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Kalman Naves, Elaine. *Putting Down Roots: Montreal's Immigrant Writers*. Montreal: Véhicule, 1998. 178pp.

With *Putting Down Roots*, Elaine Kalman Naves takes a mighty leap—attempting in a slim volume to provide an introduction to the varied cultural resources of Montreal's literary community. Her focus includes writers of disparate traditions—Italian, Yiddish, Haitian, Spanish, Hungarian, Arab, Indian, and Chinese. Some of the groundwork for the book was done in the columns Kalman Naves wrote under the title “Other Voices” in the *Montreal Gazette*. And she has imported a stylistic approach common to newspapers—the use of what she calls “sidebars,” short vignettes on such subjects as Montreal's small publishers, bookstores, newspapers, as well as backgrounders on the immigrant communities from which her chosen writers draw some of their inspiration. In keeping with the gathering of resources offered in a daily newspaper, *Putting Down Roots* includes a potpourri of short essays, interviews, and bibliographies devoted to each group of writers.

The effect of this gathering is both intriguing in its variety, and a bit disappointing in its abbreviated form. Writers whom Kalman Naves insists are central to the literary expression of their cultural traditions in Canada are met in short interviews, without the reader gaining a true sense of their work. The selected bibliographies prompt the reader to pursue authors in greater depth, but this cause would have also been served by meatier excerpts of at least one key writer working in Canada within each tradition.

The decision to focus on interviews and short biographical sketches suggests that *Putting Down Roots* may in fact be

meant more as a journalistic portrait of the writing life in Canada, than an as introduction to the work of Canada's "other voices." In her interviews with writers, Kalman Naves engages with issues of multiculturalism, exile, and the challenge of working outside the dominant cultural current. This writerly stance, outside the mainstream, is determined not by an author's choice of a certain language, which may have billions of adherents across an ocean, but instead by that writer's opportunity for a satisfactory reception in her adopted home. So much depends on the availability of translators, on the commitment of small presses willing to bring out non-mainstream work, as well as on sheer luck—the topicality of a certain literature because of its geopolitical or cultural vogue. A prime example of the success of an "other" literature in North America is Philip Roth's Writers from the Other Europe series, published by Penguin, which introduced such key central and eastern European writers as Milan Kundera, Bruno Schulz, and Danilo Kis to English language readers.

For many of the writers discussed in *Putting Down Roots*, success in their ancestral homes has preceded translation and acceptance in Canada, where too little is known about their culture and literary tradition to allow for much of a foothold among Canadian readers. It may be that *Putting Down Roots* goes a certain distance toward opening up the possibility for such footholds.

One context in which the writers under discussion can be seen to challenge these predicaments is in their repeated characterization of Canadian literary and social identity as hybrid—the Spanish language poet Alfredo Lavergne points to Carlos Fuentes' notion of *métissage*, the possibility in Canada of a "mélange of indigenous magic." Latent in many of Kalman Naves' discussions with Montreal writers is a frustration with the cultural claims of Québécois nationalists. The Lebanese-born writer John Asfour argues that if "this separation comes through, there will be a lot of hardship and you're going to see a lot of violence in the streets." In the same bitter tone,

Pakistani-born author Julian Samuel recognizes echoes of his ancestral home's troubling history in contemporary Quebec: "here . . . the filthy little word 'partition' has cropped up. And it is the most violent word in the English language!"

These moments of outspoken concern point to the particularities of Quebec life, to the way that experience abroad changes the way one might view the local political struggles or the multicultural ideal. *Putting Down Roots* provides a map of the unusual cultural terrain of Montreal's polyglot writers' community.

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Kauffman, David H., ed. *The Continuing History of the Spanish & Portuguese Congregation of Montreal 1468–1993: 25 Years of Renaissance*. Corporation of Spanish & Portuguese Jews, Shearith Israel, of Montreal, Canada, 1996, 116pp.

This book is the fourth written history of Congregation Shearith Israel of Montreal, Canada, with an emphasis on the last twenty-five years, when a remarkable recovery occurred. "In the last 25 years, our membership has increased dramatically from some 230 families, predominantly Ashkenazim, to about 740 families today, the majority of whom are Sephardi." (page 5)

The reader can find a summary of all prior histories for the period from 1768 to 1968 written by Esther Blaustein and Annette Wolf (pp. 10–27 in English; pp. 29–43 in French), and an update for the period from 1968 to 1993 written by Rabbi Howard Joseph (pp. 45–69 in English; pp. 75–101 in French). The book is written in a bilingual form (English/French), not only because of its Quebec location, but also as a representation of the composition of its membership. French-speaking, North-African Jews, predominantly of Moroccan descent, represent a significant part of the current congregation.

The book contains pictures of all the Congregation's presidents between 1768 and 1996 (pp. 71–73), and pictures of