

The Hermeneutics of Darkness: Interpreting Perpetrators on their Crimes

Schiff, Brian ⁰

⁰ American University of Paris, France

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ABSTRACT

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In this paper, I give a close reading to Gitta Sereny's (1974/1983) *Into that Darkness: An Examination of Conscience* and her account of the memories and reflections of Franz Stangl on his participation in the murder of the handicap, the mentally ill and Jews. Sereny's account is far-reaching—based upon over 70 hours of interviews with Stangl himself and many others. Although Stangl's actions, and reflections on these actions, is the ostensible fulcrum of her investigation, she provides us with a complex way of contextualizing Stangl in a personal history, his immediate social relationships and within an evolving system of historical-cultural meanings.

Following Sereny, I present a way of understanding Stangl's involvement that focuses on understanding of his reflections on his actions during the Shoah. But, I also question some of the assumptions inherent in Sereny's characterization of moral action and present a way of thinking through presumptions of perpetrator guilt and conscience from a broader perspective.

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