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**GENDER, JEWISH IDENTITY, AND CULTURAL
MEMORY IN THE POETRY OF RHEA TREGEBOV**

“We are a parcel of intention, but not our own.”
– “Elegy for Elegies”

In her essay, “Some Notes on the Story of Esther,” Rhea Tregebov considers the effects of being doubly marginal upon both her integrity and her development as a poet. A Canadian Jewish woman, she notes that she “did not begin writing authentically until . . . an articulated feminism made it possible for . . . [her] to identify . . . [herself] – not so much merely as a *feminist*, but at the primary level as *female*” (270), and that it was years later before she could begin to broach “Jewish content” (270-71) in a sustained way. She accomplished the latter breakthrough, she continues, when she composed “a performance piece/slide show [“I’m talking from my time”] which juxtaposed the images and words of . . . [her] husband’s ninety-six-year-old Russian Jewish grandmother with . . . [her] own poetry” (271). In the process of recovering a shared past she achieved a sense of wholeness and freedom that had eluded her.

Tregebov’s essay raises questions about the intersection of gender, ethnic identity, and cultural memory in her poetry and about the dynamic through which the individual and the social come together.¹ How has Tregebov’s self-consciousness as a woman facilitated her developing self-consciousness as a Jew within the late twentieth-century Canadian milieu and how is this reflected in her poetry? From her first book, *Remembering History* (1982) to her fifth, *The Strength of*

Materials (2001), Tregebov has dramatized distinctive elements of Canadian Jewish womanhood in poems of personal reflection about female experience, poems of social portraiture about the Jewish, immigrant experience, and poems that memorialize the Holocaust. In the course of this work, the author's reflections upon the social meanings of motherhood have been particularly important, yielding a form of poetic knowing that is instrumental to the integration described above. In her third book, *The Proving Grounds*, Tregebov transfers insights about the parent-child bond, gained under the stress of illness, onto reflections about the meaning of Jewish history, particularly the Holocaust. As the dimensions of the self are extended, so is her understanding of her role as a poet. In her recent book, a particularly ambitious collection of elegies, she qualifies the structure of mourning specific to that genre. Loss is reclaimed as a basis for reconnection and commemoration, becoming the ground of new knowledge and meaning.

Although she has lived in Toronto since the late seventies, Rhea Block Tregebov was born in 1953 in Saskatoon and raised in Winnipeg, where she attended the University of Manitoba (BA 1974) and then Cornell and Boston University (MA 1978), during a period when the second wave of the international women's movement was fueling resistance to gender-based oppression and inspiring women writers to write freely about their experience as women. Also in this period, a new vision of Canada as an ethnic mosaic afforded Jews a more legitimate place in Canadian society and began to encourage the exploration of Canadian Jewish identity. Tregebov's first book shows the combined effects of these two aspects of her historical situation in its focus on conventions (psychological, linguistic, mythic) that subjugate and frustrate women.

In the opening sequence, "Saint Jane," she dramatizes the noxious effects of stereotypical sex roles (cf. the primer *Dick and Jane*) on the psychosexual development of a young girl, particularly around feelings such as anger and desire that seem transgressive. The Jane of this poem is "no saint": "With her crowd / black's the rage" (13). Cognizant that Jewish religious

tradition is patriarchal, that the highest form of utterance, “*ha-shem*” (56), is associated with a male godhead, Tregebov adduces a more suitable source of inner guidance. In the poem, “Avatar – the Headless Woman,” she substitutes for this male divinity her namesake, “*rhea*” (56), the Cretan version of the Universal Mother or Great Goddess, who had no consort and ruled supreme before the coming of patriarchal invaders (Walker 856). This earth goddess informs the direct, earthy quality of the poet’s language, validating her desire to speak with “a new tongue” (56) informed by female experience. At the same time, the adjective “headless” (56) underscores how divided from herself this choice makes her feel. In both poems Tregebov participates wryly in the activity of revisionist myth-making that characterizes much twentieth-century women’s writing (Ostriker).

Tregebov’s feminist critique is given a Jewish family setting in such poems as “On a Fine,” where she questions the role of the father as a source of teaching in Jewish tradition in the Passover seder, where he sits “at the head of the table, / mother at the foot” (28). In a voice laced with irony, she imagines that

The angel of death would like to
reconstruct the family, too;
or, simply, to provide a new
arrangement. Everything’s fine. (28)

Her pun on the word “fine,” both in the body of the poem and in its title, employs an alternate meaning, “penalty,” to underscore the Jewish daughter’s compromised situation.

