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Mitgutsch WA: Ausgrenzung: Roman/Anna Mitgutsch, 6. Aufl.

Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag München, 2000, 265 pp (ISBN 3-423-12435-0), €8.00

Published online: 26 August 2004
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“Ausgrenzung” is the story of Jakob, a child “different” from all others, and his mother. At 3 years, he is still unable to speak well and screams for hours for no reason. The parents consult many doctors, psychologists and neurologists but for many years there is no diagnosis, until the moment when a psychologist mentions the word “autism” and says that this means a severe disturbance of Jakob’s relationship to his mother. He invites the mother to “work on herself”. Overwhelming feelings of guilt, the struggle to provide her child with an environment offering him the best chance to develop according to his own rhythm, isolate the mother progressively from her husband and from the few friends able to tolerate her desperate efforts to refuse the fact that her child is different from others. During a summer which she spends alone with her child on a farm, she feels completely free of constraint for the first time, since Jakob behaves more and more like a happy child, and she concludes that she has no other duty in life than to

do everything to make her child happy. For her, the way to do it is an “unconditional acceptance of the child”. During the following years, she tries desperately to get her child accepted by other children and their families and cannot understand why the world is unable to adapt to her child’s differences. Progressively, she recreates a world for herself and Jakob, and finally, at her son’s adolescence, she realises that she is living more and more as a recluse and close to the edge, excluding her and her son from society.

This painful struggle of a mother and the progressive exclusion of the father from the life of his child are described with suggestive intensity. Most of us have had to care for children with an uncertain psychiatric diagnosis and probably many of us sometimes felt helpless in front of parents of such children. This book allows the reader to see the world with the eyes of the mother and to understand how it feels to live close to the edge, or even beyond.