

Studies in 20th & 21st Century Literature

Volume 46
Issue 1 *Special Focus: Migration Narratives in Europe*

Article 10

February 2022

**Erin McGlothlin, Brad Preger, and Markus Zisselsberger, editors.
The Construction of Testimony: Claude Lanzmann's Shoah and Its
Outtakes. Wayne State UP, 2020.**

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Recommended Citation

Williamson, Michael (2022) "Erin McGlothlin, Brad Preger, and Markus Zisselsberger, editors. The Construction of Testimony: Claude Lanzmann's Shoah and Its Outtakes. Wayne State UP, 2020.," *Studies in 20th & 21st Century Literature*: Vol. 46: Iss. 1, Article 10. <https://doi.org/10.4148/2334-4415.2206>

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Erin McGlothlin, Brad Preger, and Markus Zisselsberger, editors. *The Construction of Testimony: Claude Lanzmann's Shoah and Its Outtakes*. Wayne State UP, 2020.

Abstract

Review of Erin McGlothlin, Brad Preger, and Markus Zisselsberger, editors. *The Construction of Testimony: Claude Lanzmann's Shoah and Its Outtakes*. Wayne State UP, 2020. 495 pp.

Keywords

Holocaust, film, archive

Erin McGlothlin, Brad Preger, and Markus Zisselsberger, editors. *The Construction of Testimony: Claude Lanzmann's Shoah and Its Outtakes*. Wayne State UP, 2020. 495 pp.

Since its release in 1985, Claude Lanzmann's 550-minute film, *Shoah* (1985), has presented scholars in the field of Holocaust (or *Khurbn*) studies with far more opportunities than impediments. Most impediments are logistical. Should instructors present the entire film or selected parts of an epic project that depends on full immersion for its effects? McGlothlin, Preger, and Zisselsberger's collection of essays, *The Construction of Testimony: Claude Lanzmann's Shoah and Its Outtakes*, provides an excellent solution to this problem by considering a range of methodologies—from film theory to archive theory to language theory, to feminist theory—to explore the relationship between Lanzmann's finished film and the footage not included in the edited final version. Each essay explores elements from the massive archive of outtakes not included in *Shoah*, comprising 220 hours of film carefully curated and restored by Regina Longo during her tenure as the film and video archivist at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The results of these explorations are all illuminating. Lanzmann expected his strategically edited filming of survivor, witness, and perpetrator testimony to create a series of conduits for representing the liminal spaces between death, memory, and the afterlife of intense feeling. In doing so, he focused on shame, guilt, unfinished mourning, and painful recollection. By uncovering a much less systematic and diverse emotional, psychological, and intellectual range of testimonies, this collection of essays thinks critically about Lanzmann's aims. Whereas Lanzmann focused obsessively on emotional responses to the machinery of death, the single voice bearing witness to the unbearable and subsuming the viewer into a collective experience of disaster, *The Construction of Testimony* brings forward a wide range of Jewish literary, historical, religious, and linguistic contexts for witnessing.

Lanzmann was notoriously indifferent to, even hostile towards, those contexts. He had no interest in narratives of survival and emigration, and his main focus was on death camps rather than work camps. He insistently pushed witnesses to avoid mentioning their lives (and the lives of their families and friends) during the massive disruptions to Jewish life between 1938 and 1942, especially the mass murder of Jews in the forests of the Ukraine, Lithuania, and Belorussia. In contrast, one of the best studies of witness testimony in the field, Hannah Pollin-Galay's *Ecologies of Witnessing: Language, Place, and Holocaust Testimony* (2018), focuses on the extent to which Jewish ways of living and modes of thinking were modified, but not necessarily destroyed, by the mass trauma of the Holocaust.

Lanzmann wanted to make the experience of utter abjection universal, and he used film as a medium to splice together and stage scenes of testimonial memory with this essentialized notion of Jewish experience in mind. The twelve well-argued

essays in *The Construction of Testimony* seek to restore specific forms of agency and complexity to witnesses whose Jewishness was erased by Lanzmann's universalism. Working against attempts to fit the Holocaust into Western and Central European self-mythologizing, the volume argues persuasively in favor of contingency and contiguity as methodologies for studying Holocaust testimony. The outtakes from *Shoah* serve as a repository that works against the obsessive control and discipline that Lanzmann exercised over his interviewees and over the process of editing their words.

An excellent introduction by McGlothlin and Prager explains how the archive became available to scholars and teachers. An illuminating coda by Longo explores how the archivist, as a "secondary witness" to testimony, comes to terms with the "bewitching quality" of Lanzmann's artistry as a filmmaker (416). An appendix "Guide to the Outtakes" will stimulate future researchers, and an excellent bibliography of works on Lanzmann ensures that this research will be rooted in a tradition of response.

Every essay makes a significant and resonant argument. Some are theoretical in excitingly resonant ways. Sue Vice overturns Foucauldian assumptions about the "malign" shaping power of the archive" by arguing that while "the idea of the archive might seem to shut down debate, that of the outtake enables proliferation" (78). Vice's emphasis on proliferation can also serve as an organizing principle for the entire volume. In essay after essay, we see how an analysis of the outtakes from *Shoah* give voice to the living and to their vibrant presence in the world. Languages that Lanzmann suppressed in the film emerge from obscurity. Lanzmann's translators, all women, become important agents whose transmission of knowledge, once revealed, frays the imposition of order on his performance as an editor. Three especially strong essays explore the presence of women, rendered largely invisible in Lanzmann's final film, in the outtakes: Debarati Sanyal (on the gendering of testimony and the testimonial body of the mother), Markus Zisselberger (on the differences between male and female paradigms of survival), and Leah Wolfson (on women's performance of songs). Essays on translation are also strong, especially Gary Weissman's piece on the differences between testimonies in Hebrew and Lanzmann's spliced French translations and Dorota Glowacka's chapter on translations of Polish exchanges in crowd scenes that Lanzmann's editing practices rendered incomprehensible.

Scholars and students (graduate and undergraduate) interested in film, Holocaust studies, translation theory, trauma theory, and communications will gain a great deal from this book, particularly since it spans the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. So too will anyone interested in Jewish Studies, although a few of the book's missed opportunities stem from an inattentiveness to the ways in which Jewish historical memory is so often structured by religious discourses, especially mysticism. One hopes for another collection of essays on the presence of the sacred

and of Jewish religious life in Lanzmann's outtakes. In a superb essay on outtakes featuring Benjamin Murelstein, for example, Jennifer Cazenave sets up a contrast between Lanzmann's dominant mythologizing mode and Murelstein's complex and learned references to mystical Jewish legends and folktales. The content of Murelstein's mystical self-contextualization within Jewish literary and cultural traditions is missing, but Cazenave has ably opened up new areas of inquiry for future scholars. With dexterity and creative panache, *The Construction of Testimony* takes Lanzmann to task using equal parts respect and defiance, showcasing the significance of his artistic construction of an aesthetics of death and mourning while opening up new modes of understanding how narratives of resilience and survival structure and construct testimony.

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