The skillful employment of irony is also evident in the title poem of this volume, “Remembering History,” a deft portrait of Tregebov’s grandmother, whose life as an immigrant woman in Winnipeg during World War II afforded few choices. The rhetorical surface of the poem says one thing, that her grandmother’s life was “more simple,” her “problems . . . more concrete” (32) than her own, but the details imply something else. They point to her grandmother’s precarious livelihood: “she sewed a fine seam between cloth and nothing” (32). Most

subtle is the implied atmosphere of anti-Semitism, rife in Canada during the war, that her grandmother faced stoically, buttoning “every button on her coat” (32). Yet, the irony works both ways when one considers that, with assimilation, the speaker’s improved situation in post-war Canada brought its own subtle problems of invisibility.

Tregebov has outlined these problems in an essay, describing “a double-edged sword” (“Centring” 193) of invisibility that inhibited her early development as a writer. As each generation of Jews moves away from the Old Country, impeded less by bigotry and social discrimination, the ability to blend into the mainstream has its obvious advantages. However, “the apparent safety of this position is a toxic safety, one that destroys the inner sense of self.” In order “to produce a literature in which one’s authentic self, including those elements of self which are engendered by ethnicity, is intrinsic but also organic, a context must exist in the outside world in which the authentic self is acknowledged, even welcomed (“Centring” 193). When she looks at the “Jewish” poems in her early work, the way they “veered towards and then away from cultural or religious imagery,” she realizes that there was a “hidden quality” to them. She could handle material that was “accessible to both Christian and Jewish culture,” but “dealing with the Holocaust was definitely over the top” (“Centring” 195).

In *Remembering History*, a broader sense of historical trauma, particularly the Holocaust, is present within the author’s psyche as a dark shadow which is difficult yet necessary to express. In “Graffiti,” for example, she is afraid to make cheap symbolic capital out of the anguish of victims yet she feels compelled to bear witness to it. Her double bind is expressed formally in alternating voices, the second in italics, which are printed side by side on the page in columns. The first voice, more public, expresses the basic, generalized human need for lasting expression, even if “clawed with a fingernail / into plaster in Auschwitz” (31). The second voice, interior and more urgent, works through her doubts and misgivings, laying them at the feet of a “*you*” (31) (both the other side of her reflecting

self and the reader) who is indifferent. The repetition of the word “*counted*” (31) and its transegmental drift into “*accounted*” (31) further accentuates the absence of and desire for accountability:

*I've counted
and counted
all is accounted for
and something's
not there
...
I do not profane
these walls
I was here
...
it is you
who have been found
wanting (31)*

In Tregebov's second book, *No One We Know* (1986), the need to face the brutalities of history is central and issues of ethnic identity take precedence over those of gender. In the second section, 25 poems, Tregebov grapples with the reality of human aggression both now and in the past, despite the easier course of denial and the relative safety of late twentieth-century Canadian life. As she puts it in “We're Predators,”

There's a place just now where we skin each
other alive. I could name the place but the
name changes. It's happening not here but it
is happening now. Can it be thought of
as something real? (25)

In this book Tregebov's analysis of gender oppression is subsumed to larger issues of identity concerning the human experience of historical time. In “Fall styles,” for example, she contrasts the superficial emphasis on “things changing” (48) in the shop windows with the “museum”-like (48) constancy of her inner life. In a play on the religious connotation of the word “fall,” she feels “caught up in time” (48), unable to ignore either pressure.

Again there are tributes to her immigrant ancestors, but here she takes a longer view, emphasizing the twentieth-

century's legacy of displacement and loss and the resulting feelings of disjunction. In "Grosney's Delicatessen," a portrait of her grandfather, the poet struggles to comprehend his life within the context of the diner's superficial familiarity but she remains profoundly cut off from it. In "Basya Reva," the poet remembers that her mother's button jar was the repository of a better world to her as a child. In this imaginary world, "nothing / is lost" (29), unlike the world of her mother who is haunted by the memory of her dead brother or that of another brother who played the trumpet "for the one war, the war that burned / my namesakes" (29). The poem's title refers to the poet's Yiddish name, which is based on the names of her maternal grandmother's two sisters who died during the German-Romanian occupation of Odessa.² This Yiddish name has both personal and political meaning. It links the poet's identity and sense of security with family history and, more broadly, with language as a site of Jewish memory.

