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Martha Kent. *Eine Porzellanscherbe im Graben: Eine deutsche Fluechtlingskindheit.* Bern: Scherz Verlag, 2003. 336 pp. EUR 19.90 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-502-18390-7.

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An Exploration of the Inner Landscape of Experience

In the first months of 1945, as the Red Army swept through the countries of Eastern Europe and the provinces of Eastern Germany, Soviet troops, as well as native populations and militias exacted revenge on ethnic Germans and German nationals. While many Germans had already fled ahead of the advancing Soviet Army, millions of *Reichs*- and *Volksdeutsche* remained in East and West Prussia, Silesia, Pomerania, the Sudetenland, and in pockets throughout Central and Eastern Europe. Whereas some of the Germans who remained were randomly rounded up and expelled, hundreds of thousands of Germans either ended up in internment facilities, performed forced labor on farms, or were deported to distant parts of the Soviet Union, where they worked in labor camps. In postwar Poland many camps and other types of facilities existed for the purposes of housing Eastern Germans. Gradually the Polish authorities centralized the interned Germans in six main facilities: Glaz, Milecin, Potulitz, Gronowo, Jaworzno, and Sikawa. In time Potulitz became the central administrative camp for housing interned Germans. Generally by 1950, these Germans were placed on transports that brought them to facilities near the German-Polish border, where authorities processed them and determined their final destination within the new Germanies.

In *Eine Porzellanscherbe im Graben: Eine deutsche Fluechtlingskindheit* the Polish-born neuropsychologist Martha Kent described her experiences as an ethnic German child interned in the camp Potulitz/Potulice near Bromberg (now Bydgoszsc in Poland). In March 1945, when Kent was five years old, the family was taken into captivity near the city of Bromberg. Despite difficulties, the parents and children were able to remain together as forced laborers on a farm. Then two years later, they were separated and moved to different locations and labor camps; at this time, at the age of seven, Kent moved to Potulitz. These experiences constituted many of her first memories and defined her perceptions as a child. Potulitz and captivity were all she had known. It formed the core of her worldview. In the introduction, Kent stated that "the lack of freedom (*Unfreiheit*) was my world, it was the place I came from" (p. 10). Consequently, although she wrote her biography decades later, the portion of the book that deals with Potulitz is the most vivid, and her experiences there were clearly the most formative ones

of her life.

The experience of internment as witnessed by a child who perceived captivity as a normal state of existence is perhaps the most fascinating aspect of this biography. Kent explained that Potulitz constituted her *Heimatdorf* and suggested "for us the camp was the normal place where we children experienced our youth" (p. 10). She describes in a very open, child-like fashion, and without even a hint of bitterness, the lice, diseases, living conditions, interactions with other prisoners and guards, and the fact that death was such a common experience in the camp that when her mother was sent away for several months to perform hard labor at a prison, Kent was certain she had died and would never be seen again. She describes her perception at the time: "If people disappeared, then they were dead. Whoever was dead, never came back" (p. 73). Remarkably, despite the living and working conditions, the separation of almost all family members, and the efforts of local authorities to claim the children as Polish, Kent's immediate family not only survived the experience, but even managed to stay in contact and leave Poland together in summer 1949.

In a refugee processing facility in Thuringia and then in Trutzhain (Hesse), Kent experienced freedom, something that for her was completely unknown. Kent's perceptions of the time were colored by the innocence of childhood and by her discovery of the world outside of captivity. She stated: "What was poverty when we had more potatoes than we ever had in captivity? Why should one be ashamed when every day the earth offered new snails, beetles, and rain worms?" (p. 98). Kent's mother had a different view of the situation they faced, and complained that they had gone from being *Volksdeutsche* to being simply refugees, a term that for many local Germans connoted outsiders who would never belong. According to Kent, her mother said "we are refugees–is that a crime–do we bear all the guilt for everything? It's like a whip, only you lose count of the welts on your back." The difficulties faced by a refugee family in postwar Germany sometimes led to migration. For Martha Kent's family, the possibility to migrate was made feasible by an uncle who lived in Canada.

