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Leo Kuntz Dieckmann, Leopoldine Kuntz, GÖÂ¶tz Dieckmann, eds. Hannelore. *Albert Kuntz: "Liebste Ellen ...": Briefe aus der Nazi-Haft 1933 bis 1944.* Berlin: Karl Dietz Verlag, 2005. 310 pp. EUR 14.90 (paper), ISBN 978-3-320-02063-7.

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Letters from the Nazi Penal System

This volume reprints in their entirety the 238 letters written by Albert Kuntz to his wife and son during his twelve years of imprisonment between 1933 and 1944. Kuntz was a high official of the Communist Party during the end of the Weimar Republic and had become a target of Nazi denunciations and threats in the years prior to his arrest. During an altercation in the Prussian state parliament, of which he was an elected representative, he had even been stabbed by a fascist member. Within Berlin city politics, his counterpart was Joseph Goebbels. Kuntz was among those who were arrested during the initial round-ups following the elections that brought the National Socialists to power. Once arrested, he was never released from prison.

The letters in this collection are grouped according to the various prisons, detention centers and concentration camps in which Kuntz was held. Following his arrest, he was subjected to severe beatings and torture. His apartment was ransacked and plundered and his wife and seven-year-old son were forced to live with relatives. His wife, Ellen, was also arrested and held incognito for a month, during which time her son was placed in an orphanage. She was unable to find work for a considerable period of time, and because she was under surveillance, she was avoided by other party members and their families and thus lived a highly isolated existence. There were further house searches and visits at work, measures that reinforced the family's isolation from neighbors and colleagues.

Kuntz was finally tried after a detention period of six months. Even though he was acquitted, a new trial was opened against him, this time for allegedly murdering a police officer during a demonstration in 1931. Acquitted again, he was placed into protective custody due to his political beliefs and later sentenced to eighteen months for treason. By this time, he began to realize he would never be released. Kuntz was an active participant and leading organizer of political networks and resistance movements that helped mitigate some of the prisons' more brutal aspects. During the early years of his detention, he improved his craft skills (he was a coppersmith by trade) by borrowing books from the prison library, and he was able to transform himself into a valued prisoner. This development, too, contributed to his ability to survive as long as he did within the penal system. During the six years he spent at Buchenwald, he served as an officially appointed Kapo and used his position to further the internal resistance. In the end, however, his political activities brought him to the attention of the authorities once too often, and he was beaten to death a few months before the end of the war.

The introductions to each set of letters provide much information on Kuntz, his legal status and the development of the system of prisons and concentration camps through which Kuntz was dragged. Particularly in the early years, the Nazis circumvented the legal system without destroying it entirely, and these circumstances help explain Kuntz's own trajectory through this system. The letters themselves, however, move on an altogether

different terrain. Kuntz was not allowed to write about prison conditions, the horrors he witnessed, deprivations to which he was subjected or political events. Only family matters were a permitted topic of discussion. Even the number of letters he wrote or received was strictly controlled, with limits of two per month. Kuntz's letters are exceedingly tender and full of appreciation for the letters and packages of food and clothing he received from his wife. Over and over again, he refers to the sacrifices he knows these have cost her. He often worries about his son, whom he had last seen when the child was seven. Towards the end of the correspondence he had been drafted into the fascist armed forces. The letters maintain a level of optimism and emotional evenness remarkable for the circumstances in which they were written.

Letters from Kuntz's wife are occasionally quoted in footnotes. Their inclusion might have provided the collection with more dialogue and context. Kuntz's letters are personal but also repetitive. For Kuntz, they were a means to maintain contact in circumstances which prevented anything but the most direct of comments between him and his family. The book's editors include Kuntz's son, and one senses that in some fundamental and yet unarticulated ways, this is a book about the preservation of the past. As a collection, there are simply too many letters to be accompanied by so little commentary about the letters themselves. In the otherwise informative and helpful introductions to the volume and to each of its sections, the editors still blame the Social Democrats for the rise of fascism and find it necessary to assert that "neither the Russian October Revolution nor the Communist Parties and their International can be burdened with the responsibility for this *primal catastrophe*" (p. 7, emphasis in original). This remark, too, suggests that neither on the personal level nor in the ideological domain have the experiences and emotions so poignantly conveyed and expressed in the letters been fully worked through.

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