Several of the poems in this section refer to the Holocaust, either implicitly, as in "Here We Are," where Tregebov connects present social shame with denial of the facts of past wartime atrocity, represented by photos of people "standing / naked in line at the edge of a pit / allowed only their bodies" (32) or explicitly, as in "Vienna, November, 1983," written after visiting Austria, where Mauthausen concentration camp is located. The poem is set in a Viennese café, where most of the younger generation "allow themselves . . . a certain sentimentality now" (33) about the atrocities of the past. The poet cannot accept this complacency. Nor is she satisfied with the kind of transfiguration offered by literary tradition, represented here by Shakespeare's romance, *The Tempest*. The repeated phrase, "Those / are pearls" (33) compares the transformed eyes of the drowned father in Shakespeare's play with the "everlastingly mild eyes" (33) of the people in the café which, looking on unfeelingly, are "dark as the wood / building" (33) of the camp. Similarly, her poem, "The bridge is gone," was inspired by a visit to France, where Tregebov lived for six months in 1982. Here a bus trip through Verdun across the Meuse River to

Nancy becomes a metaphor for coming to terms as an artist with wartime devastation as a mediated and distanced phenomenon within Western culture.

In the first section, the poet reflects on the inadequacy of art's traditional consolatory power:

... The sky is abruptly lit
with the disfigured ghosts of the old dead.
We cross the Meuse, which remains the conduit
of their blood. It seems here we can't write it out,
the past is final. (35)

Since religion traditionally makes claims for universality and unimpeachable truth, she turns to religious painting in the Louvre (Giotto, Cimabue) to mitigate the meaninglessness of human violence but, instead of a clear covenant between God and man, she finds that "God is lost" (35) even there.

In the second and third sections she recovers a limited faith in "the human mind, the human hand" (36). Ironically, watching pictures of famine on the television news, she is reminded both of the life force – "We want to live" (36) – and of the frailty of the imagination as a moral instrument. During a summer spent by the sea, she realizes that rather than divine law, there are only the "impersonal, inhuman laws" of nature which "the human mind can't help bending to suit its own" (37). The bridge to the past is gone, "its length only the length of our need" (37). The droll presence of a sandpiper at the water's edge offers an example of how to proceed: "Brimming with random intention ... it keeps getting its feet wet. ... even in the absence of structure" (37). Its behaviour suits her limited hope

that the past – some tidal, particular past – is not final,
that there is escape, not from death,
but from the inability to live. (37)

In *The Proving Grounds* (1991), Tregobov's faith in human possibility is sorely tested; yet here the integration of Jewish and female subject matter yields new possibilities. The poems in the first section, titled "Stonecrop," were written during a particularly painful period in the poet's life. There are poems about her sister-in-law, killed in a car crash, about the

dead baby of a friend, about another friend's death from cancer. The emotional core is a sequence, "Vital Signs," about the effects of a life-threatening ailment (severe asthma) suffered by her only child. Grief over these premature deaths and fear after almost losing her child become loci of moral instruction. The experience of motherhood, of being no longer a private individual self but rather part of someone and something else, provides new insights into the meanings of life, death, growth, and human connection. As she writes in the last section of "Vital Signs,"

In weeks of subjunctive I discover
 love a fluid, love contained
 by the kind of days, and the long nights it is given;
 it can sicken, and heal, and sicken,
 and strengthen in a gaze. (20)

In these lines preconceived ideas about maternal love are challenged. It is not merely instinctual or sacred, but purposive. She is taken beyond the limits of the experience itself.

In her extremity the poet is compelled to reconsider basic assumptions about herself, her relationships with those closest to her, and her view of human nature. In "Runt," her child's brush with death causes her to recognize the fear instilled in her by her own lifelong struggle with asthma and to put it in a new perspective:

Tell me about reasonable fear.
 I can decline the negative, say *No, I am not dying*,
 Say *I'm dying*. Always, because we do. (20)

