

MALCA AND RUBY FRIEDMAN: TWO EARLY MONTREAL JEWISH WOMEN WRITERS IN ENGLISH

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We have heard much about the rise and fall of a Yiddish literary culture in the Jewish community of Montreal.¹ Yet the origin of Montreal Jewish literature in English has not received comparable treatment. There have been individual studies on such male writers as Isidore Ascher, Hyman Edelstein, A.M. Klein, and Irving Layton, but the Jewish women writers have been almost totally ignored.² There is a dearth of reviews of published works; the biographical notes and bibliographies are slapdash; the writings and papers of early Jewish-Canadian writers have often not been collected and preserved; the archival literary collections at the Jewish Public Library and the Canadian Jewish Congress are incomplete; and today's literary scholars have tended to emphasize post-war writing. Apart from the brief comments and listings of David Rome³ and the critical and biographical comments of H.M. Caiserman,⁴ we have almost nothing to guide us through this wilderness of neglect. Yet early Jewish Canadiana in English is a subject worthy of attention. A.M. Klein was far from being the first Canadian Jew to write poetry and fiction in English.⁵ He had numerous predecessors and contemporaries, several of whom were women.⁶

I decided to begin my research into the early Jewish Montreal women writers with a study of Malca and Ruby Friedman, whose papers suddenly became available to me in 1998. Malca and Ruby were born in Sherbrooke, Quebec in 1896 and 1900 respectively. Unmarried, they lived together with a third sister, Jennie Ray, in a Montreal apartment for most of their lives. When Malca, the last of the three died in 1996, a few months short of one hundred years, their papers were gathered by Cecil Cohen, a younger cousin, and taken to his home in Margaretville, New York. I learned about the existence of his collection late in 1997, while researching the history of the Jewish community of Sherbrooke. Mr. Cohen generously



*Malca (left), Jennie Ray (third from left)
and Ruby Friedman (seated).
(Source: ETRC, Malca and
Ruby Friedman Fonds)*

allowed me to deposit the papers in the Eastern Townships Research Centre at Bishop's University, where they could be made available to scholars interested in the origins of the Jewish literary community of Montreal. Since the ETRC was interested in the sisters' Sherbrooke connection and agreed to process and store the papers, the fonds went to their archive.

The collection proved to be quite full and in good condition yet, at the same time, somewhat disappointing. It consists of a few dozen photographs of the three sisters, their parents, friends and relatives, personal family documents, three scrapbooks, several clippings pertaining to their Vineberg relatives, several folders of typed manuscripts of stories and poems by Malca and Ruby, Malca's history of the Vineberg family, Ruby's correspondence with the Gage Publishing

Company, as well as two tape recordings of the sisters and a taped interview of Cecil Cohen. Though the collection is not complete,⁷ some of the missing items can be viewed at the Canadian Jewish Congress Archives, the Jewish Public Library, and the National Library Archives. What is disappointing is the relative absence of biographical detail that could give a portrait of the sisters' literary lives, and, I would have to say, the absence of a body of work that could lift them above the minor status in which they currently languish.

On the other hand, this is one of the few accessible collections of literary papers that can provide an inkling of what it was like to be an aspiring English writer in Jewish Montreal during the first half of this century. Moreover, the collection can be supplemented by interviews with living persons who knew the sisters quite well, and by library and archival sources.

Consequently, this paper will briefly survey the early lives and education of the Friedman sisters and the careers they chose. It will consider the nature of Montreal literary life, particularly as it exist-

ed in the Jewish community, followed by an assessment of the accomplishments of the two sisters, and end with some tentative remarks about the situation of women writers in the Montreal Jewish community during the first half of the twentieth century.

Malca and Ruby's father, Julius Friedman, was born in Latvia and immigrated to New York while still a child. As a young man, Julius drifted to Sherbrooke where he opened a clothing store around 1890. A few months later, he met his future wife, Hattie Vineberg, while she was visiting Sherbrooke. Hattie was born in Lithuania in 1871, came to Canada with her father as a young girl, and went to school in Montreal. According to Malca, "she attended Miss MacDonald's Academy and picked up reading, writing, and speaking English very quickly."⁸ The young couple married in Montreal in June 1891 and settled immediately in Sherbrooke. Their three daughters—Malca, Ray, and Ruby—were born here in 1896, 1898, and 1900 respectively. Malca was the only one to attend school in Sherbrooke:

I have many pleasant memories of my first year at school.... There were three grades in the room, and I was in the highest, as my mother had taught me to write with a lead pencil on a slate. School was a very pleasant experience as the teacher, Miss Waterhouse, made each lesson appear as a game: spelling matches, reading, stressed expression, arithmetic.... I am always haunted by one of our recitations—Tennyson's "Break, break, break, / On thy cold gray stones, O Sea!" an unusual assignment for such young children. The following year, we moved to Montreal, and I found the classes there dull in comparison.⁹

