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The resilience of the refugee: how Kindertransport memoirs complicate understandings of “resilience”

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For many years, in the media as well as in scholarship, the Kindertransportee’s experience has become generalized as one of resilience. The emotional strength shown by the Kinder has been widely noted and many have written about the successful lives of this group of child refugees. For example, Vera Fast, in her history of the Kindertransport, comments: “What is truly remarkable . . . is the ‘magnificent ability’ and energy of the great majority of these uprooted children to rebuild their lives. They succeeded in overcoming horrendous memories, bitter loss and lack of parental love, care and the security of a home”.¹ Moreover, Karen Pollock, the Chief Executive of the Holocaust Educational Trust, has commented on how “stories of Kindertransport refugees are examples of resilience”.² Further illustrating the pervasiveness of the term, when the Oscar Award-winning film *Into the Arms of Strangers* was selected for permanent preservation in the U.S.A.’s Library of Congress by the National Film Registry, Deborah Oppenheimer, the producer of the documentary, announced that “the preservation of the film will recognize for all time the tremendous resilience of the children”. Likewise, the film’s director, Mark Jonathan Harris, noted, “others may be inspired by the courage and resilience they displayed in the face of harrowing circumstances”.³

It is a common belief held by society that children are resilient; it is thought that they adapt quickly to new situations or that they are not affected by a negative experience, either because adults believe the child was not fully aware of the situation or because children are less able to

1 Vera K. Fast, *Children’s Exodus: A History of the Kindertransport* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2011), 186.

2 Karen Pollock, “Stories of Kindertransport Refugees are Examples of Resilience”, *Jewish News*, 7 June 2018, <https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/stories-of-Kindertransport-refugees-are-examples-of-resilience/> (accessed 3 Jan. 2019).

3 “Kindertransport Documentary selected for Permanent Preservation,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, 21 Dec. 2014. www.jta.org/2014/12/21/united-states/Kindertransport-documentary-selected-for-permanent-preservation (accessed 9 Jan. 2019).

express their distress through language. Although the idea of resilience is also persistent in the Kindertransport narrative, the memoirs written by the Kindertransportees illustrate how their experience of being child refugees is much more complicated than the word “resilience” implies. Describing and generalizing the group of Kindertransportees as resilient is problematic for several reasons. First, doing so perpetuates the celebratory narrative of the Kindertransport. When considering the term “resilience”, one is encouraged first and foremost to think about how these displaced children pulled through a tough time, how they were fine in the end, and were able to make something of their lives – all thanks to Britain’s generosity. The term places an emphasis on the end result, on how they overcame difficulties during a turbulent period.

In turn, resilience is used positively in Kindertransport discourse to emphasize how these refugees have led successful lives. Amy Williams explains how the typical British narrative “ends positively because, although the Kinder suffered hardships along the way, they eventually became valued members of British society.”⁴ Among the Kinder rescued by British efforts are a number of authors and artists, several Nobel Prize winners, the MP Lord Dubs and Sir Erich Reich – two figures who raise awareness of the plight of refugees today – and many “ordinary” citizens who have contributed to society and to the healthcare sector.⁵ The adult lives of the Kinder are highlighted and, it can be argued, the difficulties they faced as children are not always acknowledged. The problem with this has been identified: with regard to the personal recollections of Kindertransportees, Andrea Hammel suggests that many testimonies have become “success stories relating to education and achievement”.⁶ Some memoirists, then, encourage this successful celebratory narrative in their memoirs, perhaps motivated by their gratitude to Britain.

A second concern arises from the coupling of resilience with survival. The British celebratory narrative regards resilience as an internal characteristic or attribute of the Kindertransportees – a quality which aided their survival and success. This understanding both overlooks Britain’s

4 Amy Williams, “Kindertransports in National and Transnational Perspective”, in *Monument Culture: International Perspectives on the Future of Monuments in a Changing World*, ed. Laura A. Macaluso (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2019), 132.

