



The Canadian Jewish Literary Awards Announces its 2025 Recipients

Join the Celebration on October 26, 2 p.m.

**Al Green Theatre
Miles Nadal JCC
750 Spadina Avenue**

The Canadian Jewish Literary Awards is pleased to announce nine outstanding winners for 2025. The accomplishments of these writers stand as a beacon of hope and resilience in these challenging times when the community often feels under siege. The awards will be presented at 2:00 PM on Sunday, October 26, 2025, at a gala ceremony at the Al Green Theatre, Miles Nadal JCC, 750 Spadina Avenue in Toronto.

As it embarks on its second decade, the Canadian Jewish Literary Awards recognizes and rewards the finest Canadian writing on Jewish themes and subjects. Winners have been selected in the categories of fiction, biography, memoir, poetry, Yiddish, Jewish culture, history, scholarship, and books for children and youth.

“Despite the challenges, the Canadian Literary Awards had more submissions this year than ever before,” Canadian Jewish Literary Awards founder and Jury Chair Edward Trapunski said. “The quality of the submissions was exemplary, and the Jury had to make tough decisions to honour these exceptional books.”

Especially significant is the Irving Abella Award in History given annually in honour of Irving Abella z"l, of blessed memory. Celebrating the best Canadian writing on Jewish history, the Irving Abella Award is supported by the friends of this giant of scholarship who left an indelible imprint on Canadian Jewish studies.

Honourees of the 11th annual Canadian Jewish Literary Awards

The Irving Abella Award in History

Sovereignty and Religious Freedom: A Jewish History (Yale University Press) by Simon Rabinovitch recounts the story of the varying rights Jews have enjoyed in different countries. Deeply researched and brilliantly conceived, it is both a survey and a legal history of Jewish sovereignty and religious freedom. It explores ideas about citizenship and belonging, including who is a Jew, what constitutes a Jewish family, and how to define Jewish space. It compares the conflicts between the individual and collective rights of Jews over the last two centuries. With Rabinovitch as a guide, we explore religious freedom and group rights for Jews in America, Europe, and Israel, the one state where they are a majority. The book's analysis of Jewish rights and sovereignty is directly applicable to Quebec's history, particularly the Jewish community's response to Quebec's own sovereignty movements and the ongoing discussions within Quebec about the rights of religious minorities. *Sovereignty and Religious Freedom* is original, comprehensive, nuanced, and surprisingly accessible.

Biography

Menachem Mendel Schneerson: Becoming the Messiah (Yale University Press: Jewish Series) by Ezra Glinter is a highly readable, non-partisan biography that allows the reader to understand the gifts, the accomplishments and perhaps the limitations of a man admired by Jews and non-Jews alike. It places Schneerson within the intellectual context of Hasidism and the historical context of Eastern European Jewry. It follows him through his educational journey, surprisingly, in secular institutions in Berlin and Paris that continued alongside his religious studies. It delves into the politics of leadership and succession within the Lubavitch Hasidic movement and Schneerson's role in establishing Chabad/Lubavitch in America. Its distinctive ideology is at the centre of a worldwide Jewish outreach program with the Rebbe as its sage and sometimes messianic figure. The photograph on the cover has become a meme signifying both the Hasidic movement that Schneerson led as Rebbe and the messianic beliefs and aspirations of his followers, including arguably of himself.

Memoir

No Jews Live Here (Coach House Press) by John Lorinc explores his family story and how life is shaped by historical forces over which we have no control. From pre-war Budapest to post-war Toronto, John Lorinc unspools four generations of his family's journey through the Holocaust, the 1956 Revolution, and finally an exodus from a country that can't rid itself of its antisemitic demons. His parents and maternal grandmother, Ilona, Holocaust survivors, arrived in Canada in 1956, the second wave of Hungarian refugees, mostly Jewish. The irony is that Lorinc's parents kept his Jewish identity a secret from him to protect him from the atrocities they might have faced even in seemingly benevolent Canada. As a child, the author and his sister were baptized at a United Church, a classic "just in case" move for his still traumatized survivor parents. In uncovering his Jewish and Hungarian identity, he tells a profoundly human saga that

weaves his fascinating family history with the history of Hungary and its uneasy relationship with its Jewish community.

