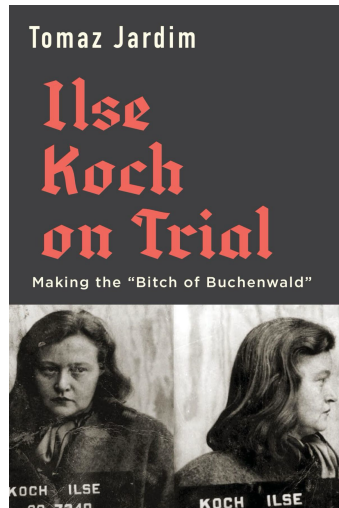


2024 Hans Rosenberg Book Prize Laudatio

Tomaz Jardim, *Ilse Koch on Trial: Making the “Bitch” of Buchenwald*
(Harvard University Press, 2023)



Tomaz Jardim has written an eye-opening, carefully researched book that parses truth from fiction about one of Nazi Germany's most notorious women: Ilse Koch. With clear prose, Jardim presents an absorbing narrative that engages both specialists and general readers alike. His measured tone avoids the sensationalism his subject matter might otherwise engender; the reader is judiciously guided through three trials that Koch faced, first at the hands of the SS itself, then by the American military occupation authority, and then finally by a West German court. Uncovering the shifting nature of justice in these different venues, Jardim highlights the many extra-legal considerations at play in determining Koch's responsibilities vis-à-vis Buchenwald atrocities. In doing so, he recaptures the contingency of each moment of legal judgment. Gender dynamics also play a large role in Jardim's analysis. Contemporary norms and expectations inflected the thinking of the victims, the judges, and the public, and they played a sizable role in determining Koch's culpability. Jardim shows how much those within Germany and without came to see Koch, someone who had no official position in Buchenwald at all, as the ultimate embodiment of the regime's monstrosity, even when other men, guilty of more extensively documented and much more egregious crimes, were shown leniency. The account reveals the difficulties of coming to terms with genocide and the barbarism of Nazism.

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