5 Fast, *Children’s Exodus*, 186.

6 Andrea Hammel, “Child Refugees forever? The History of the Kindertransport to Britain 1938/39”, *Diskurs Kindheits- und Jugendforschung* 2 (2010): 140.

role in the selection process of the refugees and threatens to situate the “resilient survivors” – also described by Tony Kushner as the “generation kept safe”⁷ – in opposition to the victims or, in other words, the children who were not given the opportunity to escape.

A third issue with using the term “resilience” to describe these child refugees is that overuse eclipses the traumatic aspects of their experience and the public understanding of Kindertransportees as resilient threatens to mask the misery, confusion, and dislocation faced by many. As mentioned earlier, the term encourages a focus on the end result and the fact that they came through a difficult time; although their suffering is alluded to, it retains a secondary position. The Kindertransport experience, however, was traumatic for many and relates closely to Sarah Benamer and Kate White’s definition of trauma as “the exposure to life-threatening experiences (actual or perceived) where a person is faced with overwhelming feelings of helplessness . . . accompanied by abandonment, isolation, hopelessness, shame, and invisibility.”⁸ As impressionable child refugees, the separation from family and dislocation from everything familiar was emotionally scarring. For years, Kindertransportees felt loneliness and alienation, often followed by overwhelming despair on discovering the death of loved ones who did not survive the Holocaust.

The eightieth anniversary of the Kindertransport offers an opportunity to reassess and rethink the way in which we are remembering the Kindertransport and how it will be remembered in the years to come. This article argues that it is important to unite the ideas of resilience and trauma, both of which can be found in memoirs. Not only does this paper bring together trauma and resilience but it will also question the definition of resilience and encourage the reader to embrace understandings that exceed our general understanding of the term.

In the context of the Kindertransport, “resilience” often indicates the child refugee’s ability to adjust to a new environment and postwar life. Yet the term also has connotations of strength and toughness, an ability to roll with the punches, an absence of weakness and ongoing suffering. Defining the Kindertransportee’s childhood as one of resilience is

7 Tony Kushner, *Remembering Refugees: Then and Now* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 147.

8 Sarah Benamer and Kate White, “Trauma and Attachment: Introduction to the Monograph of the 13th John Bowlby Memorial Conference 2006”, in *Trauma and Attachment*, ed. Sarah Benamer and Kate White (London: Karnac Books, 2008), 2.

therefore problematic as it is likely to simplify their experience. Various dictionaries offer similar definitions: it is the “capacity to recover quickly from difficulties; toughness”.⁹ A similar definition can be found in psychological research, where resilience is described as “the ability to successfully cope with a crisis and to return to pre-crisis status quickly”.¹⁰ These definitions are too vague and it is impossible to measure or ascertain to what degree a Kindertransportee was able “to successfully cope”. Consequently, by adhering to such understandings of resilience and by applying them to the Kindertransport context, we are limiting our understanding of the Kindertransport by considering only the impact of a short-term crisis rather than the prolonged impact of trauma. Three Kindertransport memoirs which will be discussed shortly challenge this idea of recovering, and recovering quickly.

Complicating general understandings of the term, two further understandings of resilience offer an alternative to that of a quick and painless recovery. Offering a more psychological understanding, Roger Luckhurst suggests: “resilience remains just another kind of post-traumatic reaction. It does not displace the predominance of trauma so much as assume a different or parallel response to psychic depredation or collapse.”¹¹ It is necessary to consider this understanding of psychological resilience as a defence mechanism, since the psychological trauma is not necessarily implied when one speaks of the “resilience” of the Kindertransportee. Resilience can also be understood as the “capability and ability of an element to return to a stable state after a disruption”.¹² A “stable state” is less problematic than the idea of a “recovery” found in dictionary definitions. Considering these definitions, the notion of resilience will now be investigated in Kindertransport memoirs by inspecting the Kindertransportees’ coping mechanisms and actions following a traumatic ordeal, and their ability to find stability after the upheaval they faced in childhood.