Fiction

Songs for the Broken-Hearted (HarperCollins) by Ayelet Tsabari is a rich and moving novel in which a young woman rediscovers and reclaims her homeland, heritage, and family. The year is 1995, and Zohara, a Yemenite Israeli, interrupts her studies in the U.S. to return home for her mother's funeral. It's an unsettling journey, as she uncovers secrets about her mother's past, immerses herself in the haunting traditional songs of the Yemenite women, and expands her political awareness. Shifting between 1950 and 1995, the novel also features a compelling love story that crosses generations. Drawing on her own cultural background, Tsabari confronts the discriminatory treatment of her community in the early days of the state, including the controversial Yemenite Children Affair. *Songs for the Broken-Hearted* offers a window into a segment of Israeli society that has often been ignored in literature.

Poetry

To All the Mirrored Doors of Beginning, a Journey Ending(Wipf and Stock) by Ruth Rivka, is a collection of poems driven by passion and urgency. Under her full name, Ruth Rifka Abrams, she is a well-known visual artist and expressionist painter. With advanced age has come the need for words, as well. In the poem titled "In My 96th Year," she begins: "I am obsessed/ to search out the truth of all things, to see the picture clear/ before I go as go I must." With startling honesty and directness, Ruth wrestles with questions of mortality, morality and belief, responding to painful current events and the rise of antisemitism. Exploring Jewish experience and concepts, she looks inward and, at the same time, bravely outward to engage with the world around her. In the Jewish tradition, her poems are an interrogation, a lament and, at the same time, a testament to the creative spirit.

Children and Youth

The Light Keeper (Second Story Press) by Sheila Baslaw and Karen Levine is a story of light – both physical and metaphorical. Shmuel is eager to help support his poor family, but no one in his shtetl will hire a ten-year-old boy. One day, two men arrive and install electric lamps, bringing the miracle of light to the village square. When a lamp breaks during a storm, Shmuel, who had carefully watched the men as they worked, is the only one who can fix it. To do it, he must overcome his fear of heights. This story is based on tales Sheila Baslaw's father told her about life in Porilla, a *shtetl* near Kyiv. Told from a child's perspective, their themes – overcoming fears, family responsibility, and the importance of community – are universal. With co-author Karen Levine, who wrote *Hana's Suitcase*, Baslaw, who is 92, is passing the stories on to the next generation. The atmospheric illustrations rendered in sepia and earth tones by Toronto artist Alice Priestley enrich a tale that touches the heart as it illuminates a chapter of our collective past.

Jewish Culture

Mashel Teitelbaum: Terror and Beauty (Goose Lane Editions with workbook) by Andrew Kear (Editor) is a beautiful book featuring more than 200 reproductions of artwork from the full scope of Mashel Teitelbaum's career. Teitelbaum (1921-1985) said about his work: "What I'm saying I'm painting, in effect ... is the terror and beauty of life." Andrew Kear has compiled essays and reflections on the life and work of one of Canada's most talented artistic outsiders. The terror and the beauty are both clearly shaped by Teitelbaum's Jewish background. One essay, "The Mills of the Gods: The Impact of Judaism and War on Mashel Teitelbaum's Art," highlights a painting depicting a bearded and burdened Jewish figure in a biblical landscape with a temple and palm trees (the meaning of Teitelbaum) at the end of the path, layering Jewish scenes over a Canadian landscape.

