

he focuses on his primary thesis, his personal interaction with communism, the work is sagacious and riveting. Ultimately, Laxer has written a compelling look into the struggles of a child in a tumultuous era, one with which every reader can identify in some form or another. He achieves his overall aim of elucidating the challenges of growing up in a communist family in Canada through this personal account, one made particularly poignant given the refreshing opportunity to gain such enlightenment through the eyes of a child.

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Menkis, Richard and Norman Ravvin, editors. *The Canadian Jewish Studies Reader*. Calgary: Red Deer Press, 2004. 493 pp.

By chance, my copy of *The Canadian Jewish Reader* arrived during the same week that the poet, Irving Layton, died. The passing of this “Jewish maverick in stuffy Canada” (Janice Arnold, *Canadian Jewish News*, 11 January 2006) was met by an outpouring of effusive tributes. Contrast that with the mixed reception accorded Matt Cohen’s posthumously published memoir, *Typing*, as related here by Norman Ravvin, in his essay “Matt Cohen’s ‘Cosmic Spine.’” Despite his presence at the heart of the English Canadian literary scene, Cohen never fully felt himself *of* that milieu, and his assertion of discomfort aroused unease, in turn, on the part of such pillars of CanLit as Margaret Atwood and Robert Fulford. In *Typing*, Ravvin suggests, Cohen effectively elevated “Spadina Avenue’s Jewish landscape” (the backdrop to his years as a literary novice in Toronto) to one of the “sacred spaces” of Canadian Jews alongside Mordecai Richler’s St. Urbain Street. Ravvin treats the abandoned Saskatchewan “Jewish ghost towns of Hirsch and Hoffer” in much the same light elsewhere in the *Reader* (“Eli Mandel’s Family Architecture”).

“Sacred space” is not a phrase that Ravvin employs, although it figures rather prominently in social historian Etan

Diamond's essay, "Sanctifying Suburban Space." The focus of Diamond's article is Toronto's Bathurst corridor and its blend of "traditionalist religion with modern suburbia." He does not argue that Bathurst Street possesses "explicit religious sanctity." Rather, he asserts, "the social spaces in which religious communities live also have a sacredness that, although not explicitly holy, is nevertheless essential to those communities" (p. 187).

As these examples illustrate, the nearly twenty essays in this volume are multi-disciplinary in their approach. In addition—as with Ravvin's essay on Matt Cohen—many of them "convey a strong sense of cultural divide between Jewish Canadians and their fellow citizens" (p. 21). Quite a few scholars who have published extensively in the field of Canadian Jewish studies are found among the *Reader's* contributors – Menkis and Ravvin for starters, plus Pierre Anctil, Franklin Bialystok, Michael Brown, Ira Robinson, Harold Troper, Gerald Tulchinsky, and Morton Weinfeld. Above all, the co-editors seek to stimulate new avenues of research "on the creation, maintenance and transformations of Canadian Jewish cultures" (in the plural), and their "own personal canonization of these materials has been informed by the insights of modern critical cultural studies" (p. 14). Thus, several contributions transcend the discourse of traditional scholarship.

In contrast to such similarly motivated anthologies as the massive *Cultures of the Jews*, edited by David Biale (2 volumes, New York, 2002 and 2006), and *California Jews*, edited by Ava F. Kahn and Marc Dollinger (Lebanon, NH, 2003), the contents of this *Reader* were largely culled from previously published books and journal articles, though several contributions are published here for the first time. It is only in the latter cases that the authors' work was "shaped... to this volume's needs," the editors observe (p. 9). This helps to explain why some contributions read like the book chapters they once were, while others omit useful contextual background, and still others have become dated during the years since they first saw print.

Those essays that discuss the Jewish presence in Quebec and Jews' encounter with French Canada particularly piqued my interest as a former resident of Montreal. Among these is Menkis's penetrating study, "Historiography, Myth and Group Relations," which analyzes contrasting historiographical perspectives on Jewish contacts with New France, especially those maintained by the Gradis family of Bordeaux. Anctil's essay, "A. M. Klein: The Poet and His Relations with French Quebec," reveals a present-day Québécois intellectual grappling with a mid-twentieth-century Anglo-Jewish poet's contemplation of his city, province, and Francophone neighbours. In "Moroccan Jewish Saint Veneration," Janice Rosen offers a glimpse into the multicultural complexities of Canadian Jewry. Intriguingly, she shows how the late Lubavitcher Rebbe, Menachem Mendel Schneerson, has joined the revered holy men and women of the Maghreb as an object of North African Jews' veneration.

In a volume that includes a number of extended treatments of Anglophone literary personalities and subjects, one wishes for a much more extensive and direct encounter with Canada's Yiddish heritage. Instead, the "Yiddish voice" is limited to Miriam Waddington's childhood memories of the literary "salon" of Montreal poet Ida Maze and Rebecca Margolis' comparative study of Yom Kippur balls held in London, New York, and Montreal over a century ago. Visual culture—which has come to occupy an important position across humanities scholarship—is also largely absent. The one exception, Barb Schober's article on Arnold Belkin's "Warsaw Ghetto Uprising" mural ("The Vancouver Holocaust Memorial That Wasn't"), concentrates more on intra-communal politics than on iconography or artistic milieu.

On the other hand, the *Reader* does not sidestep the impact that political radicalism has had on Canada's Jews. In addition to Margolis' and Schober's essays see, for example, Henry Srebrnik's study of Canadian Jewish communists' support for the "Jewish Autonomous Region" in the Soviet Far East ("Red Star over Birobidzhan").

In a brief review it is impossible to do full justice to an anthology whose contents cover such a wide range of disparate topics. Beyond the “personal canonization” of the editors, what is it that links these pieces? In large part, it is left to the individual reader to make the connections. This need not have been the case. Menkis and Ravvin might well have drawn more explicit interconnections between the essays included in the *Reader*. In addition, an index would have helped to make the volume’s contents cohere better. Having offered these criticisms, I fully share the editors’ hope that “this collection [will engage] more readers in the study of the Canadian Jewish experience, and thereby [help to] spark new research” (p. 19). *The Canadian Jewish Studies Reader* is thus a most welcome addition to the field’s rapidly expanding bookshelf.

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Muirhead, Bruce. *Against the Odds: The Public Life and Times of Louis Rasminsky*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999.

It was during the post-World-War-Two period that Jews, for the first time in the twentieth century, began to achieve prominence in Canadian public life. Louis Rasminsky was a noteworthy figure in their ranks. He was one of the first Jews to achieve a leading position in the Canadian civil service. In 1961, he was appointed by the Diefenbaker government as Governor of the Bank of Canada, serving in this position until his resignation in 1973. He died in 1998.

The primary focus of Bruce Muirhead’s biography of Louis Rasminsky is his public career. The strength of the book lies in the author’s detailed account of that career, and of Rasminsky’s educational background which helped to make it possible. Born in Montreal to Jewish parents in 1908, he moved to Toronto in 1913 where he grew to maturity. The author notes that Rasminsky was an outstanding high-school graduate of Harbord Collegiate, standing first in the Ontario-wide matriculation