Around 1902 or 1903, Julius Friedman moved the family to City Hall Avenue in the heart of Montreal's Jewish quarter.¹⁰ He had evidently not succeeded in the clothing business and now tried his hand in the poultry trade. The girls attended Aberdeen School. According to Malca, Ray and Ruby were interested in dolls and doll-houses, while she had other interests:

I read widely. My father had a large dictionary and a book of quotations. [My friend] Beryl's mother had, among other books, a complete set of Dickens, and a complete set of Sir Walter Scott. Another neighbour.... supplied me with the Elsie books and all the other girl books of the period.¹¹

Though the family was evidently not affluent, they attended the prestigious Shaar Hashomayim Synagogue—perhaps because the girls' uncle, the wealthy Harris Vineberg, had urged, encouraged, or



Malca Friedman.
(Source: ETRC, *Malca and Ruby Friedman Fonds*)

paid for them to do so. The girls apparently received a good education both in secular and religious subjects, all of which were conducted in English.

Malca was awarded the Edward Moss Silver Medal in June 1910 at the time of her graduation from the Shaar Hashomayim Religious and Day School.¹² The girls went on to high school, but at this point, their educational paths diverged somewhat.

Malca makes no mention of her high school studies. In 1917, at the age of twenty-one, she went to work at the Baron de Hirsch Institute. Her immediate boss was Garfield Berlin-sky, head of fund-raising activities. About a year later, the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies was established; Malca and another young woman

were hired as field workers. Thus Malca began a career as a social worker in the Family Welfare Department, which lasted over twenty years.¹³ She became Acting Supervisor late in 1919 and served in this capacity until 1921, when she entered the first social work class to be established at McGill University. Though she received a scholarship, she continued as a field worker at the Baron de Hirsch Institute. In 1924 she again became Acting Supervisor, and from 1926 to 1936 was fully in charge of the Family Welfare Department, serving the needs of indigent Montreal Jews. In 1935 Malca was awarded the King George V Silver Jubilee Medal in recognition of her accomplishments in the Family Welfare Department of the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies.¹⁴ During the late 1920s and 1930s, she presented several papers to Social Work conferences in Canada and the United States.¹⁵

In 1937 she resigned from the Baron de Hirsch Institute "to fulfill a long-held ambition: to take a course in writing for publication at Columbia University."¹⁶ On her return, she rejoined the Institute, this time to work with refugee children; a year later she again quit her job. Malca was only forty-three, but apparently she never returned to full-time work. She does say that she "held office in the Montreal Social Workers' Club and later in the Montreal Branch of

the Canadian Authors' Association,"¹⁷ but these were presumably part-time unpaid activities. In her comments Malca implies that she wrote and published a number of poems and stories in American and Canadian journals and newspapers even before she resigned her position,¹⁸ yet there is no concrete evidence of any publication before October 1947, when she published a poem in the *Canadian Jewish Chronicle*.

It would appear that Malca lived in semi-retirement from 1939, devoting herself to the writing of stories and poems, some of which were published between 1947 and 1968. In 1963, she assisted her close friend, Bluebell Phillips, in the editing of *Canadian Poetry Magazine* and on six occasions wrote the brief poetry reviews that customarily appeared in the last pages of that journal.¹⁹ The peak of her literary career was the publication in 1975 of a selection of her poetry together with the poems of four other women associated with the Canadian Authors' Association in a self-published volume titled *Five Montreal Poets*.

Her last work, undertaken in her old age,²⁰ was a collaborative family history, titled *Harris Vineberg and His Family: A History*, first published in 1988 and reissued in 1991. Much of it is a humdrum account of the doings of the many members of the Vineberg family, but there are several interesting stories about Harris Vineberg and about herself, which redeem the work. It also includes a selection of Ruby and Malca's poems. So, ironically, a booklet she felt pressured to work on to please her family, provides the best and most reliable account of the lives of Ruby and Malca and displays some of their best work.

Since Ruby, the youngest of the three sisters, left no autobiographical or personal memoirs behind, we know much less about her. Like Malca and Ray, she attended Aberdeen School and the Shaar Hashomayim Sunday School. She then entered the Commercial and Technical High School to specialize in business and secretarial subjects.



Ruby Friedman.

