

***Witnessing the Disaster: Essays on Representation and the Holocaust.* By Michael Bernard-Donals and Richard Glejzer eds. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003. Pp. vi + 317, ISBN 0-299-18364-5).**

Vera Mark

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[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

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***Witnessing the Disaster: Essays on Representation and the Holocaust.***  
By Michael Bernard-Donals and Richard Glejzer eds. (Madison:  
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This volume contains thirteen essays authored by a distinguished group of scholars from the humanities. Drawing from a range of cultural theorists, with frequent reference to Felman and Blanchot, the authors invoke multiple dilemmas involved in the translatability and transmission of the Holocaust as event, experience, and memory. These dilemmas are philosophical and generic: what constitutes testimony versus witness, history versus memory, non-fiction versus fiction? The generational passing of those survivors who directly experienced the Holocaust, and the consequences for memory and representation, is an important leitmotiv. While many of the authors critique the principle of "Holocaust fiction," they engage in close-grained analyses of written texts composed over the past thirty years in which the Holocaust figures directly or indirectly. The texts include Eliach, Frank, Kosinski, Bellow, Wilkomirski, and England.

Following an introduction which addresses the broader issues of witnessing and representation of the Holocaust in a range of cultural forms, the volume is divided into three parts: "The Epistemology of Witness," "Memory, Authenticity, and the 'Jewish Question,'" and "The Ethical Imperative." While the chapters work well together and echo one another in terms of themes and theoretical perspectives, they also transcend these organizational categories. This review highlights issues of concern to scholars of cultural studies and folklore. James Young's opening essay traces movements in author Art Spiegelman's hearing his father's story and his process of telling it over a period of thirteen years, from 1978 to 1991. A significant aspect of the father's narrative is suppression, for Vladek destroyed his first wife Anya's Polish-language diaries after her suicide, and thus eliminated a family text which his son longs to access. Young raises the question of genre boundaries within Holocaust fiction, a theme taken up at several points in the volume. He cites the representational struggles that emerged after the initial classification of *Maus* as fiction by the *New York Times*, and its subsequent reclassification as non-fiction, in part a response to Spiegelman's concerns with reception of his work, including among American revisionists. Richard Glejzer's essay on *Maus* considers the ontology of testimony and witnessing. Power struggles within family memory occur: Vladek claims that he never read Anya's diaries before destroying them.

In destroying the diaries, he ignored his wife's wish that their son know their contents later as an adult. However, he kept her family photographs, which provide a visual link to her family's pre-Holocaust past; Vladek has no family photographs of his own. Whose voice(s) prevail in remembering and forgetting a family/cultural memory? The question of voice and language is key to Alan Rosen's essay. Rosen decenters the narrative authority of (American) English as the vehicle for transmission of survivors' interviews, narrated originally in Hebrew, Yiddish and German. If, for some, contemporary English represents "the language of dollars," it can also provide a more neutral linguistic option through which to narrate traumatic experience. The drama of passing from one language to another, across cultural spaces, and the ensuing loss of a cultural world through English-language assimilation, is ever present.

Four essays in the volume articulate the meshing of theory and practice in teaching about the Holocaust. In Part One, Janet Alsup's essay draws from Felman's concept of secondary witnessing in examining the reception of Holocaust texts in an undergraduate English class. Alsup raises ethical questions and offers pedagogical strategies when confronted with a revisionist paper proposal submitted by a young white male student. The study of contemporary genocides can provide a means to counter younger generations' perceived "overexposure" to the Holocaust, especially among those young adults who are not direct descendents of survivors. In Part Two, Susan David Bernstein writes about the teaching of Anne Frank's diary. She asks which version to consider, what forms identification with the text and its author can take, and which intertextualities — of film, television, and Internet versions of Anne Frank's story — to incorporate into a critical reading. Her essay addresses the complex relation of scholars to mass culture: (how) can teachers draw from their students' apparent visual ease with media representations of the Holocaust, which, however, borders on oversaturation and does not involve "understanding," including familiarity with original written texts? In Part Three, David Metzger's essay argues that working back from the end provides a method and a theory for teaching the Holocaust. Truth cannot be absolute, and is situated on a continuum from fiction to history; knowledge is equally contingent. These concerns continue in the essay co-authored by Bernard-Donals and Glejzer. The power of language, especially through its naming function, is key. In teaching the Holocaust, how to reach students without repeatedly reinfllicting the trauma of secondary

witnessing? Redemption and sublimity are considered for their transcendent, but not definitive, potential.