In "L'Education Sentimentale," she considers the way her relationship with her husband has been altered by their child's illness. No longer can she take for granted her assumption that his love always would bring fulfillment. Taking her cue from Flaubert's novel about the education of feeling, she realizes that the child's near death has brought about a rupture of the family's emotional economy: "Useless, to promise in this world not to hurt. / When we almost lost him, we almost lost each other" (33). In "The Girl in the Story," she revises her understanding of her relationship with her own mother, disavowing a

story she had always told herself: that when she was deathly ill as a child, her mother, suffering with her, had given her permission to die. Now, a mother herself, she admits that did not really happen. Where would she and her son be, if her mother had said “what cannot be said,” had granted “the right to die, to give up” (22). Her commitment to the larger life force is strengthened as well as threatened by her experience of motherhood under duress. As she puts it, using gardening as a metaphor, although her urban garden is “a hard and rocky place” (47), she continues to plant flowers there, feeling the earth in the crevices of her hands as a “life line, heart line” (47).

It is worth noting that Tregobov published *Sudden Miracles*, a collection of poems by eight other Canadian woman poets, during the same year that *The Proving Grounds* was published. In the introduction to that collection she wrote that each of her contributors proposes “a new set of values, a more multi-valent and complex view of reality, of the lived core of our lives, than is offered by the dominant culture” (12). These words apply to the feminist agenda of her own work as well. In the second section of the book, the mother-child bond, the sense of being part of something larger than herself, informs Tregobov’s view of Jewish identity.

In “Kristallnacht, 1988,” a poem addressed to her son, cultural memory as it is conveyed by language, plays a central role. The poet questions the adequacy of the word (Holocaust) as a descriptor. It is presented as a symptom of the moral tragedy compressed within it: “that it, that, the word for all those, however many, / that number, those, people, killed on purpose” (73). Her sense of outrage extends to other words that also seem unsuitable now to convey concepts and processes that had once been less ambiguous. What is the meaning of “remembrance,” of remembering what one did not live, she asks. Why has the pain not died in her, who was born after? “What has happened to time?” (73). The enduring force of language with respect to Jewish identity becomes palpable to her in relation to the body of her son. Every time she gets to “pass [her] hand, eye, / across [his] marked forehead” (73), she is reminded that,

as a Jewish child, he would have been killed by the Nazis in 1938, as she herself would have been. Here Tregebov adduces the story of Cain, the cursed “other” and proverbial wandering Jew, to link herself with her son. She then employs antimetabole, a pair of words repeated in reverse order, to conflate the symbolic mark on the child’s forehead with knowledge and remembrance: “it is still there, / there it is, the knowledge, remembrance” (73). By thus stressing the tenacity with which the past grasps the present, she becomes an agent of memorial transmission, joining other poets after the Holocaust who link the present time of their imaginings with their peoples’ collective past and future (Gubar 246).

For a variety of reasons – the rise of anti-Semitism in Europe, the ageing and death of survivors of the Holocaust – in the last twenty years there has been a redoubling of efforts to memorialize the Holocaust in Europe and North America and to reexamine Jewish culture in light of progressive and feminist movements. Tregebov has connected her new freedom of expression as a woman and a Jew with this recent change in the *Zeitgeist*, claiming that it has contributed to a broader social definition of Jewish identity (“Centring” 195). “[T]here is now a place for secular Jews such as myself,” she writes, “where I can embrace those aspects of Jewish culture that I most value and readily identify with: its sense of compassion, humanity and community” (“Centring” 195).

In *Mapping the Chaos* (1995), the urgencies and ironies of Tregebov’s connection with others is at the moral centre of the text. The book is prefaced with an epigraph from Hillel: “If I am not for myself, who is for me? / If I am only for myself, what am I? / And if not now, when?” She is concerned with the ways in which the individual’s connection to the group is structured by gender, ethnic, and class markers. The book opens with the sequence, “You Are Here,” set in Toronto, mostly in the subway, where one often finds maps with arrows indicating one’s location. The poet attempts unsuccessfully to locate herself in relation to the city’s diverse inhabitants: a boy playing exuberantly, a bruised and incoherent woman, street musicians,

a harried young mother, a bearded Jew in a black suit. She wonders where she fits in this provisional human structure: “Where / am I, where? Where do I fit” (20).

