



# **On the Defensive: Reading the Ethical in Nazi Camp Testimonies (University of Toronto Romance Series)**

*Sharon Marquart*

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**On the Defensive: Reading the Ethical in Nazi Camp Testimonies (University of Toronto Romance Series) Sharon Marquart**

*On the Defensive* considers how our ethical responses to the Nazi camps have unintentionally repressed and denied the experiences of their victims. Through detailed readings of survivor narratives, particularly the works of political deportees Jorge Semprun and Charlotte Delbo, Sharon Marquart examines how well-intentioned people – including victims, their family members, and readers of witness literature – respond to such testimony in ways that are understood as ethical by their communities but serve instead to ignore victims' experiences.

As Marquart shows, collective disasters such as the Holocaust expose the limitations of our ethical theories. To cope with this instability we withdraw and defend ourselves through inattentive and formulaic responses that turn a blind eye to the plight of victims. Challenging contemporary theorizations of community, ethics, testimony, and trauma, *On the Defensive* is a far-reaching reflection on the ways in which communal understandings of our duties and responsibilities to others can facilitate the denial of an atrocity's horrors.

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