

attempt to share Ben's experiences? Did Rosenzweig feel that the lines of communication could only be reestablished through personal contact? My sense is that her relationship with Ben is somewhat flawed, not unlike many relationships between parents and adult sons and daughters. And the author may have felt that the only way she could reach her elusive son would be through her physical presence and direct conversation with him in a location of his choosing.

A Jewish Mother in Shangri-la doesn't reveal how or why Ben becomes a Buddhist. It does describe the successful rapprochement between mother and son. Rosenzweig does not become, as Rodger Kamenetz writes in *The Jew in the Lotus*, a JUBU (a Jewish Buddhist), although she does attempt to integrate Buddhist meditation rituals into her own Judaic practices. However, Rosenzweig did not have to travel to Nepal to learn about meditation and spirituality in Judaism. Structured, externally directed meditation, (*hitbonenut* in Hebrew) and inner-directed meditation, (*hitbodedut* in Hebrew) are integral to the practice of Judaic mysticism.

Rosenzweig's narrative is a marvellous travelogue about a trek to the Himalayas, but it is also much more than that. It is the narrative of the more perilous and rewarding journey of a mother's relationship with her son.

The Bat Had Blue Eyes

Betsy Warland
Toronto: Women's Press, 1993

Reviewed by Ruth Panofsky

In this powerful collection of prose and poetry, Betsy Warland excavates the eviscerating landscape of incest. She writes as a survivor who is determined not so much to lay blame—although she does evoke the tragedy that is incest. Instead, she writes toward reconciliation with her mother and the other women in her family who have been victims of incest themselves. Driven to unearth this terrible “family secret,” Warland rightly questions whether memory can be “translated into words” (14). This is her dilemma: as a poet she knows that language cannot fully articulate the experience of incest. Yet, Warland recognizes the personal and political value that resides in language, and *The Bat Had Blue Eyes* is as much an effort to reclaim the self as it is a poetic rendering of lived experience.

In fact, the abuse at the heart of the collection and the speaker's world is not described in detail. Warland's focus on the emotional trauma engendered by incest positions the victim at the centre of her volume. The perpetrator is

a shadowy presence, a threat lurking on the periphery of each poem. The ominous power he wields in life is mastered in poems that explore the damaging legacy of incest across generations. Warland posits the need to claim that legacy as an unfortunate but inevitable link with the women in her family and, ironically and tragically, traces her matrilineage through incest.

At the core of the work is an interest in mothering: the nurture of a grandmother; the emotional distance of a mother; and the healing power of words. In fact, to write is to mother the self, and Warland undertakes to write her poems in a self-conscious effort to examine her past and explore her pain: “a woman alone . . . / making her own text / . . . words so urgent she must stop / like a rock / give herself to them” (27). The desire for actual mothering is felt across the volume. Feeling her body dominated by the male, the speaker seeks spiritual solace from women. Her therapist (unidentified but likely female) recognizes the “[s]udden pungent smell of semen on the web of my / hand, so strong, precise” (14); she claims her grandmother “was the one person i had trusted” (36); and finally, she holds her mother “in the circle of my arms” (96). The “invisible” crime of incest has the power to devastate and isolate women. Feeling herself riven—in body and in spirit—the speaker tries to reconnect with her mother, only to learn her mother was herself a victim of incest: “in my family —7 generations, a healer said” (89).

The act of writing assists in loosening the shackles of incest on the speaker’s life. As she struggles to render memory through language, knowing that “[w]ith words we begin our forgetting” (14), she moves toward celebration of that same language, source of healing and pleasure. By the end of the collection, she has found her way through a shared past to a present where she joins her lover, herself

a lover of words,
renders me speechless
drives me down to earth’s opening sound
oooOOOOOO

& I let her o let / her
return me to
mother letter. (97)