



Sheymes: A Family Album after the Holocaust

Elizabeth Wajnberg

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The daughter of Holocaust survivors, Elizabeth Wajnberg was born in postwar Poland. Evoking the past from the present, she gathers her family's history as it moves from the prewar years through the war to their arrival in Montreal. She traces through their own voices the memories that echo and have shaped their lives to present a portrait of a family whose bonds were both soldered and sundered by their wartime experiences.

The people in this book are living sheymes - fragments of a holy book that are not to be discarded when old, but buried in consecrated ground. While embodying the world they have lost and the remnants that they carried with them, Wajnberg follows her family through their last decades. As her parents age and the author becomes their active and anxious caregiver, the book changes its perspective to accent the present - now the scene of trauma - when her parents join another demeaned group. Knowing their history, she senses that society turns away from the elderly the same way it looks away from the details of the Holocaust.

Rich with humour and Yiddish idioms, Sheymes is a compelling and beautifully written memoir. In its illumination of the legacy of the Holocaust and the universal aspect of Jewish suffering, it resonates far beyond her family.

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