9 “Resilience”, Oxford English Dictionary, www.lexico.com/en/definition/resilience (accessed 7 Jan. 2019).

10 Ian de Terte and Christine Stephens, “Psychological Resilience of Workers in High-Risk Occupations”, *Stress and Health* 30, no. 5 (4 Dec. 2014): 353–5.

11 Roger Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question* (London: Routledge, 2008), 211.

12 Ran Bhamra, Samir Dani, and Kevin Burnard, “Resilience: The Concept, a Literature Review and Future Directions”, *International Journal of Production Research* 49, no. 18 (Sept. 2011): 5375–93.

Vera Gissing, Pearls of Childhood (1988)

Vera Gissing's well-known memoir, *Pearls of Childhood*, tells the story of a patriotic ten-year-old Czech refugee.¹³ She is placed with a loving family and attends the school for Czech refugees in Wales. Meanwhile, her father was deported to Auschwitz and her mother died from typhus shortly after she was freed from Bergen-Belsen. In her memoir, Gissing reflects on the moment she learned about the concentration camps. In an attempt to avoid processing this disturbing knowledge, she "locked [her] anxiety deep within and threw [herself] into [her] studies". Gissing's memoir reveals how she repeatedly relied on repression as a coping mechanism: "I tried not to dwell on the tragedies of the past but to concentrate on coping with and settling into my new life."¹⁴

Kindertransport memoirists, aided by retrospect, can identify moments in which the child refugee decided to carry on despite their difficulties and attempted to settle into a new life in Britain. Yet, although this can be understood as an act of resilience, memoirs expand our general understanding of the term by presenting the process and difficulties of trying to persevere against the odds – something that reference to the term itself often overlooks. Crucially, here, Gissing's explanation of how she tried to cope by settling into a seemingly ordinary life is positioned alongside and as a consequence of "the tragedies of the past". Thus, memoirs make more transparent the relationship between trauma and the need to "carry on" as a way of coping with distress, disruption, and disorientation.

Moreover, memoirs are able to clarify how resilience – the Kindertransportee's ability to move on with life – is often the only option left for the refugee who, otherwise, would be weighed down by her own misery. As her world is turned upside down following the death of her parents and the additional loss of her home country, Gissing's first step was "to close the door firmly on the past and to concentrate on putting down roots for the future."¹⁵ Further challenging our understanding of resilience, Gissing's memoir shows how, rather than "overcoming" and working through a difficult past, the Kindertransportee actually attempts to forget and escape past experiences. Resilience, as we generally understand it, has far more positive connotations than an escape from and suppression

13 Gissing, *Pearls of Childhood* (London: Robson Books, 2003).

14 *Ibid.*, 95, 143.

15 *Ibid.*, 169.

of the past. Here, Luckhurst's conceptualization of resilience as a "post-traumatic reaction" and psychological defence mechanism is much more fitting than the notion of "successfully coping".

The idea of resilience is further complicated in Gissing's memoir as the term, which is generally understood as positive, is proved to be an act of self-deception. Gissing admits that during her time in postwar Britain she gave in to a performative identity and played the "role" of a British housewife. She "even fooled [herself] that this was all [she] wanted, all [she] needed in life."¹⁶ The historian David Cesarani explains how this approach was common and describes how many Kinder "erected barriers against the pain of loss and separation and busied themselves building successful, prosperous and productive lives."¹⁷ This attempt to keep other aspects of her life constant can be seen as an act of psychological resilience after a traumatic ordeal. Instead of becoming engulfed by grief – a psychic collapse which would have impeded her ability to function – this defence mechanism allows Gissing to build a life in Britain. Yet, crucially, as the memoir shows, this form of post-traumatic resilience is only a temporary charade and does not lead to the durable stability suggested in general definitions of resilience.

