

child. She has much to tell us that others from her generation did not live to tell—another piece of the puzzle of Jewish history during the Holocaust. Publishers who are willing to take on survivor memoirs must provide them with the editorial support to shape their narratives and draw out their insights. Perhaps there will be no more Wiesel's and Levi's, but there are still many important stories to be told. Survivors should be encouraged—and assisted!—in their quest to speak and be heard.

Paula J. Draper  
Toronto

Grafstein, Jerry, ed. *Beyond Imagination: Canadians Write About the Holocaust*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1995. xvii+265pp.

*Beyond Imagination* brings together an eclectic group of Canadian historians, journalists, novelists, and poets, who were asked by the volume's editor to record "the Holocaust's impact on Canadians" who grew up "so far and so safely removed from the threat" of Nazism. As one might expect, the contributors who have devoted a good part of their working lives to contending with the events of the Holocaust present the most assured and interesting responses. Among these are Michael Marrus, who offers a thoughtful discussion of the historian's task, and of the difficulty of "finding the right language, expressing oneself in the right idiom" when addressing the Holocaust. Similarly, Alan Bullock—the volume's only non-Canadian—presents a detailed and revealing refutation of the strategies used by Holocaust deniers. (One might quibble that rather than importing Bullock to provide the collection's Afterword, a Canadian could have been found with suitable skills).

Equally effective in challenging the reader to think deeply about the role of the Holocaust in contemporary life, are narratives by Miriam Waddington and Morley Torgov. In these portraits of how we distance ourselves from the memory of the

War, and of how great the gap is between our own experiences and those of survivors, we are reminded that both commemoration and education about the Holocaust remain difficult and often obsessive aspects of contemporary Jewish identity. One of the pleasant surprises in *Beyond Imagination* is Larry Zolf's characteristically hammy rendering of post-war Winnipeg, which manages, in its nonchalant, upbeat tone to be more effective than some of the serious and mournful contributions gathered with it.

Although a number of the pieces in *Beyond Imagination* fail dismally at saying anything new or provocative about the way we live with the legacy of the Holocaust, we can learn important lessons from these failures. I was particularly discomfited by the tendency among a number of the writers to begin with the familiar proposition that they "hadn't earned the right" to speak, that when asked to contribute their thoughts on the Holocaust they felt they "could not do so." How can "I reflect in any meaningful way," one writer asks, "on something that did not happen to me?" Since this restriction is not placed on any other form of dialogue or self-expression—North Americans who rarely visit Israel do not feel any compunction over philosophizing about the nature of its society—one can only guess that these fitful starts are a sign of how traumatic and un-worked through the history of the Holocaust continues to be. Since none of the writers are survivors, and their editor has asked them to record the impact of the Holocaust on their generation, each is in some way equipped and entitled to carry out this task. In one particularly overblown response, a contributor writes: "The task you have set me is too awesome, too awful, and too dreadful. It is beyond expression for me and I am unable to comply." This approach presents only impasse, non-communication and dysfunction as guide-posts by which post-Holocaust Jewry can address this central event in recent history. In begging off the editor's request, this writer refers as well—using an increasingly common cliché—to the suicide of Primo Levi, suggesting that Levi's decision to jump down the

stairwell of his Turin apartment, in some way emblemizes our failure to “understand” the Holocaust. Such uncontrolled responses—at once self-assured and histrionic while pleading modesty and incomprehension—are strange, though increasingly common contributions to the dialogue concerning the effect of the Holocaust on our lives. It is rare, nowadays, to read that the Holocaust proffers knowledge about humanity, and it is almost taboo to state, as Georges Bataille did in his 1947 review of David Rousset’s *The Days of Our Death*, that the “depths of horror presents itself to human beings as the truth to discover. In other words, it is necessary for man to learn, beyond his normal state, the faraway limit of the possible.”

Since we live now, not only in the aftermath of Auschwitz, but also in the shadow of the Rwandan genocide and the Cambodian and Balkan killing fields, it may well be time to stop speaking of these acts as being “beyond belief,” as “incredible” and “incomprehensible.” Primo Levi’s remarkable voice was not, in the broader context of his work, characterized by an inability to address his experiences directly. In the preface to his first book, *If This Is a Man* (1958), he writes dispassionately of his motivation to “furnish documentation for a quiet study of certain aspects of the human mind.”

There can be no doubt that we all find a unique personal frame through which to view the events of the War. For some this frame is tempered by professional concerns, such as, in Michael Marrus’s words, the historian’s responsibility to “get it right,” or in Irving Layton’s poetic challenge to his sons, by the ideal of Zionist heroism. A number of the writers in *Beyond Imagination* feel bound to the events of the Holocaust by the memory of relatives who were lost. And for others, the absence of connection, the very silence and evasion of the subject they experienced as youths in prosperous post-war Canadian homes, is the prism through which they were forced to come to terms with the War. The strength of *Beyond Imagination* is in this eclectic mix of different points of view, through which we gain a portrait of the varied responses of a generation of Canadians

born shortly before the War, and for whom the Holocaust continues to be a troubling touchstone.

Norman Ravvin  
Concordia University

Lavertu, Yves. *L'Affaire Bernonville, le Québec face à Pétain et à la Collaboration (1948-1951)*. Montréal: VLB éditeur, 1994. 217p.(=Lavertu, Yves. *The Bernonville Affair: A French War Criminal in post-WW II Quebec*. Trans. by George Tombs. Montreal: R. Davies, 1995. 154pp.)

*L'affaire Bernonville, le Québec face à Pétain et à la Collaboration (1948-1951)* d'Yves Lavertu est un ouvrage original. Il traite d'un aspect de l'histoire récente du Québec qui ne semble guère intéresser les historiens. Par l'utilisation presque exclusive de documents d'archives, complétée par quelques interviews, Lavertu nous présente les réactions des faiseurs d'opinion de l'époque face à des questions comme Pétain et la collaboration, de Gaulle et la résistance mais, encore plus, les raisons de ces réactions : vision du Québec, rôle des Anglais, importance de l'immigration, etc. Sa description de l'atmosphère de l'après-guerre comble un vide, ses explications laissent le lecteur sur sa faim.

L'affaire Bernonville n'aurait pas existé s'il ne s'était trouvé au Québec un groupe d'individus prêt à tout pour sauver un Français, Bernonville, collaborateur de l'occupant nazi. Lavertu ne s'attarde pas sur le personnage mais sur l'activité suscitée au Québec par sa venue au pays. Bernonville, travaillant pour Vichy, chargé d'affaires au Commissariat aux questions juives pour le Maroc (p. 23), engagé dans la Milice (p. 24), prêtant serment à Hitler, payé par les Waffen-SS (p. 25), faisant la chasse aux résistants (pp. 26-31) n'est qu'un de ces nobles Français qui ont sombré dans la trahison et le nazisme. Son action n'a pas empêché l'Église catholique de déployer des trésors d'ingéniosité pour le sauver, lui et maints autres. Lors de