

*In 1972 one of Roberta Kalechofsky's stories, "His Day Out," had the distinction of being included in Martha Foley's Best American Short Stories for that year. Despite this prestigious accolade, in the year following her work was consistently rejected by one commercial publisher after the other. In 1975, after receiving her umpteenth rejection slip, Roberta Kalechofsky and her husband, mathematician Robert Kalechofsky, decided to found their own publishing house. Thus began the Micah Press. Initially, their intention was to publish only Roberta's work. Soon, however, they opened their publishing house to the work of other undeservedly unknown writers. Since its inception, the Micah Press has earned wide recognition among small presses in the United States for the literary merit of its production and for the quality of its graphic layout.*

*As one of the participants in the round table, "Literary Creativity and the Publishing Industry," Roberta Kalechofsky shared with the other panelists her unique experience as both a peripheral publisher and a little known author. Hers was a "minority" opinion that gave voice to all the worthy American writers for whose talent the publishing system finds no space and whose resulting silence is everybody's loss. The excellence of "Myra Is Dying," the short story that Kalechofsky has given RSA Journal, is proof that the marginal position she has been forced to occupy in American letters deprives readers of a genuine, moving, highly distinctive and literary voice.*

*It is one of the most persistent epistemological tenets in American culture that if one is unemployed, this is but the consequence of one's lack of drive. Poverty is often viewed as the just punishment for one's unwillingness to put one's shoulder to the wheel. By analogy, there is a widespread tendency to assume that an unpublished writer is one that is undeserving of publication. A truly deserving writer—so goes the argument—will always, eventually, find his or her way into print.*

*Roberta Kalechofsky's case exemplifies the fallacy of the ingrained assumption that merit is destined to be rewarded.*

*One seldom comes across a contemporary American author as responsive as Roberta Kalechofsky to broad, fundamental historical issues, or as interested in investigating the complex and often undetected epistemological factors that influence human actions. Her fiction is consistently characterized by a keen sense of the diachronic forces that are at work even in the most commonplace situations. This is what lends Kalechofsky's fiction its individuality and uniqueness. Whether the setting be XVI century Spain, XIV century England or II century Rome, nearly all of Kalechofsky's novels and short stories revolve around a dramatic core created by deep-rooted historical conflicts and by the raw clash of opposing ideologies.*

*At a time when many writers feel encouraged to cater to the narrow range of interests of a mass audience, Kalechofsky's preoccupations with what lies beyond immediate awareness, her concern with the hidden elements that make up our visible reality, and her refusal to accommodate the predictable taste of a large public, constitute as many obstacles to her being considered a "commercially viable" author. This does not mean, of course, that authors with literary interests analogous to Kalechofsky's never receive positive attention on the part of commercial publishers. It does mean, however, that a "difficult" writer's lack of a track record can become a sort of white albatross hanging from the author's neck. The stigma of not being published grows to be a taint. Independently of the quality of the work, publishers shun this "loser," loath to risk where others have pulled back. The accretion of rejection slips walls the writer in, deepening the obscurity, and sealing out any hope of ever being heard.*

*It takes a real writer to continue to work under these conditions, to seek communication in the face of solid indifference — to "persist and persist and persist," as Cynthia Ozick puts it. It takes a highly motivated intellectual to keep on trying to get the message across.*

*Roberta Kalechofsky is precisely that—a real writer and a real intellectual.*

M. M.

*"Myra Is Dying" is the fourth story by Roberta Kalechofsky to be published*

in Italy. The first to be translated was "*Meditazione su un animale*," *Etica e Animali* 2 (1988). It was followed by "*Il suo giorno di libertà*," *Scrittori ebrei americani*, ed. Mario Materassi (Bompiani 1989), and by "*Riflessioni da una panchina di un parco*," *Pietraserena* 3 10/11 (Autumn-Winter 1991-92).

Roberta Kalechofsky's work include *Justice, My Brother* (Montreal: Writers' Cooperative, 1974)—her only work of fiction to have been published by other than the Micah Press; *Stephen's Passion* (1975); *Orestes in Progress* (1976); *La Hoja* (1976); *Solomon's Wisdom: A Collection of Short Stories* (1978); *Rejected Essays and Others Matters* (1980); *The Sixth Day of Creation* (1986); *Bodmin 1349* (1988).