Four essays in the volume present analysis of literary texts and hybrid genres. Sharon Oster examines issues of gender, sexuality, power and witness through two novels, one by a Polish survivor (Kosinski), the other by an American observer (Styron). A fine line exists between “reproducing the experience of horror” and “fetishizing violence,” especially when it involves men’s sexual dominance of women in fictional form. Sontag’s essay on fascinating fascism and its function in pornography is key, whereas Ozick’s separation of history from fiction calls the question of artistic license. This question appears throughout the volume: as an aesthetic object that may express a (Kantian) sublime, literature appears to be irreconcilable with lived historical experience. In Part Two, Elizabeth Bellamy’s essay underscores the multiplicity and instability of Jewish identity. Saul Bellow’s character Humboldt, a temporary faculty member at Princeton in the early 1950s, speaks no German, and sees himself as “a Yiddisher mouse in these great Christian houses.” Lyotard’s observation that Auschwitz is a sign that remains to be phrased, and Adorno’s writings on repression, disavowal and foreclosure provide theoretical frameworks through which to understand a postwar refusal to enact Jewishness. Reinhold Hill’s essay in the same section provides insights into a little studied connection between Mormons and Holocaust victims. Hill contrasts differing religious concepts of redemption and authorial attitudes, which either maximize or minimize identity differences between the two groups. Michael Bernard-Donals’ essay, which concludes Part Two, addresses the issue of authenticity through the controversy over Benjamin Wikorski, author of *Fragments: Memories of a Wartime Childhood* and his actual social identity, of Bruno Doesseker: who may speak for the Holocaust, and how? The impossibility of narration of the Holocaust is shown: in the guided tour undertaken by a survivor at the Holocaust museum in Saint Louis, and in the film “Life is Beautiful.” The slippage from fictional representations of the Holocaust to a revisionism that draws from false testimony is evoked, as is the incommensurability of the mass scale of the Holocaust and its rendering.

While all of the essays in the volume are grounded in theory deriving largely from literary studies and philosophy, the essays by Hartman and Lacapra in Part Three have theory as their focus. Geoffrey Hartman’s essay on Blanchot engages a number of key themes: the distinction

between moral and culpable; the effect of the negation of negation; the conceptualization of “malheur”; the I-Thou relation. If Hartman’s quote from Blanchot that “Parler, ce n’est pas voir” may be taken as an organizing metaphor for the volume, the question arises as to which Blanchot to evoke? In Derridean mode, is Blanchot forgiven, like de Man, for initial engagement with right-wing journals, his writings to be considered beyond/outside of history, and from a philosophical perspective of an ethics of knowing and of sentiment? The concluding essay, by Dominic Lacapra, synthesizes a number of issues addressed throughout the volume, with a discussion of Agamben and Levi. Citing Agamben’s use of etymology, Lacapra underscores the problematics of the term “the Holocaust” and cautions against an exclusively linguistic focus in theory. He also cautions against a posttraumatic repetition of conditions and binary models of representation, such as the perpetrators/victims of Levi’s grey zone. Lacapra introduces the principle of agency, of historicizing sentiment (shame), and a multiplicity of perspectives, including studies of perpetrators of the Holocaust, in a move beyond poststructuralist theoretical frameworks. The study of ethics and law provide a means through which to examine issues of responsibility and guilt within fields of academic knowledge. Lacapra provides a critical link between the current volume and future studies. In conclusion, *Witnessing the Disaster* is rich in theoretical, textual and pedagogical insights, both in the chapters themselves and in the extensive notes. Its discussions are of relevance to a broad range of scholars in the humanities, in and beyond literary studies, and serve as an important methodological guide to a cultural study of genocide.

Vera Mark  
 Pennsylvania State University  
 University Park, Pennsylvania

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***Creeping Conformity: How Canada Became Suburban, 1900-1960.*** By Richard Harris. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004. Pp. 204, ISBN 0-8020-8428-1)

Harris indicates three major themes to be covered in this book. First is the issue of suburban diversity/conformity, i.e., the demonstration of how Canadian suburbs have moved increasingly away from diversity to the stereotyped homogenous entities of today. Much of this argument is built on the continued expansion of municipal and federal housing and mortgage regulations. Second is the question of how the house and social life are connected. Harris notes that suburbs have been mostly studied by social historians and urbanists (who mainly look at social life), and by historical geographers (who focus primarily on physical structures). He argues that little work has been completed on the relation between the two, but that his work will help fill the gap. Third is attention to the dialogue between critique and advocate of suburb. This is an attempt to give a balanced interpretation of space which is generally frowned on by social theorists, to give better perspective on academic and popular biases for and against suburbs and thus reveal some of the