As in her previous book, Tregebov is also concerned with the ways in which, through memory, she can momentarily experience a “collision of times” (24) that may be fruitful. In portraits of her ancestors, she emphasizes the values conveyed by each. There is a poem about an uncle, Abraham Block, whose robust physical vitality but essential gentleness, reminds her of “the world split into gender” (30) in a pleasurable way; another about a great-aunt, Anne Ganley, whose life as a left-wing activist “teas[ed her] / gently into the larger view” (48) of political struggle; and one about her grandfather, “absolutely foreign” (27), whose sense of irony, “being both here / and there” (28), showed her how to navigate the “cold avenues of Winnipeg” (27). The discomfort with social definition put forward in the opening poem is not resolved, however.

She does achieve a sense of belonging in relation to close family members but there, ironically, the very strength of the connection also can be problematic. There are several poems about maternal identification with her son, its dangers as well as its wonders. In “The Extravagant,” for example, she realizes that she gets her body “confused with his, and it’s / wrong and it hurts him” (36). Poems about marriage focus on differences between her husband and herself which are thrown into bold relief by their long connection: “My husband as always siding / with abundance, optimism, and me as / always grim and uncertain” (42). In the final poem, “The Dinner Table, the Tulip,” she claims a stubborn faith in human renewal, based on the love of vivid, specific, physical materiality, despite being unable to answer more abstract questions:

. . . The ultimate question not only
of science, but ours *why is there*
something rather than nothing. (58)

In *The Strength of Materials*, Tregebov’s interrogation of the foundational basis of human connection takes the form of

a collection of elegies. The elegy is of course a lament for the dead in which the traditional elegist “finds consolation in the contemplation of some permanent principle” (Preminger 215). In the past generation, “elegies have been more prolifically written, intensively studied, and resourcefully theorized than poems in practically any other genre” (Zeigler 1), both because of the pervasiveness of cultural melancholia at the end of a century that has repeatedly witnessed unimaginable loss of life and because of its stature among traditional poetic forms. In a recent letter to me, Tregebov commented that in this book she was “trying to do elegy as ode in some ways.” This blending of the two traditions is instructive: the ode is more generally philosophical in nature than the elegy and is associated more with commemoration than with mourning. Tregebov’s book is comprised of three groups of single elegies on a variety of subjects that are divided by two poetic sequences – “Elegy for Knowing” and “Into the World (Elegy)” – which provide a method and an emotional direction for the book. In a poem in the third group, “Elegy for Elegies,” she recuperates the genre itself as a still useful means of representing the past.

“Elegy for Knowing” is about the virtue of certain kinds of knowledge, both historical and personal, despite the dangers inherent in coming to know. Its subjects range from recalling the location of Romania on a map of Europe, to finding Hebrew books in an old trunk in the basement, to refusing to acknowledge problems in her marriage. As Tregebov puts it, “*What you don’t know can’t hurt you / is a lie*” (21). And later, “*Where do you go / in between the not and the knowing, what / becomes of you?*” (22). The moral issues at stake here are best elucidated by Anne Michaels in her essay, “Cleopatra’s Love,” a meditation on love, poetry, and memory:

The distinction between knowledge and “poetic knowing” resembles the distinction between history and memory. Knowledge/History is essentially amoral: events occurred. “Poetic Knowing”/Memory is inextricably linked with morality: history’s source is event, but memory’s

source is meaning. Often what we consciously remember is what our conscience remembers.

Memory, like love, gains strength through restatement, reaffirmation; in a culture, through ritual, tradition, stories, art. (6-7)

Although a full discussion of late twentieth-century elegy is beyond the scope of this essay, a couple of important trends are worth noting as a context for the psychological dynamic of Tregebov's "Into the World (Elegy)" and "Elegy for Elegies." The preoccupation with elegy as a form has coincided with a widespread theoretical exploration of loss, mourning, and, lately, trauma.⁴ A deepening pessimism about conventional sources of consolation has informed the verse of authors dealing with deaths resulting from battle, illness, accident, neglect, criminality, natural catastrophe, and particularly genocide. Contemporary elegists "participate in a transgeneric attack on convention" by "focus[ing] their antipathy on the psychological structures and literary devices specific to the elegy" (Ramazani 3). Rather than trying to remedy death by writing poems about it, they often question the ethical grounds of recuperative art by writing about the diminished efficacy and legitimacy of the genre itself. They shift the rhetoric of redemption from particular elegies to a historical narrative about elegies. As Jahan Ramazani puts it, "every elegy is an elegy for elegy – a poem that mourns the diminished efficacy and legitimacy of poetic mourning" (8).