(Source: ETRC, Malca and Ruby Friedman Fonds)

After graduation, Ruby joined the Jewish Colonization Association where she worked for fifty-eight years as secretary, accountant, and translator from French to English.²¹

Malca writes that “Ruby was a gifted writer of children’s stories, and many of her poems were published in anthologies and periodicals in Canada and the United States.”²² This comment seems somewhat understated. Ruby produced at least 263 poems, many more than Malca did.²³ In *Idische Dichter in Kanade*, H.M. Caiserman, writing in 1934, mentions that Ruby’s first published poem appeared in the *Montreal Star* in 1929,²⁴ eighteen years before Malca had her first poem published in the *Canadian Jewish Chronicle*. Caiserman was apparently reviewing a full manuscript of Ruby’s poems.²⁵ He was critical of some, but others he praised; he never suggested that they were written for children. So while it is true that Ruby succeeded in selling a number of her poems and stories to children’s books and magazines, it is equally true that she published her adult poetry in a variety of journals and newspapers in Canada and the United States. On September 20, 1947, Caiserman wrote to Ruby asking her to send in a number of her poems for possible inclusion in an anthology he was planning of Canadian Jewish poetry in English and Yiddish. On October 20, she sent him eleven poems, six of which had been previously published.²⁶ Unfortunately, for Ruby, Caiserman’s project was still incomplete at the time of his death in 1950. So Ruby never had the satisfaction of seeing her poetry collected and presented to an adult audience, despite the fact that her poems have a wider range and are more numerous than her sister’s. Ruby seems to have worked harder at poetry than Malca did, but Ruby’s apparent reluctance to cultivate literary contacts with the Canadian Authors’ Association may have foreclosed the possibility of more significant publication.

To assess the accomplishments of Malca and Ruby, we must consider the literary scene as it existed in Montreal during the first half of the twentieth century, and then note what kind of work was being produced by the poets and writers. The period between 1900 and 1950 was far from barren. One way of understanding the literary atmosphere of that time would be to see it as a conflict between the ancients and the moderns, or between the nationalists and the internationalists. On the one hand we have the founding of the Canadian Authors’ Association (CAA) in 1921 supported by its two journals—*The Canadian Author and Bookman* (1919) and *Canadian Poetry Magazine* (1936). The CAA poets were “ancients” in the sense that they clung to traditional verse forms popular in Victorian and

Edwardian England and “nationalists” in the sense that they indiscriminately attempted to boost Canadian literature. Their leading lights included Bliss Carman, Stephen Leacock, D.C. Scott, and Charles G.D. Roberts.

They were, however, mocked and satirized by a group of young radicals based on *The McGill Fortnightly Review* (1925–27) and *The Canadian Mercury* (1927–29). Though these two journals were short-lived, the young guard—people like F.R. Scott, A.J.M. Smith, E.J. Pratt, Leon Edel, Leo Kennedy, and A.M. Klein—found a congenial home during the 1930s in the left-wing *Canadian Forum*, from where they were able to continue their attack on the Canadian Authors’ Association. These young Turks, and their younger successors, later founded *Preview* and *First Statement* in 1942. They were modern in the sense that they wished to write in the idiom and form of the great innovators of the twentieth century and internationalist in the sense that their models were British, Irish, and American poets.

F.R. Scott dealt the unkindest cut of all in his famous poem, “The Canadian Authors Meet,” a satiric account of a CAA meeting that Scott apparently attended early in 1927:

Expansive puppets percolate self-unction
 Beneath a portrait of the Prince of Wales.
 Miss Crotchet’s muse has somehow failed to function,
 Yet she’s a poetess. Beaming, she sails

From group to chattering group, with such a dear
 Victorian saintliness, as is her fashion,
 Greeting the other unknowns with a cheer—
 Virgins of sixty who still write of passion.

The air is heavy with “Canadian” topics,
 And Carman, Lampman, Roberts, Campbell, Scott,
 Are measured for their faith and philanthropics,
 Their zeal for God and King, their earnest thought.

One might think that the gulf between the two groups of poets would be immense. In fact, we find that the young guard, Scott, Smith, Kennedy, and Klein all contributed at least once to *Canadian Poetry Magazine*, and CAA writers occasionally managed to publish in the *Canadian Forum*. Moreover, most of the young Turks turned out to be resolutely Canadian, albeit in a different way and in a different idiom than their older contemporaries.

As we know, the Jewish community of Montreal between 1910 and 1940 was largely composed of people born in Eastern Europe, whose *lingua franca* was Yiddish.²⁷ Younger people, those who were

born in Canada or came here as young children, began to feel the pull of English as soon as they reached school. Some like A. M. Klein and Shulamis Yelin,²⁸ felt the attraction of Yiddish, but sooner or later succumbed to the lure of English. The Jewish press would print creative work in either language depending on the interests of the editor, but clearly the possibilities for publication were much greater in English. Though the occasional biased editor might have rejected writers with Jewish-sounding names, there is plenty of evidence that Jewish writers could hope to have their work accepted in Canadian papers and journals.²⁹ So as time went by the number of people writing in English grew.

