Henze and Karlheinz Stockhausen, and filmmakers Wim Wenders and Rainer Werner Fassbinder, among others. This is an important, timely book. As today's far-right revisionists try to erase the past and minimize the Holocaust, he shows how Germany's postwar culture is still touched by the vestiges of the Nazi era.

### **Biography/Memoirs**

*Those Absent on the Great Hungarian Plain* by Jill Culiner (Claret Press). Writer, photographer, and social critic Jill Culiner presents vignettes from what was planned as a six-week excursion to find traces of Jewish presence in rural Hungary, and evolved into a multi-year sojourn exploring memory, culture and hard truths about what can lie beneath the surface in the human heart. "Those Absent" in the title are, of course the Jews. The event the author chooses to epitomize their final disappearance from rural Hungary and the Great Hungarian Plain is the pogrom in the town of Kunmadaras in 1946, in which Holocaust survivors who had returned to the town were attacked by an organized mob, leaving several dead and numerous injured while the police declined to intervene. Jews as narrators stay offstage until close to the end of the book, so that the reader's understanding advances through vivid, sympathetic, but ultimately unsparring portraits of present-day inhabitants of the town who claim, at least initially, to have forgotten that there ever were any Jews living there, let alone that the town had hosted a pogrom.

### **Fiction**

*Let It Destroy You* by Harriet Alida Lye (McClelland & Stewart) charts the relationship between a noted Jewish physicist and his wife as he prepares to stand trial at the International War Crimes Court in The Hague in 1945. Unfolding through their intimate parallel narratives, moving across continents, this elegant, thoughtful novel was inspired by the life and ideas of the visionary Hungarian American physicist Leo Szilard. Known for his work in nuclear fission, he was the inventor of cobalt radiation, designed to save lives – but with the potential to be weaponized as a bomb. At the heart of the novel is the question of moral responsibility, when something created for good can also be used for evil. Guilt and trauma over their experience of the Holocaust underscores the ethical struggles of August Snow and his wife June, the names of the fictionalized characters in the book. As Hungary swooped right, August changed his name and official religious status and fled to Germany and the United States to become a student of Einstein. Lye draws on Szilard's correspondence and memoirs, as well as his short story "My Trial as a War Criminal," in her poignant imagining of a dramatic historic moment.

## **Poetry**

*Talking To Strangers* by Rhea Tregebov (Signal Editions). “We’re all strangers in the startling light / of midnight.” This opening line from her poem, *White Night*, echoes the title of this new, lyrical, often elegiac collection of Rhea Tregebov’s poetry. This eighth book of her poems confirms her place among the most significant poets of her generation. Her Jewish heritage informs *Refuah* (Hebrew for healing) and especially *Kaddish: Villanelle*, her lyrical approach to the Hebrew prayer for her dead father. Even with the lament of *Talking to Strangers*, she ends hopefully with the final poem proclaiming *Hineini* – Here I am.

## **Children and Youth**

*Rising* by Sidura Ludwig (Penguin Random House). This quiet, joyful story celebrating a Jewish mother’s tradition of making challah with her child merges a lyrical text with stunning illustrations. Drawing connections between kitchen chemistry, timeless traditions, and the pleasures of everyday Jewish life, *Rising* bubbles with the joy of family and friends coming together to share the warmth of Shabbat. The poetic narration captures the ritual of a Jewish family making challah – a lesson in patience, slowing down, faith, and family. Readers will enjoy making the author’s favorite challah recipe as the Jurors did.

## **Jewish Thought and Culture**

*Faithfully Seeking Franz* by Elana Wolff (Guernica Editions). This engaging narrative gives us the intertwining of two lives, two quests and two literary experiences. The author relives the experiences of the German-Jewish-Czech writer Franz Kafka through a long research trip that retraces Kafka’s tortuous existence. In the process, the author records her personal evolution, marked by emotional revelations and an enriched knowledge of her inner life. The author discovers so many serendipitous interconnections with Kafka’s and her own life that the text becomes almost a pilgrimage into herself. The twin travellers engage in a mysterious dialogue over a century apart, revealing many enigmatic aspects of Kafka’s journey and writing. These discoveries can happen only because of the meticulous and thoughtful biographical research and the captivating writing. The publication of the book marks the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Franz Kafka’s death.

