

ment d'assurance en raison de la longévité du judaïsme ; enfin, elle est envisagée comme une fausse question, puisque l'idée de vouloir assurer une continuité à tout prix risque de fixer l'identité, c'est-à-dire de réduire à néant sa portée créatrice.

En somme, le grand mérite de cet ouvrage consiste à donner la parole à plusieurs Québécois juifs, de manière à saisir les contrastes, les nuances, de même que les similitudes et les divergences des points de vue qui confèrent à ces « identités mosaïques » une richesse singulière. Fait à souligner, à l'opposé des francophones et des anglophones, les Juifs n'ont jamais formé un groupe ethnique ou culturel à proprement parler. Pour cette raison, leur position dans la province renvoie davantage à leur contribution aux divers secteurs de la vie québécoise, qu'à la définition de leur identité collective. En cela, les entrevues montrent bien, de manières différentes et à des degrés variables, que « l'identité culturelle est affaire de dialogues – voire de débats – à travers lesquels nous apprenons à vivre ensemble ».

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Kucharsky, Danny. *Sacred Ground on de la Savane: Montreal's Baron de Hirsh Cemetery* Montreal: Véhicule Press, 2005. 242 p.

Beys Olam (house of eternity), *Beys Chaim* (house of life)...these names convey the idea of the Jewish cemetery as a living institution, a communal dwelling place deep within the psyche of the Jewish population, though often on the physical periphery of the community. The cemetery is the place where Jews demonstrate their reverence and affection for their dead ancestors, where they walk through the profound desire to connect with their collective a past. A newly founded Jewish community, it is said, is truly rooted only when it buries its first dead, in land reserved for this purpose.

The beautiful little monograph *Sacred Ground on de la Savane* by Danny Kucharsky (with photos by D.R. Cowles)

lovingly tells the story of the Mother of all Montreal Jewish cemeteries, the Baron de Hirsh Cemetery, known by many simply as “de la Savane.” Kucharsky’s story opens with a brief history of the early years of the Baron de Hirsh Institute, focus of Jewish secular communal life at the beginning of the century, and the home of what were later to become the Jewish Public Library and “Jewish Family Services”. It was a gathering place for new immigrants that offered language courses for adults and Hebrew school for children. Commissioned by the Baron de Hirsh Cemetery Centennial Book Committee, the book documents the history of the Baron de Hirsh Cemetery from its inception in 1905, when it began as a philanthropic response to a lack of burial space (especially for the indigent) in the Back River cemetery near Carterville.

Kucharsky goes on to document the relationships between the Institute and a plethora of sick benefit and burial societies founded on the basis of mutual aid. These included groups like the Hebrew Sick Benefit Society, the King George Sick Benefit Society, and a plethora of synagogue affiliated groups. He negotiates with grace and tact the story of their collaboration which, while absolutely essential, did not always run smoothly, and pays loving tribute to those transient beings, the burial societies, the last of which ceased operation in 1989. “With the disappearance of most of the sick benefit societies, much has been lost-including planning for death...the advantage of the sick benefit society was the “don’t worry” factor. When you die, we have a place for you to be buried. ” Not content to leave this absence as a mere nostalgic reminiscence, and pointing to a vital function that needs addressing, Kucharsky’s interviewee (former director Jacques Berkowitz) asks the reader “Have you made arrangements for your burial?...Are you going to leave it to your kids at the last minute?” (p. 54)

Kucharsky’s account is vital in the sense that it portrays the cemetery as a living organism: it is both a mirror of the community as it grew, and an evolving public site. The grave-

stones reflect, for instance, the community health of an entire generation of immigrants. Until 1927 the majority of those buried were minors-dying as infants of a variety of childhood diseases, especially tuberculosis. Kucharsky gives us a sense, as well, of the natural ecology of the cemetery, which is built on a high water table (hence the “savannah” denomination of its site). The savannah requires an elaborate drainage system, described in detail by the author, as also the repair projects, including concrete measures (installation of foot deep foundations) undertaken to address the problem of falling tombstones.

The Baron de Hirsh cemetery is evoked in all its dimensions, social, ecological, and semiotic. There is a section, for instance, on Jewish burial customs, with illustrations from gravesites in the cemetery. We hear, for example, of the passing custom of placing photographic portraits in on some gravestones, particularly at the beginning of the century, and of the unique role of flowers (normally shunned by Jewish custom) the sale of which actually sustains the Perpetual Care Fund designed to provide for the maintenance of gravesites. I would have liked to hear just a little more, however, about the neighbourhood and social context of the actual site of the cemetery.

The last section of the book is dedicated to a collection of life stories of some of the denizens of de la Savane: famous scholars, rabbis, activists, poets “rogues and scoundrels” calling forth vividly the life of this Montreal Jewish Community. The book is rounded off by a delightfully eclectic compilation of epitaphs, ranging from Biblical verses, to ee cummings poems, to the eloquent “I’d rather be skiing.” It is somewhat of a mystery that the book, which includes stories of such a diverse collection of characters, chooses to present so few females, given that the cemetery is one of the few public spaces where women are amply represented.

Sacred Ground is an evocative portrait of a dynamic and diverse community, particularly in its early immigrant phases, as told by cemetery stones and other efforts to honour the dead. It draws on a wide range of sources, from municipal archives to

daily newspapers, with life breathed into the account through the voices of former cemetery directors, rabbis and other personalities. What a shame that these sources are not footnoted, so that other scholars could follow where Kucharsky has led! The historical sections of the book could have benefited, as well, from the work of an editor who would have given more coherence to what reads at times like a parade of capsule histories of sick benefit societies, while moving backward and forward in time, thus making it hard for the reader to follow.

The aesthetics of the book are lovely. Photographs by D.R.Cowles grace the pages throughout, and there are breathtakingly beautiful sepia reproductions in the little portfolio at the centre of the book (though the plates could have benefited from the addition of captions). The layout of the epitaphs is tasteful and lively, and the inclusion of a walking tour of the cemetery makes this book as practical as it is beautiful. Danny Kucharsky's book makes a wonderful addition to the bookshelf of any student of Montreal Jewish History, and of the Jewish way of commemorating the dead.

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Joachim Neugroschel, *The Golem: a New Translation of the Classic Play and Selected Short Stories*. New York and London: W.W. Norton, 2006. xii+ 254 pp.

Yudl Rosenberg, *The Golem and the Wondrous Deeds of the Maharal of Prague*. Edited and translated by Curt Leviant. New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2007. xxxiv + 220 pp.

Yosef Dan, in his book on the Hasidic story, stated that the story of the Maharal [R. Judah Loewe] of Prague and the Golem is the greatest contribution of Hebrew literature to world literature in the twentieth century. Yet the man who created this story in the form in which it entered world culture was, until relatively recently, unheralded for this singular feat. That was because its