An examination of her memoir reveals how Gissing achieves the stability associated with resilience only on her return to Czechoslovakia in 1968. There, she visits a museum located at a cemetery in Prague. The museum displayed the drawings made by thousands of children who did not escape continental Europe and Gissing realizes she narrowly escaped the same fate as these children thanks to the Kindertransport rescue operation. Consequently, she is forced to confront her own experiences, which she had attempted to leave behind her during her attempt to settle into a new life in England.

Essentially, this visit enables Gissing to accept her identity and, in doing so, she gains a stable understanding of the past which she had previously repressed. She realizes: "by shutting out the past I had closed the door on my inner self – that I would never find peace and true happiness unless I accepted myself for what I was: Jewish by race, Czech by birth, and British by choice." The stability and peace she finds by engaging with her past is highlighted towards the end of her memoir: "[m]y task is completed; I seem to have travelled a full circle, reopening doors I had left locked

¹⁶ Ibid., 170.

¹⁷ David Cesarani, *Into the Arms of Strangers: Stories of the Kindertransport*, ed. Mark Jonathan Harris and Deborah Oppenheimer (London: Bloomsbury, 2000), 18.

for most of my life, reliving moments of beauty and happiness, sadness and pain.”¹⁸ Gissing’s memoir, then, challenges generally accepted understandings of resilience by illustrating two stages of resilience and periods of stability: first she demonstrates an intentional forgetting which results in an emotional toughness and which enables her to put down roots for the future. A second moment of resilience and period of stability occurs later in life when she confronts the horrors of her past and accepts her own identity.

Martha Blend, *A Child Alone* (1995)

Martha Blend’s memoir, *A Child Alone*, documents her childhood in Vienna and her arrival on the Kindertransport.¹⁹ At the age of nine, Blend was given a new home with caring foster parents in London. Once concentration camps had been liberated, the Red Cross confirmed that her parents had been murdered. Her memoir focuses on her experiences of growing up in London, her education, and the process of reconstructing her past. Yet, a striking and concerning feature of the memoir is the emotional and psychological distress caused by the separation from her parents and the resulting impact on her identity. Blend describes her teenage self as “a young person putting up a tremendous fight for her sanity in a partly insane world.”²⁰

An examination of Blend’s memoir offers an opportunity to probe ideas of resilience. The memoir frequently conveys the fragility of the Kindertransportee, portraying a child who is almost unable to cope with the disruption surrounding her. Similar to Gissing’s memoir, Blend’s reveals how repression was a key coping mechanism, employed to maintain her stability and sanity. She recalls: “To me the whole subject was so painful that to delve into it would have strained my adolescent frame beyond endurance. It was left as a dark pit at the back of my mind for whose entrance I fashioned a cover of forgetfulness, a cover I dared not lift for many years.”²¹

This intentional repression of traumatic experience, which lasted decades, problematizes the general dictionary understanding of resilience. When we consider the term “resilience”, we think of our ability to

18 Gissing, *Pearls*, 171, 175.

19 Martha Blend, *A Child Alone* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 1995).

20 *Ibid.*, 92.

21 *Ibid.*, 123.

persevere, to battle on and get through to the other side of a difficult period. In this memoir, however, simply dealing with the death of her parents is too overwhelming and results, instead, in psychological avoidance. This memoir in particular highlights how there is a fine line between resilience and repression – depending on whether harmful memories are overcome or submerged.

While the outcome is the same either way since the individual achieves a sense of stability, in the case of repression, this period of stability is impermanent. Comparable to Gissing's experience, Martha Blend also tries to bury her past and fashion herself a new seemingly stable life in Britain in an attempt at resilience. As seen in Gissing's memoir, this avoidance and suppression of the past cannot endure for ever. When Blend became a parent, unanswered questions about the fate of her family haunted the memoirist. The Kindertransportee is faced with "half-formulated" questions which "kept coming back to haunt me in moments of solitude . . . How had my parents died and where? What horrors did they have to face before then?"²² These unanswered and persistent questions indicate an incomplete "recovery" – to use the problematic word from earlier, generalized definitions of resilience.

