Fuchs, Esther (editor). *Women and the Holocaust: Narrative and Representation*. Studies in the Shoah, Vol. XXII. Lanham, New York, Oxford: University Press of America, 1999.

Reviewed by Robyn Sassen, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa

It was only in the 1970s in the west that academic extrapolation of the Holocaust became a gendered activity. Of course this important awareness happened alongside many other challenges to male hegemonic structures of telling and creating in a vast array of disciplines: Feminism was the catchword underlying all that our bruised western world had undergone, and represented one of the means of accessing it from a completely different angle.

By the same token, in doing so within the auspices of popular culture, it brought its own sense of ideological values which romanticised much of Holocaust narrative for the contemporary consumer, giving the woman victim an often glossy sense of prominence in Holocaust narrative, which belied so much of the terrible details as have been traced and recorded by victims themselves, and negated the importance of the ordinary woman-in-the-street, who was neither more beautiful nor more accomplished than anyone else, but who was also confronted with, and murdered by Holocaust realities. Consequently, it was only during the 1980s and 1990s that publishers began to acknowledge the dearth of real women's voices and creative gestures in recounting the devastation of Holocaust experiences.

Significantly, in her introduction to this anthology, Esther Fuchs comments that the neglect of this acknowledgement represents the dismissal of

> one of the most lethal weapons of Nazi propaganda and persecution. The Nazis produced an ideology of both racist and sexist supremacy … to ignore misogyny is to remain oblivious to the profundity of [the Nazis'] … anti-Semitism and anti-humanism (p. ix).

This critical schism is precisely what *Women and the Holocaust* addresses. Not only is an understanding of the historical facts of the Holocaust central to an understanding of the artistic and factual accounts woven around it, but it's the presence of the women whose voices are being heard or read, some for the first time ever on a public platform, that is so relevant. It's a physically small book, but its size belies its span and the type of issues it raises which are potent as well as contemporary. Comprising eleven chapters, this modest anthology is clearly written and concisely edited.

Rather than aiming at being a comprehensive foray into theoretical Holocaust feminism, this book offers clear focuses into a wide diversity of aspects of the larger field, overturning preconceptions and ideological myths: from theses as controversial as a questioning of Anne Frank's sexual proclivities (R. Amy Elman: 14), to examining pregnancy as a politically defiant gesture (von Kellenbach: 21-32); or from addressing incisive feminist critiques of the theories that inform Holocaust film (Baron: 89-96 and Fuchs:

97-112), to analysing language to express devastation from a sociological perspective (Lentin 47-62); or from extrapolating on the debate of religious ownership of Edith Stein (Garber: 1-8), to critiquing selected poems by Nobel laureate Nelly Sachs, for example; these papers analyse, expose, question and challenge values imposed upon the 'nameless' women Holocaust victims as well as the ones with an intact and time-hewn intellectual or creative reputation.

Using literature, film critique and the diarised and as yet untranslated records of the memories of Margaret Engle Keat (translated and edited by Phillipa Kafka) and Zila Fuks (translated and edited by Esther Fuchs) to inform their arguments, these essays are by and large, lively and convincing pieces. That said, this wide diversity could also be seen in a negative light: the focus of the anthology is on women, but not on a particular mindset representative of women's expression, and for this reason, it may be perceived as confronting too wide a readership.

Consequently, the overall focus is not always even, as is the copy-editing of this book. The effect of the former serves to enrich the reading of the text in view of the multitude of levels and angles propagated by and about women in the Holocaust, on the one hand, while on the other, it raises unanswerable questions as to the role of certain papers in the broader intention of this publication. The latter, unfortunately, mars the smooth readability of this book.

But on the whole, in editing and compiling this anthology, Fuchs has brought to fruition a book that will serve the general Holocaust or feminist scholar interestingly. It will also be of value to an array of lay readers – from the reader with theoretical or feminist interests in Holocaust narrative, to the reader for whom personal biography has relevance.