

**Robin McGrath. *Salt Fish & Shmattes: A History of the Jews in Newfoundland and Labrador from 1770.***

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## 570 Reviews

Leggo's habit of repeating sentiments and repeatedly using favourite words, like "light." By page 86 the reader will have already encountered: "shapes / of light and lunacy and love" (40), "the light lunacy of love in your eyes" (41), "figures of embodied light" (52), "writing always with the heart's light, / this poem also written in the light heart" (59), "you know the grammar of light" (63), "steeped in love's light" (77).

Sadly word combinations also get repeated. In one stanza in "Traces," Leggo writes resonantly: "The day is a Gerry Squires lithograph, / lines of light etched lightly" (78), and this use of light as noun and adverb enchant. But then, but four pages later, the reader comes smack up against a repetition of "light etched," now used to characterize stories (in "Spring," 82). But the word Leggo has an even greater weakness for is "heart," which we have already seen in combination with "light." The following is a long, but I fear not exhaustive list: "in the language of the heart's delight" (24), "the refrigerator door open / like a teacher's heart / when the final bell rings" (31), "I taught with fire in my eyes and heart" (33), "they know the earth's rhythms by heart, / they know the heart turned with earth's rhythms" (57), "with heart language," "heart's light" (59), "the light of the heart" (67), "heart's time" (67), "heart's rhythm" (67), "heart's light" (84), "resilient heart" (58), dandelions as "yellow hearts in the sun" (89).

I know poets of great stature have, through the repeated use of particular words, turned those words into a personal lexicon, a personal code. But, as in the case of Paul Celan, for instance, whose poems abound in the repetition of certain words like "stone," "almond," "ash," "snow," the symbolic weight of those words is rooted in particular (and in Celan's case harrowing) personal and historical experience. Their use has been (tragically) earned. To my eye and ear, Leggo's "heart" and "light" lack the necessary gravitas. I see that *Come-By-Chance* is Leggo's third book. In *Proofs & Theories: Essays on Poetry*, Louise Glück has written of her own practice, after finishing a book, to read it through, looking for settled habits, tics, in order to be aware of them before embarking on her next. It is advice that all of us poets would do well to heed.

Ruth Roach Pierson  
Professor Emerita OISE/UT

Robin McGrath. *Salt Fish & Shmattes: A History of the Jews in Newfoundland and Labrador from 1770*. Creative Book Publishing, 2006, ISBN 1-89717-01-2

THIS BOOK IS A WELCOME addition to the growing number of texts documenting and recounting the history of Jews in Canada. From coast to coast to coast, Jewish Canadians/Canadian Jews are researching and celebrating their roots, producing histories, novels, poems, memoirs, and hybrid forms that suit the particularity of

the author's interests and personality. Robin McGrath is a poet, a folk-historian, and an archivist, and this book combines her multiple talents. Drawing from sources as diverse as B.G. Sack's classic 1945 text *History of the Jews in Canada*, newspaper clippings, and archival letters, fragments, and photos, she brings the history to life.

The earliest Jew with a connection to Newfoundland and Labrador seems to have been mariner Joseph de la Penha. Although he never actually lived there, he was given the deed for Labrador in 1677 following his claim of the territory for England. However, in 1986, de la Penha's descendents were definitively denied their claim by the Supreme Court of Canada.

The history of the Jews in Newfoundland and Labrador follows the same basic sequence as in the rest of Canada and North America. The first to settle were Sephardic (i.e., of Spanish ancestry) traders who began to arrive after the English conquest of 1761. Few in number, many of them had converted to Christianity, either wholeheartedly or in appearance only so as to escape persecution (this group is now referred to as "crypto-Jews"). This makes uncovering their history a difficult task; McGrath used a combination of careful tracing of archival records and educated guesswork regarding names and patterns. The most documented, and therefore the most well known, of this early group was Simon Solomon, a watchmaker and jeweller who functioned as unofficial postmaster for the region, even producing his own hand-made stamps. In fact, his name still lives on in a back alley in St. John's called "Solomon's Lane."

These earliest settlers were followed by a number of immigrant waves, much more numerous, Ashkenazi (i.e., of Central and East European ancestry), and escaping economic, social, and/or political persecution. The first such wave to arrive in North America seems to have bypassed Newfoundland and Labrador: McGrath's book makes no mention of the Jews who arrived from Central Europe in the mid-nineteenth century. But she devotes a large amount of her book to the next wave: Eastern Europeans during the period from 1890 until World War II. In Newfoundland, most of the first members of this group became peddlers who travelled throughout the island or textile workers in the small garment industry of St. John's. Israel Perlin was a coastal trader who travelled by boat in 1892, while Max Pink travelled by foot along the railway line which was being built; both traded salt fish and shmattes (Yiddish for "rags") with Newfoundlanders in outlying areas.

The World War II Holocaust changed the picture significantly. Immediately before, during, and after the war, very few Jewish immigrants were allowed into Canada at all. The few German Jews to make it to Newfoundland were treated badly by the authorities, who suspected them of being German spies. In 1948, however, Canada began to open its doors to the European Jewish survivors in the Displaced Persons camps. McGrath tells the stories of Cylla and Joan Reichman, Ernie Maus-

kopf, and other survivors who ended up in Newfoundland and Labrador, giving the immense tragedy a human face and dimension.

The last two sections of the text focus on the Jewish community and the relationship between Jews and their non-Jewish neighbours. Here we read about synagogues, community leaders and organizations, cemeteries, etc, mostly in St. John's but also in other locations such as Stephenville and Corner Brook.

This is an excellent preliminary text. As McGrath herself states, she had envisioned a pamphlet with some basic information on the Jews of the province. But the book grew to its present size and scope. The flaws of the book are therefore understandable and forgivable: for example, there are errors in the bibliographic information; the section on post-World War II contains more information about the period before the war than after; and, frustratingly, there is no index — it is therefore difficult to find specific information. But the greatest problem is the lack of numbers. Although the focus is on archival material and individual stories, demographic statistics would provide a perspective *vis-à-vis* the non-Jewish population of the province and a comparison with the rest of Canada. What is needed now is more fieldwork, more research, and a comprehensive text. The last two parts of McGrath's book will be extremely useful for anyone interested in further research, either on a personal or societal level: an annotated listing of Jewish family names for Newfoundland and Labrador will help people interested in tracing their family history; and the extensive bibliography is a guide to further research. Let us hope that graduate students take up the challenge and delve further into the history of this area.

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Patrick Warner. *There, there*. Montréal: Signal Editions, 2005, ISBN 1-55065-200-1

THE EVOCATIVE TITLE of Patrick Warner's splendid new volume calls to mind the famous sentence with which Gertrude Stein dismissed Oakland, her childhood home. Initially, only one of the poems in this, Warner's second collection, carried a Steinian resonance for me — "The Howard Johnson," which concludes the book. Not Steinian in syntax or diction, but in the recognition, as demonstrated in "There is no there there," of the formlessness, the vapidity of so much of contemporary society. Stein fingered the suburb; Warner, the chain hotel. Stein expressed this recognition with her characteristic repetitiveness, her playing on the multiple meanings of a single word; Warner, more discursively with lines like "Loneliness pours from the air conditioner," and "Hours spent here amount to nothing," the "here" a non-place "where the weight of evidence leans / toward one's never having been" (64).