A second act of resilience occurs when Blend faces her past by visiting concentration camps, a relative in Israel, and her childhood home in Vienna thirty-five years after departing on the Kindertransport. Directly confronting her past, instead of ignoring it, can be understood as an act of courage and emotional strength through which she is able to find answers to her questions. In turn, she achieves a sense of stability which enables her to write her memoir.

An interesting difference here is that while Gissing views her task as "completed", Blend shows how a return to a stable state is an ongoing process. While writing her memoir, the return of an upsetting repressed memory unsettles her account of the past when she remembers how, at the age of ten, a Red Cross letter delivered the news of her father's death: "In fact I had 'forgotten' an incident which occurred in the early spring of 1940 . . . and even continued to do so while writing this account."²³ Memoirs, which document how one attempts to engage with, process, and construct personal distress, reveal that an attempt to face the past requires a new effort of resilience as the stability and adult sense of self are once again

22 *Ibid.*, 152.

23 *Ibid.*, 118.

threatened by returning memories. This process of writing is in itself challenging, as the Kindertransportee Bertha Leverton explains: “Many of us did not find it easy to recall and tell the traumatic events which befell us.”²⁴

When considering the two preferred definitions of resilience discussed earlier, it is notable how Blend first shows her psychological resilience by attempting to carry on, by concentrating on her studies, because to try to fully process the tragedies of the Holocaust as a teenager would probably have been too overwhelming. She creates a life in Britain, settles down, and has a family. Yet, as also seen in Gissing’s memoir, the past cannot be avoided for ever. A second act of resilience is required and, hoping to gain stability and an understanding of her parents’ fates, Blend retraces her upsetting past. Resilience is evident in the memoirist’s actions, decisions, and courage, yet the temporary nature of the stability achieved by this resilience is highlighted in the text’s form, which is disrupted by the return of memories that were repressed during her first act of psychological resilience.

Ruth Barnett, *Person of No Nationality: A Story of Childhood Separation, Loss and Recovery* (2010)

Ruth Barnett, who arrived on the Kindertransport at the young age of four and who was reunited with her parents after the war, has both written and spoken on the psychological effects of separation and dislocation on child refugees.²⁵ Her memoir, *Person of No Nationality: A Story of Childhood Separation, Loss and Recovery*, brings together understandings of psychological distress and her own upsetting experiences.²⁶ The idea of resilience as an inherent, positive characteristic of the refugee is challenged when Barnett describes how helpless and powerless she was as a young child. She remembers the distress and confusion she felt when she was repeatedly passed from one foster family to the next: “As soon as I had got used to a place, they didn’t want me any more and moved me on”.²⁷ She

24 Bertha Leverton and Shmuel Lowensohn, eds., *I came Alone: The Stories of the Kindertransports* (Lewes: Book Guild, 1990), 412.

25 Ruth Barnett, “Therapeutic Aspects of Working through the Trauma of the Kindertransport Experience”, in *The Kindertransport to Britain 1938/39: New Perspectives*, ed. Andrea Hammel and Bea Lewkowicz (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2012), 157–71.

26 Ruth Barnett, *Person of No Nationality: A Story of Childhood Separation, Loss and Recovery* (London: David Paul, 2010).

27 *Ibid.*, 64.

portrays the refugee as a transportable, exchangeable object who lacks any input in where life takes her.

Yet, although she depicts the vulnerability of the refugee, her memoir simultaneously attests to her younger self's strength of character. Addressing the frequently assumed inherent connection between childhood and resilience, Barnett suggests that, although children adjust quickly and show a "creativity, curiosity, resilience and zest for life",²⁸ moments of resilience may actually stem from a lack of control over decisions. To a greater extent than the two memoirs discussed earlier, Barnett's reveals a conscious act of resilience in the form of the child refugee's wish to gain some control over her own life. The memoirist recalls how "I was confirmed in my sense of failure as a person. But I was determined to survive". She documents how she helped out on her guardians' farm and with the housework because "[she] wanted to become indispensable, so that [she] could not be sent away again".²⁹ This memoir, then, addresses and unites both sides of Kindertransportee resilience; the child's active determination is portrayed as a consequence of the powerlessness and confusion she faced.