## **Yiddish**

*In the Land of the Postscript: The Complete Short Stories of Chava Rosenfarb* translated by Goldie Morgentaler (White Goat Press). This collection makes available for the first time a complete selection of Chava Rosenfarb's short stories in English. “The postscript” in the title refers to the afterlife of Holocaust survivors in Montreal. The stories are about people who have lost wives, husbands, and children in the camps and crematoria, who are trying to remake their lives. In their way, these are ghost stories, the ghosts representing the world left behind. Chava Rosenfarb, one of the few great Yiddish women writers, wrote about it as fiction and not as

memoir, her inspiration coming from European realism told in straightforward language, full of detail and description. The Award goes to the translator, Chava Rosenfarb's daughter, Goldie Morgentaler. She started translating her mother's work at 13 years old. Translation is an art. Morgentaler, who is Professor Emerita of English Literature at the University of Lethbridge, and her mother's literary champion, has singular access to and insight into the author, her language, and the intricacies of transforming the Yiddish sentences into English, maintaining the intense emotions and experiences they convey.

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

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

As an independent, volunteer-based organization, the Canadian Jewish Literary Awards relies on community support for ensuring that the Awards will thrive and continue to honour the best Canadian books on Jewish themes. Donations of any size are welcome. The Israel and Golda Koschitzky Centre for Jewish Studies at York University will provide a tax receipt for contributions and acknowledge donors' generosity. Donations may be made [here](#).

### **The 2024 Canadian Jewish Literary Awards Jury:**

#### **Edward Trapunski**

Chair of the Canadian Jewish Literary Awards Jury. He is a writer and broadcaster, and the author of four books, one of which was #1 on the Financial Post best-seller list. A producer for CBC Radio and Television for over 20 years, he won the ACTRA Award as Best Writer, Radio Documentary for the five-hour production *George Orwell: A Radio Biography*. He was senior producer of *The Arts Report* on CBC Radio, which won the Imperial Oil Award for Excellence in Arts Journalism. He was nominated for an International Peabody Award for the *50th Anniversary Grey Cup Broadcast* documentary.

#### **Rona Arato**

An award-winning author of more than 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 chosen as Canadian Children's Book Centre Best Books. Her book *The Ship to Nowhere*

was honored by the Sydney Taylor Awards. Rona was an interviewer for the Survivors of the Shoah project. She is a frequent speaker about children's literature and the Shoah (the Holocaust) at schools and community events.

## **Andrew Cohen**

A best-selling author and award-winning journalist who has written for newspapers and periodicals from London, Berlin, Washington, Toronto, and Ottawa. His seven books of history, biography, and commentary range in content 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 23 years, he was an associate professor at the School of Journalism and Communication at Carleton University. He is the founding president of Historica Canada, and chairs the Advisory Board of The Trudeau Centre at the University of Toronto.

## **Mark Freiman**

Holds a PhD in Modern Thought and Literature from Stanford University and 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 served as Deputy Attorney General for Ontario as well as 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 is the co-chair of the CIJA Rapid Response Legal Task Force, responding to the current wave of antisemitism in Canada.

## **Alain Goldschläger**

Professor Emeritus of the French Department at the University of Western Ontario, where he founded the Holocaust Literature Research Institute. He has published or edited 26 books in English and French on literature, semiotics, and genocide issues and the Holocaust, including *Les Témoignages écrits de la Shoah*. He is a recipient of the Ordre des Palmes académiques (French for "Order of Academic Palms") bestowed by the French Republic on distinguished academics and teachers.

## **Anna Porter**

One of Canada's most notable book publishers and editors. She was co-founder of Key Porter Books, which published, among others, Howard Engel, George Jonas, Martin Gilbert, Irving Abella, former Canadian Prime Minister Chrétien, Farley Mowat and Margaret Atwood's children's books. As an author, she has written six novels and five non-fiction books, including *Kasztner's Train: The True Story of Rezsó Kasztner*, which won the Writers' Trust Non-Fiction

Award and a Canadian Jewish Book Award. Her book *The Ghosts of Europe* won the Writers' Trust Shaughnessy Cohen Prize for Political Writing.

## **Sandra Rabinovitch**

The founding producer of the acclaimed CBC Radio literary program *Writers & Company*, with host Eleanor Wachtel. Over its 33-year weekly run, she produced award-winning, in-depth interviews with remarkable international writers and artists, including 14 Nobel Prize winners and notable Jewish authors Saul Bellow, Philip Roth, and Amos Oz, among others. As principal story editor for CBC Radio Drama, she commissioned and developed scripts and led workshops across Canada. She served as a juror for the David A. Stein documentary prize at the Toronto Jewish Film Festival for 2024.

More information is available from Canadian Jewish Literary Awards Jury Chair Edward Trapunski at 416-720-4700 or [info@cjlawards.ca](mailto:info@cjlawards.ca), or online at <https://cjlawards.ca/>.

- 30 -

**For further information, visit <https://cjlawards.ca> or contact:**

**Linda Litwack  
Linda Litwack Publicity  
416-782-7837**

**or**

**Edward Trapunski, Chair  
Canadian Jewish Literary Awards  
416-720-4700**