

The Wandering Womb: Essays in Search of Home

S. L. Wisenberg

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Mournful, yearning, and reflective, the essays of S. L. Wisenberg's *The Wandering Womb* wonder through Jewish women's realities in the diaspora.

Wisenberg—the descendant of Russian Jews who immigrated to the American South in the era of Jim Crow—writes about shifting identities, the loss of homelands, and the pressures of changing women's roles, both within religious traditions outside of them. Her essays are musing and melancholy, drawing universal truths from experiences as personal as a mikveh visit, summer camp stays, and vacations abroad. She reflects on fading relationships in hindsight; she addresses persistent racism in the South.

In an essay about posing as a student rushing a sorority at thirty, when she already had an MFA and publications to her name, Wisenberg asks why, “two decades after the publication of *The Feminine Mystique*, do we long to be judged on personality and looks and charm and perceived ability to attract the right kind of males? ... I still wanted to be the Queen of the Prom.” In an entry following a women's conference in Wrocław—once a center of Jewish life in Europe, where now only 300+ Jews still live—she notes that “our heritage, Jewish and female, is buried in the backyard ...[a]shes have settled over” it. And in entries about growing older, she admits to complicated takes on not being a mother: “I usually believe myself when I say I never wanted children, though I get sad that I no longer have the option.” “Up Against It,” a collection highlight, is an answer-free, poetic reckoning with dreams that have gathered dust, COVID-19, midlife changes, and the Trump presidency.

Wisenberg is an affecting guide through the nuances, joys, and complications of contemporary Jewish womanhood; *The Wandering Womb* both celebrates those identities and mourns the past pains that they reflect.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (March / April 2023)

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