Yiddish

Poem by Poem, Fable by Fable: Discovering My Father and Learning His Language (Wipf and Stock) by Anna Miransky does more than celebrate the life of her father, Peretz Miransky, one of Canada's foremost Yiddish writers. At the age of seventy-two, she begins to read her father's poetry and fables in her first and forgotten language. She not only discovers her father, but she also gains insights into the experiences of being a Holocaust survivor, being a member of Yung Vilne, the celebrated Yiddish literary group, and the thriving Yiddish cultural community in Montreal. In an astute literary analysis, she probes why he had to write in fables to protect himself from harm and why, as a Yiddish writer, he chose the literary themes he did. *Poem by Poem, Fable by Fable* brings forward an understanding of the creative imagination and introduces the reader to remarkable poems and fables both in Yiddish and in English translation.

Scholarship

A Time to Sow: Refusenik Life in Leningrad 1979-1989 (University of Toronto Press) by Michael Beizer and Ann Komaromi, provides an account of the *refusenik* movement in Leningrad in the period between the end of *détente* with the West and the beginning of the policy of *perestroika*. This time marked the end of any realistic possibility for Jews to emigrate from the Soviet Union to the point where such emigration once again became possible. The book dispels any notion that the Soviet Jewish community was passively waiting for external guidance or deliverance. It shows how they themselves worked to establish a Russian Jewish identity during that period. A story emerges of how these *refuseniks* created their own Russian Jewish identity where previously there was none. A movement that originally sought emigration because of economic realities came to understand, as one *refusenik* put it, "a free person needs to belong to some sort of group with shared traditions, with shared values and a shared world view." The book's great achievement is to focus our attention not only on what the *refuseniks* resisted, but also on the identity they constructed.

The Public is Invited

The Canadian Jewish Literary Awards will be presented on **Sunday, October 26, 2025, 2 pm** at a gala ceremony at the Al Green Theatre, Miles Nadal JCC, 750 Spadina Avenue in Toronto and

will be available for later viewing on the Canadian Jewish Literary Awards YouTube channel. Winning authors will be in attendance to discuss their books and sign copies. We are proud that the Canadian Jewish Literary Awards welcomes everyone to attend the Awards ceremony at no cost. Registration links and more information are available on [the Award's website](#).

As an independent, volunteer-based organization, the Canadian Jewish Literary Awards relies on community support to ensure that the Awards will flourish and continue to honour the best Canadian books on Jewish themes. The Canadian Jewish Literary Awards is grateful for the support of its generous donors who have contributed to sustaining Jewish literature and ideas in Canada.

Donations of any size are welcome. The Anne Tanenbaum Centre for Jewish Studies at the University of Toronto will provide a tax receipt for your contribution and acknowledge your generosity. [Visit our donation page here](#).

The Awards are administered through The Anne Tanenbaum Centre for Jewish Studies at the University of Toronto, in partnership with the Miles Nadal JCC.

The 2024 Canadian Jewish Literary Awards Jury

The Canadian Jewish Literary Awards, including the Irving Abella Award, are judged by an independent jury. It consists of the following members:

Edward Trapunski

The 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 a 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 one of the Canadian Children's Book Centre Best Books. Her book, *The Ship to Nowhere*, was honoured 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 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 subject matter 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. Since 2002, he has written a regular column for The Ottawa Citizen that appears in Postmedia Newspapers across Canada. 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 Western University of Ontario, where he founded the Holocaust Literature Research Institute. He has published or edited 26 books in English and French on literature, semiotics, genocide and the Holocaust, including *Les Témoignages écrits de la Shoah*. He is a recipient of the Ordre des Palmes académiques 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 Jean 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 Rezso 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 such notable Jewish authors as Saul Bellow, Philip Roth, and Amos Oz. As principal story editor for CBC Radio Drama, she developed and directed radio plays, as well as produced documentaries and a weekly series of original dramatic features and readings. She has evaluated scripts for Telefilm and the Ontario Film Development Corporation and edited both fiction and nonfiction books for various publishers. In 2024, she served as a juror for the David A. Stein documentary prize at the Toronto Jewish Film Festival.

For more information, contact Canadian Jewish Literary Awards Jury Chair Edward Trapunski at 416-720-4700 or info@cjlawards.ca, or visit [the Awards website](#).

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