Similarly to Blend, Barnett directly confronts the traumatic nature of her experience and the effect such emotional and physical disruption had on her state of mind: "Overnight I had lost my home, foster parents, language, and everything familiar, and found myself in a strange world, where everything was different to what I was used to. . . . There was so much fear and rage, inside me, that I felt I was just as mad inside myself as the mad world outside me. I just couldn't cope with yet another massive change in my life. It is unbearable to feel mad inside and outside."³⁰ As general definitions of resilience revolve around the child's ability to "successfully cope", Barnett's memoir challenges this by offering an insight into the reality of a refugee's initial inability to deal with such disruptive changes.

Like Gissing and Blend, Barnett in her memoir also complicates the notion of resilience by depicting resilience – the act of carrying on – as a psychological defence mechanism in reaction to a traumatic reality which was too difficult to process. Barnett openly addresses the coping mechanisms put into place as a child which enabled her simply to carry on. Unable to comprehend the fact that her mother had abandoned her – in the eyes of a child, the separation caused by political events and threat of

²⁸ *Ibid.*, xiii.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 67.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 107–8.

persecution would have been difficult to understand – Barnett convinced herself that her mother was dead. Reflecting on her childhood, Barnett explains: “The human mind has many built-in protection devices. One of them is to shut off an experience that is too traumatic to deal with at the time and lock it away in some corner of the mind.”³¹ The knowledge that her mother was alive yet had intentionally left Ruth and her brother alone in England would have been too devastating for a four-year-old to contemplate.

The idea of recovering quickly from childhood difficulties is also challenged in this memoir. Like Gissing’s and Blend’s, Barnett’s memoir also reveals how the initial separation and dislocation experienced as a child feed into her postwar uncertainty. Contrary to definitions of resilience, these memoirs show that the experience of being a child refugee is not something that one can just “pull through” and easily come to terms with, even when the child is reunited with her biological parents. The generally accepted understanding of the Kindertransportees as resilient does not account for the way they dealt with the challenges they faced in postwar life. Barnett explains how that life was just as difficult: “I was hungry and lonely and at the lowest ebb I had ever been in my life.”³²

Here, it is important to emphasize that the postwar stage of psychological resilience (or avoidance through repression) demonstrated by both Gissing and Blend was not an option for Barnett. The death of Gissing’s and Blend’s parents was central to their attempts at resilience and sparked a period in their lives in which they felt the need to put down fresh roots in a new country. Barnett, who was reunited with her parents after the war, was not granted this closure or stability as she was continuously torn between England and Germany, the country to which she was repatriated against her will. Stability achieved through the repression of a traumatic upheaval was not possible for Barnett because she was still enduring this sense of loss and displacement for several years following the war. The Kindertransportee does, however, find stability when she marries her husband and finds her passion in teaching and psychotherapy. Yet it was only decades later, in the 1980s, when Barnett – like many other Kindertransportees – was able to find a sense of peace and understanding following the fiftieth anniversary of the Kindertransport reunion.³³

31 *Ibid.*, 17.

32 *Ibid.*, 169.

33 *Ibid.*, xiv.

Conclusion

To summarize, the three memoirs discussed in this article present the difficulties of being a Kindertransportee, the challenges which are often only briefly mentioned – if not pushed to the background – when one talks about the Kindertransportees’ resilient nature. All three memoirs address the workings of trauma, repression, and coping mechanisms, and portray fragility, hopelessness, and depression alongside the refugee’s fortitude and determination. In this respect, these memoirs challenge generalized and prevalent understandings of Kindertransport resilience in which the child’s strength in the face of adversity, successes of later life, and their contribution to society are emphasized.