The section of Kent's biography focused on Canada is largely a retelling of her school experiences, which were anything but average or "normal." She felt fundamentally like a conspicuous outsider. She described her problems with the new language, her introduction to new things like bananas, the round and full faces of the large, well-developed children, and the abundance of things like books and food. Kent's internment experiences and her immigrant status made her feel as though she would never belong in this new and unfamiliar world.

Eventually Kent moved to the United States, where one of her sisters lived, and studied literature, psychology and neuropsychology at universities. In this section of her biography she describes meeting her future husband, university life during the 1960s, witnessing American cultural and political developments during this tumultuous decade, and the necessity of maintaining a certain silence about most of her childhood. During this time, even when speaking to her husband, she only related the basic facts about her childhood in the internment camp and her role as outsider while a refugee child, and then as a German immigrant in Canada.

It was after working with a patient with serious and disfiguring injuries that Kent had a sort of breakdown and herself entered an extensive period of attending to her inner world. This section of her biography describes how she lost her language for herself and her life, and how she gradually found it. In her experience she recognized the neurobiology of bonds in captivity, their destruction in freedom, and the restoration of her inner self. Kent described the process of working through her lost language, using old letters, books, and even internet searches to assist her in dealing with the taboo subject and to help her to come to terms with the inability to express her inner world. "Even mentioning Potulitz would cause friends, friends whom I valued and who wanted only the best for me, to react negatively. They assumed that the people who instigated the war and made National Socialism possible–the Germans–did not have the right, due to collective guilt, to speak of their own suffering" (p. 296). Through writing about her experiences, she was able to explore the bonds that helped her through her internment and were missing in her post-Potulitz world. Eventually, in 1998, Kent traveled to Potulitz to attend a commemoration at the location of the camp.

The subject of the internment of Eastern German civilians in Poland or in the Soviet Union has not been widely examined by historians. In part, historians may have avoided the subject due to a lack of sources; unless one looks to interviews or memoirs, few available sources deal with the internment and forced labor of German civilians. Kent's autobiography is therefore one of only a few that historians would find useful if they were interested in an examination of this topic. Furthermore, Kent's autobiography deals with a subject–German internment and displacement at the end of and following

World War II–that truly does cause many people, especially German historians, to bristle. Kent rejects the categorization of her work as an autobiography of a German refugee child; she suggests instead that this book describes her childhood in captivity. In fact, the title of her original English-language manuscript did not even contain the words "refugee" or "German." The title she gave her work was "Children of the Magnificent Earth: On Captivity and Learning to be Free." (The current subtitle of the translation, *Eine deutsche Fluechtlingskindheit*, was selected by her publisher as a means of categorizing this work.) Her purpose in writing this book was clearly not to describe Potulitz or focus on the suffering endured by the Germans interned there. She is a neuropsychologist interested in exploring human bonds, connectedness, and the forces that help people survive extreme experiences.

It must be noted, however, that only one third of this book deals with Kent's experiences in Potulitz. This book also has value due to the author's straightforward descriptions of being a refugee and outsider, first in Hesse and then as an immigrant in Canada. Moreover, a large section of the book details the author's experiences struggling with her past, her memories, and her loss of speech and finding language and her voice. In the epilogue, Kent described her efforts in this book "as a search for a language and an exploration of the inner landscape of experience" (p. 329). Indeed, in large part, the value of this book for historians relates to this process of describing the "inner landscape of experience." Through the reviewer's correspondence with Kent, she explained why this inner landscape was so important to her: "It is because I lost my language, because I want to know what destroys people internally, what keeps them well, how can I restore my inner self, what is really essential to life–I seemed to have had it in captivity and to have lost it so drastically in freedom. The astonishing answer is bonds, affiliation, love. In the end, it is a book about these amazing qualities, about love, that keeps us well, rather than the brutality and destruction of the past."

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