Some Jewish writers were members of the Canadian Authors' Association from its founding in 1921,³⁰ and Miriam Dworkin (later Miriam Waddington) published the first of several poems in the CAA's official outlet, *Canadian Poetry Magazine*, in 1937.³¹ Given this tolerant reception, we need not be surprised to find that sooner or later most of the early Canadian Jewish poets became members of the CAA. *Canadian Poetry Magazine* published one of Hyman Edelstein's poems in 1947, five of Ruby's between 1950 and 1966, and seven of Malca's between 1953 and 1962. However, their association with CAA was not necessarily good for their poetic development. The uncritical publication of the work of CAA members in *Canadian Poetry Magazine* did not encourage these poets to improve their form, language, and content. Their poetry had the virtue of being accessible to the readers and subscribers of the time, but it was not highly regarded by the critics. The future lay with the modernists; those who would not or could not adapt to the modern movement are today largely forgotten.

We do not know precisely how many poems Malca Friedman wrote, but the manuscript evidence indicates that she produced forty-one poems between 1947 and 1988. Though her output was small, she was, compared to her sister, relatively successful in making her work available to the public. Between October 1947 and June 1968, eighteen poems were published in such newspapers and journals as the *Christian Science Monitor*, *Chatelaine*, *The Canadian Jewish Chronicle*, *Saturday Night*, *Canadian Poetry Magazine*, and the *Regina Leader Post*. She presented twenty-one new poems and four Haiku in the privately published *Five Montreal Poets* of 1975, and one new poem in *Harris Vineberg and His Family* of 1988. Consequently, all but three of the forty-one poems in her manuscript collection were privately or self-published. Malca probably had neither the quantity nor the quality to interest a commercial publisher in a collected

edition of her poetry, yet she was sufficiently determined and ambitious to use her contacts, and the occasions that arose, to present her work to the public, however small that public might be. Malca's poems are all short lyrics; several of them take the form of modified sonnets. They deal with the seasons, flowers, small animals, or with situations taking place within a natural setting. Some are set in the city. Only four poems have Jewish subject matter. There is no passion, no deep thought, no reference to contemporary events, and almost nothing personal in them. Form, imagery, and theme are conventional. None of them are brilliant or particularly memorable, yet four or five are good solid poems. Consider "At Villa Maria Convent" for example:

In soft October sunlight the nun sits
 Under glazed sky, Madonna blue and gold.
 Her age-gnarled fingers falter as she knits,
 Enjoying warmth before oncoming cold.

The convent's undulating grounds are still
 As her calm spirit and limpid pool
 That mirrors three spare poplars from the hill
 Where autumn gentians hold their fleeting rule.

She must not drop the wool her needles lift
 Or miss one moment of the gleaming hour;
 A maple shuffles, sending leaves adrift,
 Her faith clings to a Tree of greater power.

Malca appears to have devoted more time to her stories. Twenty-eight manuscripts survive. Many of them were composed between 1942 and 1959. Others were written or retyped between 1960 and 1985. Most appear to have undergone revision over the years. Four were published in the magazine *American Hebrew* between 1949 and 1951. Another was published in the *Montreal Star* in August 1954, and at least two were read on CBC radio. Several stories feature the fictional Mishkin family and such day-to-day concerns as match-making and weddings. The more interesting stories are about childhood life in the old Jewish quarter of Montreal or about lonely, single people. They are evidently based on Malca's personal familiarity with the early Jewish community. Only a small proportion of her stories reached the public, but at least these had met the requirements of a fiction editor. In short, we may say that Malca had only a limited success in publishing her short fiction. Given the high standards expected in the contemporary short story, her fiction has not passed the test of time, but as a portrait of Montreal Jewish life in

the middle of the twentieth century, some of the stories still have a certain interest.

How do we explain Malca's inability to interest the serious literary publishers of the time? It is not simply that her work failed to express a personal or distinctive view of life, though that is part of the answer. A glance at the three scrapbooks she left behind is revealing.³² The scrapbooks are a collection of illustrations, poems, prose passages, wise sayings, aphorisms, etc. that Malca clipped out of newspapers and popular magazines over the years. Among the authors featured are Shakespeare, Rossetti, Tennyson, Stevenson, Noyes, Thoreau, Emerson, Frost, etc.—classic English-language writers—together with a generous sprinkling of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Canadian poets, especially Bliss Carman and Pauline Johnson. Apart from Edna St. Vincent Millay, none of the great early modern writers such as Hopkins, Joyce, Eliot, Pound, Yeats, or Wallace Stevens are included. The scrapbook contains only one poem by A.M. Klein, one by Freda Myron, one by Dorothy Vineberg, and two by Regina Shoolman. We find very few references to the great events of the twentieth century that took place during Malca's long life: World War I, the great immigration, the depression, World War II, the holocaust, the foundation of the State of Israel, the Cold War, the emergence of modern feminism, etc.

