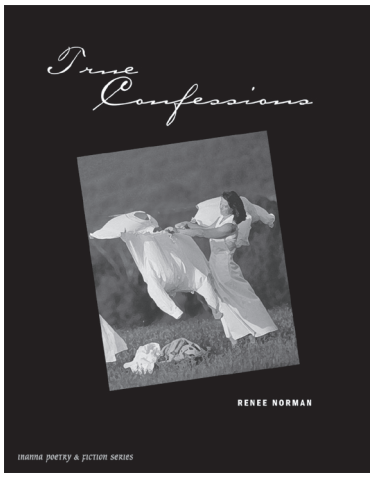
life—a passion that she has always had to deflect and hide. He is the one who taught her how she—and her new baby—could live off the land with little help from white men. It is Wioche who remains her friend and defender throughout her long life. And it is Wioche who guides her over the frozen land to Frederick Town to settle her land claims when she is without other male protection. This is a hard journey but it becomes their love tryst. Fiction? Yes, but great story-telling—and a lovely detour from the grinding facts of early emigrant experience.

Although the book is filled with action and unexpected twists of plot, and although fate seems almost to overwhelm Charlotte Taylor, we never hesitate in our belief in this life. This woman develops a will of steel because she has to: such a harsh environment demands a harsh response—especially from a "mere" woman. But finally Charlotte Taylor has established herself and her family in the most favourable acreage at Tabisintack; she loves the Point, she has secured the land here for her clan and it remains theirs to this day. "She celebrates her eighty-fifth birthday at Wishart's Point" with "more than seventy grandchildren, eight of them named Charlotte" and so the saga of this matriarch comes full circle. Back to Sally Armstrong, to "this place … not much more than a sand dune" really. It took a very strong woman to write this herstory and who better than a descendant who is herself a fearless proponent of women's rights. Sally Armstrong is another woman who did not hesitate to cross the world to give us the stories of the women of Afghanistan—not as victims but as *The Hidden Power of the Women of Afghanistan.* Charlotte, Sally, the women of Afghanistan: all powerful women—different lives, different countries, different centuries but HER stories that must be told.

Shelagh Wilkinson is University Professor Emerita, founding Director of the Centre for Feminist Research, and Coordinator Women's Studies Atkinson, 1983-2001, York University, Toronto



TRUE CONFESSIONS

Renee Norman
Toronto: Inanna Publications and Education Inc., 2005

REVIEWED BY WANDA HURREN

Renee Norman's award winning collection of poems, *True Confessions*, is a celebration of words and women. Throughout this collection, the particular in everyday events (school field trips, cooking soup at the stove, checking the doors at night to make sure they are locked) mingles with the universal, in that Norman refuses to be silent regarding the place(s) of women in a patriarchal society.

True Confessions is divided into four sections, and each begins with a black and white family photograph. The sections are organized in a way that is almost chronological, but not quite; almost seasonal, but not quite; and definitely confessional. In the opening poem from the first section, we are drawn in to the not always suppressed tensions shared between a mother and daughter. Norman calls up that crazy ambiguous positioning of being a mother with daughters of her own, yet still and also being the daughter in her mother's house (even when Norman's own daughters are present). The tensions that exist around these roles are called up: *these summer visits home are/ like waiting for the other shoe to drop*. Much of the tension seems to be located between an aging mother and daughter, and Norman writes more tenderness into the relationships with her young daughters. Yet there are also moments of tenderness located in her lines about her relationship with her mother. When she discovers her mother at the stove with her shirt on inside out (*migod, her shirt is on/ inside out*), Norman tells us, *i lift her shirt off her shoulders/ the way i undress my youngest child/ when her head is stuck/ my hands radiate/ tenderness and humour*.

A major theme present in the poems from the second section, *If I Call Myself*, is that of women and their positioning in a patriarchal society. Norman calls on her experiences as mother, daughter, student, teacher, and above all woman, to highlight society's gaze upon women, men's privileged positioning, and how middle age plays into the mix. Norman rises up in her middle age, letting us know that she no longer sits with her *feet folded under another table*, waiting for a man to ask her to dance. Within the educational world where Norman has lived as a student and teacher for many years, she champions women who go against the grain: like *fleas in the fur of university departments/ we burrow in*. Regarding the gendered inequities in the educational world, she writes of *choruses of women/ chanting the mantra of men/ between school board walls*.