The examination of first-hand accounts encourages an alternative twofold understanding of resilience. These Kindertransport memoirs encompass both understandings of resilience introduced at the beginning of this paper: resilience can both be seen as a post-traumatic reaction immediately after an upheaval and be observed in their later lives when they find emotional stability after confronting their childhood trauma. These two forms of resilience appear at different stages of the Kindertransportee’s life, complicating the straightforward idea of resilience being a “quick recovery”. Crucially, these memoirs show that the strategy of psychological resilience – a defence mechanism allowing them to “carry on” during tough times – does not lead to everlasting stability. Memoirs show how this psychological response of resilience was often one of the only options available to Kinder following a distressing episode, mainly because they were too young to have a say in the decisions that were made for them by guardians or refugee committees.

Nevertheless, a more healthy, durable form of stability can be achieved once past experience has been returned to, confronted, accepted, and processed. For Kindertransportees, this confrontation with the past often occurred decades after their arrival in Britain. These memoirs thus complicate the straightforward dictionary definitions of resilience, as the process of gaining stability and of coping with a distressing event is in fact lengthy. Indeed, Martha Blend’s text demonstrates how stability – which supposedly goes hand in hand with resilience – is not necessarily a permanent state but is, rather, an ongoing process of acceptance and engagement, in which repressed memories return and must be continuously worked through and accommodated into her life narrative.

While the nature of the Kindertransportees' resilience can be understood as a mixture of determination, coping mechanisms, and an acceptance of and engagement with the past, it should be noted that the age of the Kindertransportee at the initial separation, their experience in Britain, and the fates of the parents greatly affect the way in which the child refugee perseveres during difficult periods and copes with postwar reality.

As this exploration of Kindertransport memoirs has revealed, the generally accepted term "resilience" masks the difficulties and trauma of the Kindertransport and postwar experience. With this knowledge, it becomes increasingly vital to acknowledge the difficulties associated with life as a Kindertransportee and to rethink the way in which we describe their experience in scholarship and in public discourse today. An overemphasis on resilience – as a way to describe how children quickly returned to normality – leads to a distortion of Kindertransport memory. The eightieth anniversary marks the passing of living memory and is thus a particularly crucial time to reassess understandings of resilience and to situate these revised understandings alongside the workings of trauma.

"Resilience" must be questioned and refined as we reach a future in which we shall come to rely on cultural representations of the Kindertransport and in which the ethics and aesthetics of such representations will, and should, be continually questioned. Fiction, for example, can re-imagine the Kindertransport and attract a new readership, raising awareness of both the Kindertransportee's personal struggle and a chapter of history. However, if the term "resilience" is more easily coupled with synonymous understandings of bravery rather than psychological trauma, Kindertransport representation and memory is at risk of being distorted even further. This can be seen in recent Kindertransport fiction by Jana Zinser, in which the Kindertransport is placed into the form of an adventure novel and the child's dislocation is eclipsed by the "boundless determination" and boldness of the child refugees.³⁴ This results in a concerning incongruence with the trauma and psychological coping mechanisms observed in memoirs. By extension, if we continue to understand the Kindertransportees primarily as resilient and brave, and recognize above all their contribution to British society, we fail to recognize the challenges and dangers that young refugees face today.

In conclusion, while it is important to recognize that most Kindertransportees persevered, adjusted to a new life, and accomplished many

34 Jana Zinser, *The Children's Train* (Atlanta, GA: BQB Publishing, 2015), 167.

things despite their distressing childhood, an examination of Kindertransport memoirs reveals the anguish they faced at the time, the decades needed before they were able to process their childhood disruption, and their ongoing mediation with the past. To develop a more nuanced understanding of the daily life of the refugee, these aspects of the Kindertransport experience should also be acknowledged and remembered when one speaks of the resilience of the Kindertransportee.