The impression that Malca passed over the great but disturbing events of the twentieth century is confirmed by Margaret van Nooten's account of Malca's interests.³³ Though Ms. van Nooten worked with Malca only during the last six years of her life, when she was totally blind and in her nineties, Ms. van Nooten found Malca to be alert and attentive, but not deeply interested in contemporary writing. In the early part of her life Malca had distinguished herself as a social worker. However, the available evidence suggests that she lacked the single-mindedness, energy, and ambition that often accompanies the successful artist. The sisters earned their own keep, but at the same time they lived somewhat sheltered lives—free from many of the responsibilities, cares, joys, and sufferings that other women pass through. Malca was not bitter, resentful, or regretful about her limited literary achievement. People who knew her loved her for her kindness, gentleness, thoughtfulness, sensitivity to others, and modesty. She was a success as a human being.³⁴

Ruby had greater dedication and drive than Malca. She wrote seven stories for children, two of which were published.³⁵ But her forté was poetry, which she appears to have written all her life. Of

the 263 poems in her manuscripts, at least twenty-one were published in such papers, journals, and books as *The American Hebrew*, *We Do It Together*, *Our Little Messenger*, *Congress Bulletin*, *Jabberwocky*, *Canadian Poetry Magazine*, *Chatelaine*, *Canadian Forum*, *The Children's Friend*, the *Montreal Star*, the *Gazette*, *The Seasons of Children*, and *Rubaboo I and II*, between 1935 and 1966. As the above list suggests, many of her poems were written for children.

Malca included seven of Ruby's best-published poems in *Harris Vineberg and His Family*. Otherwise, Ruby's work remains uncollected. Like Malca, she wrote on the change of seasons, on flowers and trees, on aspects of nature, on small animals and pets, and sometimes on Quebec or on Jewish themes. The following poem expresses a woman's point of view:

Not by the waters of Babylon,
 Nor by the dun-coloured waters of the Danube
 Did we sit down and weep,
 We were not the same women and yet we were the same,
 Warmed by the same sun, chilled by the same wind,
 The bite of the same serpent followed us,
 We screened our eyes searching for a far off land,
 A land of refuge and peace.

Not by the waters of Babylon
 But by the rivers of all the world,
 Rivers made of women's tears,

Did we weep for the fate of our sisters
 In distant lands.

Ruby also wrote comic or satiric verse as well as a few portraits of people and, occasionally, some personal poems. In "My Mother Feeds the Sparrows," she evidently recalls a scene from her childhood:

My mother feeds the sparrows from flat pans
 That catch the winter sunlight. From her stock
 Of crumbled bread and shiny grains of rice
 She offers breakfast to the wandering flock,
 Brown spots of quivering feathers in the snow,
 They flutter down upon the balcony,
 Twittering happily like polite girls
 Who come to pay a casual visit.
 Their leader, very round and fat,
 Waits patiently while his companions eat,
 Sitting hunched on the clothes line watching them,

He sees each has a share. Then swooping down,
 He pecks his portion with a dainty beak,
 Pausing to dart a swift inquiring glance
 At mother's face to reassure himself
 Of food again tomorrow. Nourished they dance
 High and higher in a swirling ballet

Over white roof tops, and then they disappear.
 My mother's cheeks are flushed, her eyes are bright,
 As she regards the empty pans. She laughs.

In general, one might say that there is some insight, sensitivity, keen observation, and skilful use of language in Ruby's work.

She succeeded in placing only two of her poems in the relatively prestigious *Canadian Forum*,³⁶ but she was never able to follow up on this modest success. The rest of her work appeared in newspapers, Jewish magazines, children's publications, and of course in the CAA sponsored *Canadian Poetry Magazine*.

Her fondness for rhyme often seems to have led to triteness of expression and uncertainty of rhythm. Take, for example, an unpublished poem for children titled "The Sail":

We're on our way to Portugal,
 We're sailing fast and free,
 The Captain's standing at the helm,
 We may see gay Paree.

We're on our way to Portugal,
 The big ships sail this way,
 With breaking waves and sea-gulls' cries,
 But we're on Casco Bay!

While H.M. Caiserman was surely correct in criticizing Ruby's tendency to clichéd expression, he also remarked on her "rich command of the English language and poetic talents."³⁷ Ruby deserved to have had a volume of her poetry published in her lifetime. Perhaps she lacked the money or the self-confidence to publish it on her own, as so many of her contemporaries did, or perhaps she lacked the contacts with critics and publishers, or perhaps there was no encouragement from her peers. It is not possible to know at this point why Ruby did not collaborate with her sister and the four other women in *Five Montreal Poets* of 1975. A posthumous solo-collected edition does not, however, seem warranted at this time.

The Friedman sisters' near contemporaries—Vera Black (b. 1900) and Regina Lenore Shoolman (b. 1907)—demonstrate what Montreal Jewish women with a richer life experience, a greater knowl-

edge of the world, higher energy, and a stronger background in the arts were able to accomplish. Subsequent papers on Black, Seigler, and Shoolman, will, it is hoped, reveal these forgotten talents.