Norman's third section, *When Geese Fly*, sometimes performs a type of humorous interlude in the everyday, while time passes and families age. There is also a preoccupation with death and dying in this section. Sad endings to stories and lives are recounted—this is a group of poems

that looks back, while acknowledging that life goes on. Norman calls up the inevitability of death, poetically reminding us that people die while life goes on: *they die in the middle of heat waves/ snowstorms/ … during the hour we set the clock back every fall.*

In the final section, *Giving Thanks*, Norman tells the story of how one generation grows into the next. To emphasize the circle of life, Norman's collection ends as it begins, with her mother cooking. Norman calls up the taste of mashed potatoes and crisp coleslaw, and she is gentle with her mother's spirit, wondering who at her mother's thanksgiving table *will love/ my mother's grace and endurance/ who will give thanks/ for that.*

Academically, I would recommend this book as required reading for courses that examine gender and society, as well as for courses in women's studies and creative writing. Personally, I would recommend *True Confessions* as required reading for women who can't quite articulate the feelings/knowings that are accumulating regarding their experiences as women aging in a patriarchal society; Norman manages to articulate this with tact, poignancy, a healthy measure of anger, and true poetic craft. At one point Norman muses*: i wonder how i will ever get used to moving/ in the world like a ghost/ people no longer glancing my way.…* In this first collection of poetry, which received the 2006 Helen and Stan Vine Canadian Jewish Book Award, Renee Norman is anything but ghostlike.

Wanda Hurren's writing and research focuses on issues of identity, place, and poetics. Her poetry is published in journals, books, and anthologies. She is an Associate Professor of Curriculum Studies at the University of Victoria.

ARGUING WITH THE STORM: STORIES BY YIDDISH WOMEN WRITERS

Rhea Tregebov, Ed.
Toronto: Sumach Press, 2007

REVIEWED BY SHARON POWER

As a humble collection of 14 newly translated stories by nine twentieth-century mostly North American Yiddish women writers, Arguing with the Storm provides an invaluable glimpse into the work of a talented group of writers who have been largely overlooked within the male-oriented field of Yiddish literary scholarship. It follows up on the groundbreaking first anthology of translated works by Yiddish women writers, *Found Treasures* (Second Story Press, 1994). These anthologies go beyond the academic—they are an important part of the Yiddish revival movement. As the last native Yiddish speakers are being lost, enthusiastic Yiddishists around the world regularly gather to discuss Yiddish literature and culture, ensuring that the language itself and the great literary legacy of 19th and 20th-century Yiddish writers lives on. It was out of one such group, the Winnipeg Yiddish Women's Reading Circle, inspired by *Found Treasures*, that this collection was born. In her preface outlining the anthology's evolution, Rhea Tregebov writes that their primary concern was to make the stories as broadly accessible as possible, in the hopes that other Yiddishist groups might in turn be inspired.

The anthology's title refers to a poem by Yiddish poet Rachel Korn about a mother's defiant defense of her family from an impending storm, serving as a "paradigm of courage and resistance" for the lives of the Jewish women who wrote and inhabit these stories. Many of them portray the bitter suffering of poverty, and the ways poor Jewish women struggled to sustain themselves and their children. Especially moving are "The Apple of Her Eye" by Malka Lee, set in the slums of 1920s New York, and "Little Abrahams" by Rochel Broches, set in pre-revolutionary Tsarist Russia, in which we see the hunger, isolation and bleakness of poverty through the eyes of a young child. Winding its way through these stories is the theme of a hunger which cannot be appeased. Anne Viderman's "A Fiddle" tells the tragic tale of a young Ukrainian musician's frustrated appetite for the wider world. Bryna Bercovitch's memoir recounts how she became a revolutionary in response to growing up always hungry in turn-of-the-century Ukraine. Hunger is laid bare most painfully in "A Natural Death," Paula Frankel-Zaltzman's stark portrayal of a father and daughter slowly starving to death in Latvia's Dvinsk Ghetto during World War II.

A surprising diversity of themes is represented in this small collection. Family plays a central role, especially the challenging relationships between parents and adult children. Like their more famous male counterparts, these female Yiddish authors explore the transition and incongruity between the Old World and the New, often exemplified in the vast divide which springs up between older parents and their modern, American-born children (e.g. "A Guest" by Sarah Hamer-Jacklyn). In stories written by survivors, the physical and psychological suffering of the Holocaust is a potent, devastating presence, the trauma bleeding through into the characters' lives long after the war. The strong socialist emphasis in Yiddish writing comes through in pieces with both literary and historical value, such as Frume Halpern's moralist parables portraying the costs for women who fail to live their lives by Leftist revolutionary ideals. Rounding out the collection, Rikuda Potash in "Rumiyah and the Shofar" and Sarah Hamer-Jacklyn in "No More Rabbi" also touch on religion, how Jewish women sometimes found themselves at odds with