

Canadian Jewish Literary Awards handed out in Toronto

BARBARA SILVERSTEIN
SPECIAL TO THE CJN

On Oct. 14, 120 people gathered at York University in Toronto, to honour the recipients of the 2018 Canadian Jewish Literary Awards (CJLA), which is sponsored and administered by the Israel and Golda Koschitzky Centre for Jewish Studies at York.

The awards celebrate excellence in Canadian writing on Jewish themes, which encompass a wide spectrum of genres, including both fiction and nonfiction.

The CJLA covered eight categories: fiction, memoir/biography, poetry, history, scholarship, Holocaust literature, Yiddish and books for children and youth.

Anne Renaud, a children's nonfiction writer from Nova Scotia, won the youth literature award for *Fania's Heart*, a picture book about the late Fania Landau Fainer's real life experience in Auschwitz. Her daughter, Sandy Fainer, accepted the award on behalf of Renaud. She described her mother as a kind and modest woman. "Her wry humour, positive disposition and optimistic outlook belied her painful past," said Sandy Fainer.

In the biography/memoir category, the



Winners of the 2018 Canadian Jewish Literary Awards. From left, Sandy Fainer, Pierre Anctil, Kathy Kacer Max Wallace, Jordana Lebowitz, Daniel Kupfert Heller, Rebecca Papucaru, Natalie Morrill and Seymour Mayne. BARBARA SILVERSTEIN PHOTO

CJLA went to Kathy Kacer and Jordana Lebowitz for *To Look a Nazi in the Eye: A teen's account of a war criminal trial*. In 2015, Lebowitz, who was a student at the time, managed, despite many obstacles, to travel to Germany to attend the war crimes trial of Oskar Groening, also known as the bookkeeper of Auschwitz.

The book, which chronicles Lebowitz's experience at the trial, is a collaboration between her and Kacer, an award-winning author of children's books about the Holocaust.

Kacer said she was struck by Lebowitz's "passion and depth of feeling. She wanted to be a witness of history and to be a spokesperson for her generation."

Indeed, Lebowitz lamented that with the dwindling number of Holocaust survivors, her generation is the last to witness their live testimonies.

Natalie Morrill, who lives in Ottawa, won the CJLA for fiction, for her first novel, *The Ghost Keeper*. The book, which is set in Vienna between the two world wars, follows Josef Tobak, a secular Jew whose life is upended by Germany's annexation of Austria in 1938.

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Winners to be announced Oct. 30

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Felsen worked from Segal's original Yiddish verse instead of relying on Anttil's French translations.

"The sentence structure of Yiddish and English are very similar," she explained. "They're both Germanic languages. French is totally different, and to try to translate French back into English just wouldn't have made sense."

Born in present-day Ukraine in 1896, Segal arrived in Montreal in 1910 and published 10 volumes of poetry in his lifetime, including the first book of Yiddish poetry ever published in Montreal, *Fun mayn velt*


(*From My World*) in 1918. He died in 1954.

His best-known works, Felsen said, are those that were modernist in form, but used traditional subject matter and imagery from Jewish sources.

"He made a lot of use of his Hasidic background," she said. "He had these images from the shtetl superimposed on Montreal."

Translating his work was "a wonderful experience. I fell in love with Segal's poetry," she said.

Also nominated for a Governor General's Award is Anttil for his history of Quebec Jewry. Winners will be announced Oct. 30. ■



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'Outstanding literary tradition'

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The book also won the HarperCollins Canada/UBC Prize for best new fiction.

Morrill said her interest in the Holocaust stems from her childhood in Vienna. She never forgot the neglected Jewish cemetery near her home, with its rubble, broken glass and graffiti. "The toppled gravestones were overgrown with no significant community to look after the cemetery," she said.

The CJLA for poetry went to Rebecca Papucaru, for her first published book, *The Panic Room*. Papucaru spent her formative years in Montreal and teaches communications at a college in Sherbrooke, Que.

University of Ottawa Professor Seymour Mayne's book, *In Your Own Words: Translations from the Yiddish and the Hebrew*, was the CJLA winner for Yiddish.

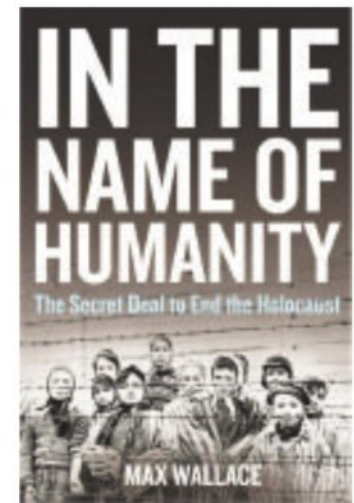
Max Wallace received the CJLA in Holocaust literature for his book, *In the Name of Humanity: The Secret Deal to End the Holocaust*. The book was shortlisted earlier this year for the 2018 RBC Taylor Prize for nonfiction.

Wallace said that many scholars have dismissed the contribution of Orthodox communities in the rescue of Jews during the Holocaust and his book shows the important role the Orthodox played.

In the history category, the CJLA went to University of Ottawa Professor Pierre Anttil, for his French-language history of Quebec Jewry, *Histoire des Juifs du Québec*.

Anttil said that one cannot understand Montreal history without including the contribution of the Jewish community.

Daniel Kupfert Heller – who is originally from Toronto and is now teaches eastern European Jewish history at Monash University in Melbourne – won the award for scholarship for his book, *Jabotinsky's Children: Polish Jews and the Rise of Right-*



Wing Zionism.

Kupfert Heller said historians have paid too little attention to Vladimir Jabotinsky and the Betar youth movement, which developed right-wing Zionist ideology in Poland during the 1930s.

The CJLA jury included: authors Edward Trapunski, Arlene Perly Rae and Michael Posner; professors Alain Goldschlaeger and David Koffman; and editor Andrea Knight.

Liberal MP Michael Levitt gave the opening remarks. Also in attendance was former Ontario premier Bob Rae.

Trapunski, the CJLA jury chair, explained that the jury considers books by Canadian citizens or permanent residents on subjects with Jewish themes or authentic Jewish content.

"The authors we are honouring today are maintaining that long and significant tradition of outstanding literary talent and scholarship in the Canadian Jewish community, and about the Jewish community," he said. ■