An examination of the Friedman papers reveals no evidence that Malca or Ruby Friedman suffered any overt discrimination either as women or as Jews. Despite the immature state of letters in Canada prior to World War II, and the relatively small English audience available in Canada at the time, it was possible to publish poetry in a wide variety of Canadian and American newspapers, magazines, and journals, both Jewish and gentile, and even to have collections of poetry published in volume form. Sometimes it was necessary to resort to self-publishing, but often publication was arranged through friends or influential connections—just as it is today. There was not, it would seem, sufficient literary discrimination, and much weak poetry passed without comment. Writers who received a literary education were obviously at an advantage, and those who belonged to the Canadian Authors' Association enjoyed a handy outlet as long as *Canadian Poetry Magazine* existed. No doubt it helped if one catered to popular tastes of the time.

Women, including Jewish women, were active contributors to the literature of the time; occasionally they became editors of journals and newspapers.³⁸ Perhaps the Friedman sisters did not enjoy greater success because they did not have a lot to say, failed to recognize the significance of the emerging modernist movement, and did not establish contact with its practitioners. They worked hard on their art, but in the end their lack of recognition was due to their own limitations, and not to the ignorance or intolerance of their society.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article décrit brièvement l'éducation, la formation académique, et les carrières littéraires de Malca Friedman (1896–1996) et de sa sœur, Ruby Friedman (1900–1985). À l'aide de leurs archives récemment acquises par le Centre de recherche des Cantons de l'Est, d'entrevues avec leurs amis et des membres de leur famille, et de leurs oeuvres de fiction et de poésie publiées entre 1929–1991, l'auteur examine le travail de ces deux écrivaines juives, qui ont choisi d'écrire en anglais. L'auteur résume et évalue l'ensemble de l'oeuvre littéraire d'inspiration juive et laïque de Malca et Ruby Friedman et situe leur travail dans le contexte littéraire montréalais des années 1920 et 1930. Il analyse aussi les problèmes auxquels faisaient face les écrivaines canadiennes juives de l'époque, qui, comme pionnières, ne bénéficiaient d'aucun support et d'aucune reconnaissance.

ABSTRACT

This paper deals briefly with the upbringing, education, and literary careers of Malca Friedman (1896–1996) and her sister, Ruby Friedman (1900–1985). Using personal papers recently recovered from a family collection, interviews with surviving friends and relatives, and the fiction and poetry they published between 1929 and 1991, it is now possible to examine the work of these two early Jewish Montreal women writers, who chose English as their language of expression. The paper attempts to summarize their literary accomplishments and assess the value of their Jewish and secular poems and stories. It places them in the context of Montreal literary activity during the 1920s and 1930s and discusses the problems facing Jewish Canadian women writers in a period when there was very little precedent, support, or recognition for them in Canada.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abbreviations Used

CAA	Canadian Authors' Association
CF	<i>Canadian Forum</i>
CJC	Canadian Jewish Congress
CPM	<i>Canadian Poetry Magazine</i>
CSM	<i>Christian Science Monitor</i>
ETRC	Eastern Townships Research Centre
MDS	<i>Montreal Daily Star</i>
RLP	<i>Regina Leader Post</i>

The following lists of published poems and stories are based on information found in the files kept by the two sisters. Those entries marked with an asterix proved, on examination, to be incorrect.

Ruby Friedman's Published Poems, 1933-77

- "The Sail." *MDS* 22 Apr. 1933: 22.
 "Quest." *MDS* 18 Nov. 1933: 22. Rpt. *CPM* 21.2 (Winter 1958): 8.
 "Snowflakes." *MDS* 3 Nov. 1934: 22; rpt. *CPM* 21.2 (Winter 1958): 8.
 "Time for Singing." *Canadian Forum* 15.175 (April 1935): 253.
 "Nocturne." *CF* 19.54 (May 1939): 54.
 "Not by the Waters of Babylon." *The American Hebrew* 9 Feb. 1940, n. pag.
 *"Misled." *Canadian Nature* Jan. 1941.
 "Laurentien Landscape." *Congress Bulletin* (Aug.-Sept. 1949): 7.
 "St. Paul Street, Montreal." *Canadian Poetry Magazine* 13.3 (Spring 1950): 11.
 "Miriam Danced." *CPM* 14.3 (Spring 1951): 13.
 "Maariv." *CPM* 20.4 (Summer 1957): 4. Also in the *Jewish Spectator* (NY) 24.2 (Feb. 1959): 10.
 *"August." *Chatelaine* (Aug. 1958).
 "The Poet." *CPM* 22.1 (Fall 1958): 11.
 "The Prayer Shawl." *Jewish Spectator* (NY) 24.2 (Feb. 1959): 10.
 "Pets." *Our Little Messenger* 24.29 (17 Apr. 1959): 1.
 "In the Park." *We Do It Together* 2.10 (July 1959): 4.
 "My Mother Feeds the Sparrows." *Rubaboo I*. Scarborough, ON: Gage, 1962: 205.
 "Émigré." *Rubaboo I* Scarborough, ON: Gage, 1962: 37.
 "Adventure." *CPM* 25.3 (May 1962): 9-10.
 "Tea Party." *Rubaboo II*. Scarborough, ON: Gage, 1963: 18.
 "Song for My Sister." *Rubaboo II*. Scarborough, ON: Gage, 1963: 207.
 "All of These." *The Gazette* c. 1965, n. d.
 "Balance Sheet." *The Gazette* 31 Dec. 1965: 6.
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Ruby Friedman's Published Prose

