

## Response Page

The following response was posted on the H-France discussion list in response to Katherine Roseau's review of Ida Grinspan and Bertrand Poirot-Delpech, *You've Got to Tell Them: A French Girl's Experience of Auschwitz and After*.

Roseau's original review is located at *H-France Review* Vol. 19 (June 2019), No. 86:  
<http://www.h-france.net/vol19reviews/vol19no86roseau.pdf>.

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I know that we are encouraged to view "faults" with the works, to give balanced, not all sunny reviews, but as I read them in this report, I wonder whether it was called for in a witnessing book of autobiographical experience. It seems that Katherine Roseau subtly wrote them as "criticisms" to bring out a poignant dimension to the (naïve?) imperative that was honoured "to tell them".

1. As a journalist, Bertrand Poirot-Delpech was used to guiding public response perhaps out of fear (but also out of experience?) that without such guidance, the report might fall on unreceptive ears, or plainly indifferent ears—those of collaborators, of their families, of a number of people that might be actually anti-jewish. The mild form of disassociation is the one of the good gentle hostess who nevertheless informed Ida as a child that "Jews killed Jesus" to guide her reception of the Holocaust that her scattered family lived under. The less mild forms are the flare ups of anti-Jewish sentiments that make the front pages of the news today in Paris and elsewhere, accompanied by the denial that anti-jewish sentiments are alive and well in French society for instance. Poirot-Delpech's attempt to guide the sentiments of the readers is probably futile indeed, but given the "pedagogical" aim of the book, and since it is not really a matter of an intellectual "opinion" that we are free to come to by ourselves, but essentially an emotional appeal to feel empathy, to see history through the eyes of a young girl, I am not certain what a less guided or "dramatised" report could hope to yield anything at all. At this point in time, the reception of WWII and of the Holocaust is incredibly distant (a matter of antiquity concerning anthropology) for students in their early twenties, unless one of their great/grand-fathers or a distant great uncle was remembered by the family.

2. Given the observations of 1, and the observation that adult teacher most benefited by the guided tours Ida Grinspan gave to children visiting Auschwitz, it is clear that the book problematises its intended readership. Children are not mature enough to empathise and draw conclusions from their information. Their reception of the book must unfold in time. Adult readers have their mind mostly made up, and it may be a strange choice to seek further information on the Holocaust through a

book destined for children, destined to raise a feeling of solidarity in children for what happened to a child of the past. The older generation (now disappearing) may have been curious to see what happened to the children that they saw leave, that they helped, or that they helped leave, to assuage their feelings of guilt, because they need to know, because they feel the duty to witness and see the continuation of those traumatic days in their village, because they want to see how responsibility falls. (By the way Ida Grinspan was vague about her tattoo number, it does not look like there was a rush of eager listeners for her experience among her contemporaries). From Ida's point of view she was fulfilling a duty by telling the story she had the mission to tell. The book is leaving her testimony for future generations to read if they care to, or when they need to, when history repeats itself—as suggested by the diverse forms of massacres mentioned by Katherine Roseau.

PS. I would not have answered except the authors are dead...

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