In a recent discussion of poetry after Auschwitz, Susan Gubar extends this discussion, clarifying its relationship to gender. In the numerous memoirs that have been published since 1945, she finds that "all idealisms stumble . . . except those related to inexplicable instances of caregiving" (241), and offers a theory about the significance of these saving acts. She reconsiders the role the imagination can play in fostering a type of compassion she calls "empathic imaginative identification" (242) or "empathic unsettlement" (243). This is a form of identification with others that recognizes disparity but is not aggressively coercive in that "one puts oneself in the other's position while recognizing the difference of that position"

(Gubar 243). Available to men as well to women, it is figured as pregnancy, birth, and nurture in some recent poetry and fiction (Anne Michaels's novel, *Fugitive Pieces*, is a primary illustration) and it stands in stark contrast to Nazi ideology that resorted to the sort of "hypermasculinity" evident in the phrase "master race" (Gubar 244).

Gubar's theory is particularly relevant to Tregebov's sequence, "Into the World (Elegy)," which draws upon maternal love as a way of transvaluing loss and of renegotiating the poet's position in the world. Here empathic unsettlement becomes a means of growth as the poet rethinks the connections between self and other. In Tregebov's words, "I have edges but they bend" (38). Four of the seven poems are about separating from an adolescent son, a process which Tregebov fuses, in one particularly compelling section, with a memory of his birth informed by the separation of parturition:

... *Push*, they say.
 I can't not. We're both
 taken, part of something else.
 Then, pushed, that first yelp
 of air, joy, or terror, breathing
 all on his lonesome. And he's
 one person. And so am I. (39)

Both of these processes are recognized as part of a larger force.

In "Elegy for Elegies," Tregebov extends this deeper understanding of her relationship to others to the subject of cultural memory itself. Instead of mourning the "diminished efficacy and legitimacy" of the genre, as Ramazani suggests is typical, her poem restages the psychological history she describes in the quotations at the beginning of this essay: that is, in it her connection with others leads to the embrace of a shared, Jewish past. The poem has two sections. In the first, written in the present tense, the poet is a little girl at the swimming pool, having "no place to go but up" as she climbs the ladder of determined older children to the diving board. Although part of her is afraid to jump, "shame or stubbornness drives . . . [her] forward at last / and down into a blue that receives but doesn't end [her]"

(59). In the second section, written in a past tense that bleeds into the present, a “chute of intention” (60) has carried her, as an adult, to Washington’s Holocaust Museum, where she is about to enter the most harrowing exhibit, “the reconstructed cattlecar” (60). She hesitates again and once more is driven forward. This time the direction is downward, more deeply into the self and the past, where her imagination now confronts the greatest tragedy of modern Jewish history:

. . . and it is as if
I were down into a dark that receives me,
my shoulder at someone’s back, someone else’s
shoulder at my back. Someone waits at my back, from
someone further down the line a crushed whisper.
We are a parcel of intention, but not our own. (60)

In a way that parallels the empathic extension of the self she experienced in motherhood, Tregebov blurs the boundaries between self and other, victim and witness, in this poem. Moreover, she does so in a way that honours the distance between the living and the dead.

Of course, the decision to revise the elegy is a political act. Tregebov prefaces *The Strength of Materials* with epigraphs from Saint Teresa and Oliver Sacks that express the tension in her work between longing for a healing language and understanding its limits. “Words lead to deeds,” writes Teresa; “They prepare the soul, make it ready, and move it to tenderness.” Sacks writes of the universal fantasy “of a primordial or original human language, in which everything has its true and natural name,” a language so concrete and particular that it is incapable of “evasion or deception.” Yet it is this very tension that gives her work its characteristically resonant edge. Tregebov is too savvy to relinquish the consolations of irony. Motherhood made the inevitability of death as well as the tenacity of life real to her at a young age. The unendurable, below the surface in her early work, is absorbed and articulated fully in recent poems that both dramatize her personal reintegration and memorialize the tragedy of modern Jewish history. In her hands words are the strong materials of a contemporary Jewish female self.

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Notes

¹Here I am indebted to a definition of cultural memory as an "act of transfer" in the present through which individuals and groups constitute their

identities by recalling a shared past on the basis of common norms, conventions, and practices (Hirsch 5).

²Tregebov explained the biographical facts behind this poem to me in an email dated 29 Dec. 2003.

³Email, 15 Nov. 2003.

⁴See in particular Peter Sacks's influential book, *The English Elegy*.