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"Puffy, the Clever Pigeon." *Jabberwocky* 4.1 (Summer 1977): 5.

Malca Friedman's Published Poetry

"In Memory." *Canadian Jewish Chronicle* 24 Oct. 1947, n. pag.

"Housing Dilemma." *Chatelaine* Aug. 1948: 22.

"Averse." *Saturday Night* 18 Jan. 1949: 18.

"White Tulips." *Regina Leader Post* 31 Jan. 1952, n. pag.

"Grace." *RLP* 22 June 1953, n. pag.

"Utrillo Exhibition." *Canadian Poetry Magazine* 16.4 (Summer 1953): 24-5.

"Rain Tune." *RLP* 30 Apr. 1954, n. pag.

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"Brief Beauty"

"Autumn Comes"

"Winter Dusk"

"Last Robin"

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NOTES

- 1 See, for example: David Rome, ed. *The First Jewish Literary School*. Canadian Jewish Archives, New Series 41. Montreal: Canadian Jewish Congress, 1988; Adam Fuerstenberg, "From Yiddish to 'Yiddishkeit': A. M. Klein, J. I. Segal, and Montreal's Yiddish Culture," and Gerald Tulchinsky, "The Third Solitude: A. M. Klein's

- Jewish Montreal, 1910–1950,” in *Journal of Canadian Studies* 19.2 (Summer 1984): 66–81 and 96–113; Ira Robinson, Pierre Anctil, and Mervin Butovsky, eds. *An Everyday Miracle: Yiddish Culture in Montreal*. Montreal: Véhicule, 1990.
- 2 For articles on Isidore Ascher see Vera Black, “A Canadian Jewish Poet Seventy Years Ago,” *Canadian Jewish Annual*, 1959; Hyman Edelstein, “Canada’s First Jewish Poet,” *The Jewish Standard* (15 Aug. 1959): 10, 52; and Esther Safer Fishman, “Isadore Gordon Ascher: 19th Century Canadian Jew, Champion of Black Rights,” *Multiculturalism* VI.2 (1983): 30–1. Ms. Fisher also wrote an article on Hyman Edelstein in *Canadian Poetry* VI (Spring/Summer 1980): 1–13. Studies of Klein and Layton are numerous and easily accessible.
 - 3 See David Rome “Literature of Jewish Canadiana,” *Jewish Book Annual* 18 (1960–61): 44–53; *Jews in Canadian Literature: A Bibliography*, Montreal: Canadian Jewish Congress and Jewish Public Library, 1964; and with Judith Nefsky and Paule Obermeir, *Les Juifs du Québec, bibliographie rétrospective annotée*. Québec: IQRC, 1981.
 - 4 H.M. Caiserman. *Idische Dichter in Kanade*. Montreal: CJC, 1934.
 - 5 See the work of Adolphus M. Hart (1814–79), Isidore Ascher (1835–1914), Hyman Edelstein (1889–1957), Abram Stilman (1903–85), Lawrence Lande (1906–98), and Lionel Shapiro (1908–58).
 - 6 For example: Arakie Cohen (1888–1936), Ida Seigler Bension Wynn (c.1887–1948), Malca Friedman (1896–1996), Vi Bercovitch (1897–1993), Ruby Friedman (1900–85), Vera Black (1900–81), Regina Shoolman (1907–99), and Raisa Applebaum (1908–?).
 - 7 The three sisters maintained a household until the sudden death of Ruby in 1985. By that time Ray was deeply afflicted by Alzheimer’s Disease, and Malca was incapacitated by blindness. Family members had to move the two surviving sisters into separate nursing homes, and in the resulting confusion a number of books and papers were lost or hurriedly disposed of. The present collection is therefore smaller than what might otherwise exist, had Malca been able to assist in the move.
 - 8 *Harris Vineberg and his Family: A History*. Montreal: privately printed, 2nd edit. 1991: 88.
 - 9 *HV&HF* 88–9.
 - 10 The evidence of the Sherbrooke City Directories points to that date. However, in a 1983 taped interview with Cecil Cohen, Malca stated she was around eight when her family moved to Montreal.

