
BOOK REVIEWS/COMPTES RENDUS

Deutsch, Mina. *Mina's Story: A Doctor's Memoir of the Holocaust*. Toronto: ECW Press, 1994. 185pp.

To write a Holocaust memoir is to pit one's skills against the insights, depth of language, and impact of Elie Wiesel and Primo Levi. If one is to so judge all the autobiographies that have followed, few would have seen the light of publication. For decades, survivors' manuscripts have flooded the desks of publishers with little success. Some have been printed by survivors for their families and friends, or as fund-raising efforts for institutions of Holocaust remembrance and education. But most remain unpublished. For the reviewer to admit that perhaps that is how it should remain, can only seem cruel. For every voice deserves to be heard. Survivors should write, and institutions, libraries and archives should encourage and collect these memoirs. The challenge is how can one address them in a critical manner. When so few are commercially viable, what criteria can be utilized to create documents that will shed new light on the text of survival?

Dr. Mina Deutsch has written just such a problematic memoir. She recounts her life story, from her childhood in Galicia in a middle class Jewish family, through medical school in Prague where she met her husband, to the birth of their daughter in 1939. She devotes tremendous detail to the two years of Soviet occupation, then outlines their time hiding in the Ukrainian countryside among farmers and in a bunker hidden

inside a potato cellar and chicken coop. The first year of Liberation under Soviet rule and the uncertainty of continuing war is also recounted, followed by their escape to Austria and eighteen months in DP camps. They arrived in Canada in 1948 to join her brother. The rest of the volume catalogues the many geographic moves and tribulations of this immigrant physician couple, as well as their accomplishments and the education of their only child, Eva. It ends with a detailed account of Leon Deutsch's failed battle with cancer, a list of their grandchildren's educational achievements, and a photo gallery.

There is much of value in this account, yet the gaps are glaring. Accounts of hiding and passing are less published than memoirs of the Camps. Survivors who hid can provide insights into the motivations and behaviour of their rescuers as well as bystanders. Yet *Mina's Story* focuses all its detail around her actual Holocaust story. Where most accounts skip over the two years of Soviet occupation and the anarchy of the last year of the war in the liberated East, most of this volume is devoted to those periods. The lack of almost any dates in the book make it difficult to determine just how long the Deutsch's spent in hiding and, with the exception of a few sentences, there is almost no examination of the emotional effects of this kind of survival. It is made clear that they were able to pay for their rescue, but there is no discussion of the relationships they had with the variety of people who assisted them.

Indeed from the outset it is evident that this is the dispassionate and clinical retelling of a physician's life—even the recollections of Mina's WWI childhood are told in the detailed and meticulous manner of a scientist. Yet the details are oddly uninformative. We learn the names of family, and their fates, but little of their personalities or of Jewish life in general. And this lack of insight also applies to the author's own narrative. We learn nothing about her nature, nor that of her husband, despite the incessant facts. Nor do we have any sense of the larger Holocaust story and how Jewish community responded. Without this context the memoir floats in a vacuum. Only when

she writes about her daughter, growing up in fear and whispers, does the story encourage the reader's empathic ear.

Survivors often focus their writing and oral testimonies on the years of direct persecution. Hungarian survivors may only speak of the one year of German occupation, ignoring the rest of the war period. Although this family's years under Nazi rule are thinly sketched, this memoir does offer specific information about the years surrounding their hiding experience. Therein lies its historical value. This volume adds to the literature by describing the uncertainties of life for Polish Jews under Soviet rule, tensions which resurfaced with Liberation. There are also comments on the local populations, both in Ukraine and during their return stay in Poland. The author outlines incidents which indicate the hostility of the local populations to Jews, as well as the random murder of Jewish survivors after Liberation. Poles are called "those murderers" and the term "antisemitic Poland" is also used. This blatant ethnic stereotyping is our only glimpse into the anger of this survivor. Likewise, the occasional reference to her "depression" for surviving when most of her family perished, is the sole crack we are permitted to see in Mina's complex emotional makeup. There is no discussion of faith or mourning, just as there is not one comment on how Mina's experiences affected her familial relationships and her integration into Canadian society. And, despite her husband's role creating psychiatric profiles of seven hundred Canadian survivors who filed for restitution, the wider elements of the Holocaust are absent from the narrative.

When survivors are interviewed they invariably try to rush through the painful experiences of the Holocaust. As soon as the narrative reaches Liberation, they relax. They begin to outline every event, every move in minute detail. The role of the interviewer is to guide them through the retelling—to ensure all aspects of the narrative are given due weight. Every survivor can be interviewed, yet few can write. Mina Deutsch needed an editor to be her guide. Here is a member of the oldest group of survivors, who came through the Holocaust with a

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.

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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