- 11 HV&HF 89.
- 12 HV&HF 91.
- 13 HV&HF 92.
- 14 As reported in *The Canadian Jewish Chronicle* 22.52 (17 May 1935): 7. See Gerald Tulchinsky's report, "The Baron de Hirsch Institute, 1863–1962" (Montreal, 1962): 146–48, available at the CJC Archives, for an assessment of Malca's contribution to the Institute's Relief Department.
- 15 HV&HF 11. It appears that Malca was also pursuing her literary interests. The *Canadian Jewish Chronicle* of 12 Dec. 1924 reports that she read a paper on American poets to the local Council of Jewish Women.
- 16 HV&HF 93.
- 17 HV&HF 93.
- 18 HV&HF 93.
- 19 See *Canadian Poetry Magazine*, 25.2 (Jan. 1962): 30–2; 25.3 (May 1962): 19–20; 25.5 (Nov. 1962): 17–20; 26.2 (Feb. 1963): 19–20; 26.3 (Apr. 1963): 22–3; 26.4 (Aug. 1963): 30–1.
- 20 Malca's secretary-companions, Margaret van Nooten and Mary Hagey, have stated that Malca did not enjoy this task (Margaret van Nooten, interview, 22 June 1998, and Mary Hagey, phone interview 12 July 1998). In her letter of 1 Jan. 2000, Ms. Hagey claimed that what Malca really wanted to do was write her memoirs, "the stories of the lives of the Friedman sisters."
- 21 HV&HF 96–7.
- 22 HV&HF 97.
- 23 This figure is based on a count of the poems found in her papers.
- 24 Caiserman, *Idische Dichter* 219.
- 25 Caiserman, *Idische Dichter* 210. It is likely that Ruby's manuscript, titled *Branch of My Planting*, is the one she showed to Caiserman, since most of the poems he quotes are from that manuscript.
- 26 Ruby's letter is in the Caiserman collection in the archives of the Canadian Jewish Congress. Caiserman does not appear to have had any official contact with Malca—perhaps because Malca did not begin to publish poetry until October 1947.
- 27 There are numerous accounts of the history of the Jewish community of Montreal. In addition to works by Robinson, Fuerstenberg, and Tulchinsky cited above, the following works provide background information on the rise of a Jewish literary culture in Montreal: Pierre Anctil, "Les Écrivains Juifs de Montréal." *Juifs et réalités juives au Québec*. Ed. Pierre Anctil and Gary Caldwell.

- Québec: IQRC, 1984. 197–247; Usher Caplan, *Like One That Dreamed: A Portrait of A. M. Klein*. Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1982; Saul Hayes, "Canadian Jewish Culture: Some Observations." *Queen's Quarterly* 84.1 (Spring 1977): 80–8; David Rome, "Jews in Anglophone Quebec." *The English of Quebec: From Majority to Minority Status*. Ed. Gary Caldwell and Eric Waddell. Québec: IQRC, 1982: 160–75.
- 28 In a personal interview on 8 Feb. 1999, Shulamis Yelin attributed her late start in writing in English to language dilemmas.
- 29 This is not to deny the possibility of anti-semitic bias in the CAA. In a telephone interview conducted in May 1999, the writer, Hanna Tennenhaus, reported that when the remark of a holocaust denier was left unchallenged at a CAA meeting in 1960, she left the CAA never to return.
- 30 Hyman Edelstein and Ruth Arakie Cohen are listed as members of the CAA in the September 1921 issue of *The Canadian Bookman*.
- 31 In the December 1937 issue she adopted Miriam Dorne as a pseudonym, but in the issue of December 1938 she used her maiden name of Miriam Dworkin.
- 32 Though there is no overt identification on two of the scrapbooks, Margaret van Nooten was quite certain that all three scrapbooks belonged to Malca. See Interview, 22 June 1998.
- 33 Margaret van Nooten and Mary Hagey were two of a number of young women hired by Cecil Cohen to act as secretary-companions for Malca after the death of Ruby in 1985 and the consequent breakup of the household on Côte-St-Luc Road. Both women were very fond of Malca. Ms. van Nooten's comments were recorded in a taped interview.
- 34 I am indebted to Mary Hagey for these insights into Malca's character.
- 35 *Jabberwocky* (Sarnia, ON) 3.1 (Summer 1976): 10–12; and 4.1 (Summer 1977): 5.
- 36 "Time for Singing" in *Canadian Forum* 15.175 (April 1935): 253, and "Nocturne" in *CF* 19.54 (May 1939): 54.
- 37 *Idische Dichter* 212, as translated by Abe Bogen.
- 38 Ida Seigler (c.1887–1948), edited *The Canadian Jewish Chronicle* from 1917 to 1925. A Mrs. Bernstein later succeeded her. The British-born Ruth Arakie Cohen edited the women's page of the *Winnipeg Telegram* between 1908 and 1918. Florence Cohen edited the *Canadian Jewish Review* during the 1920s.