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Introduction

Buchenwald: A European Text History

I

This volume is the result of an international conference that took place in Weimar in September 2019, bringing together literary studies scholars and historians from Germany, France, Poland, Spain, England, Hungary and Austria. Though international academic exchange is always desirable, in this case it took us straight to the heart of the topic – the Buchenwald concentration camp and how it is represented in texts. Although Buchenwald was a German camp in terms of its design and location, it was an international camp in terms of the people who were held captive there and the texts that they wrote about the camp after liberation. The *Buchenwald-Report* [*Buchenwald Report*], which was compiled shortly after the camp's liberation by a collective of authors under the leadership of Eugen Kogon, names thirty predominantly European nations and, to a lesser extent, nations outside of Europe from which people were deported to the camp (Hackett 1995, 109–110). This information is incomplete, and it obscures the fact that many inmates could not or did not want to be subsumed exclusively under their nationality. But it does illustrate how the camp was experienced in different languages and thus became a text. The account *L'Espèce humaine* [*The Human Race*] by Frenchman Robert Antelme is just as much part of this as the novel *Sorstalanság* [*Fateless*] by Hungary's Imre Kertész, the Czech novel *Oblak a valčík* [*The Cloud and the Waltz*] by Ferdinand Peroutka, the sociological study *Die Gesellschaft des Terrors* [*The Society of Terror*] by Austrian Paul Martin Neurath, the collective account *Vojna za koljučej provolokoj* [*War Behind Barbed Wire*] compiled by Soviet inmates, Bruce Marshall's book *The White Rabbit* about the life and imprisonment of British officer Forest Yeo-Thomas, and the drama *Stara Gwardia* [*The Old Guard*] by Polish author Mieczysław Lurczyński. An impression of the wealth of texts written about Buchenwald can be gleaned from the first attempt made by Rosemarie Hofmann, Wolfgang Röll and Torsten Seela to compile a complete bibliography as part of the research

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they carried out at the National Buchenwald Memorial (Hofmann, Röll and Seela 1985/1986).[1]

It goes without saying that no scholar can do philological justice to this diversity (see Roskies and Diamant 2012, 3). Even if they were in command of numerous languages, they would only be able to read a fraction of the original texts that were written by former inmates about the camp. And they would only be able to access some of those texts in translation, for the overwhelming majority of camp texts fell into oblivion soon after they appeared and were never translated into any other language. This does not just apply to the mass of grey *Lagerliteratur* [camp literature] that was published shortly after the war ended. It even applies to significant literary texts like David Rousset's novel *Les jours de notre mort* [*The Days of Our Death*], which still has not been translated in full; Pál Királyhegyi's sarcastic account *Első kétszáz évem* [*My First Two Hundred Years*], which was only translated into English in 2017; Ferdinand Peroutka's novel, which did not appear in German until 2015; and Mieczysław Lurczyński's play, which has not yet been translated either. It is thus unsurprising that Reinhard Ibler's article about Czech Buchenwald literature in this volume closes with a call for more translations. The philological challenge described here pertains to texts where we at least know that we will not be able to read them (all). There is probably a whole gamut of texts where we do not know that we cannot read them because we do not even know that they exist. The article by Arkadiusz Morawiec in this volume, for example, addresses a series of Polish texts that neither Polish nor international research has taken note of to date.

The first objective of this volume, then, is to draw attention to the international diversity of literature about Buchenwald. It begins by giving an overview of Polish (Morawiec), Czech (Ibler) and Luxembourgish (Schmit) Buchenwald literature. Gero Fedtke and Julia Landau provide insights not just into the Soviet text and song memory of Buchenwald but also into its afterlife in popular culture after the downfall of the Soviet Union. Ferenc Lazcó and Támasz Scheibner show that the way that Imre Kertész portrays the camps is less unique in the Hungarian context than it might appear from an outsider perspective, which frequently only views Kertész within the transnational context of Holocaust literature. Bill Niven addresses the ambivalent way in which the 'material' of Buchenwald has been adapted in contemporary novels in English, which, on the one hand, suspend the oversimplified opposition between victim and perpetrator but, on the other, often make use of this suspension for popular, historically un-

1 The research librarian Stefan Lochner at the memorial is currently working on a bibliography of the texts that were published until 1950.

dercomplex romance and family narratives. The wealth of examples that Niven has to offer makes it seem like Buchenwald has survived as literary material above all in popular novels. Christian Fleck and Andreas Kranebitter search for an explanation for the striking abundance of analyses of the camps from the fields of sociology and social psychology, written by Austrian and, specifically, Viennese Buchenwald survivors. They discuss discourse politics and the sociology of education to find reasons for this connection between nationality and certain epistemologies of the camp. The articles by Torsten Hoffmann and the editor of this volume contend that German-German Buchenwald literature needs to be liberated from memory politics' fixation on Bruno Apitz' novel *Nackt unter Wölfen* [*Naked Among Wolves*] by acknowledging the diversity of Buchenwald portrayals in the GDR (Hoffmann) and critically investigating the Buchenwald portrayals that circulated in the old Federal Republic (Pabst).

There are differences between national memories of Buchenwald as the camp did not carry the same significance in every country. Buchenwald has played a central role in the culture of remembrance in France (Combe) and the Netherlands (Dijk and Baars). In France, this has to do with factors such as the large number of French inmates who were deported to Buchenwald, including many politically active, educated prisoners who were in a position to speak about the camp after liberation. In the case of Dutch inmates, who actually formed a much smaller group, Dijk and Baars suspect it was a combination of their education level and relatively higher chances of survival that meant that Buchenwald managed to gain a fairly large presence in Dutch memory discourse despite the rather small number of prisoners in the group. At the same time, it was possible construct a national narrative of resistance around the Buchenwald inmates. However, while that has been changing since the 1960s in the Netherlands, and Buchenwald has been disappearing into the background as the Holocaust and Auschwitz gain in memory-political significance, Buchenwald has managed to maintain its central role in the French culture of remembrance much longer. Hungarians primarily became aware of Buchenwald due to the translation of Apitz' novel, although Hungarian literature about the camp has remained marginalised, probably because in the Hungarian case it primarily consisted of Jewish Buchenwald narratives (Laczó and Scheibner). In Spain and Italy, the camp has played a subordinate role as the majority of Spanish and Italian prisoners were transported to other camps like Mauthausen and Gusen (Siguan; Müller). As is to be expected, the memory of Auschwitz is at the forefront in Poland (Morawiec; Gall). In the Soviet Union, stories about Buchenwald had to adapt to the narrative of the 'Great Patriotic War', while in contemporary Russia, Buchenwald has assumed a central place in memory politics as a chiffre for Nazi crimes.

There are thus also national differences in Buchenwald's function as a site of memory. It is a site that has allowed certain groups of victims to articulate certain things and to gloss over others, that has helped people to process experiences of war and occupation, and that has provided justification to certain prisoner groups who either assumed roles in the camp or who, like the Soviet inmates, were under general suspicion of having collaborated with the German enemy or at least of not having resisted their imprisonment sufficiently (Fedtke and Landau). Buchenwald was instrumentalised in the conflicts surrounding the political systems of the Cold War and as an antifascist narrative of legitimization. However, it is evident that the similarities and differences do not symmetrically reflect differences in political systems.

It was not possible to find article authors for all the nations represented in Buchenwald for this volume, in part because some national groups, like the Greeks, were so small that barely any or no texts have survived, partly because it was impossible to find contributions on certain groups, for example, on that of the Belgian group of prisoners, which was relatively large and significant in the history of the camp and its texts.

II

Recognising the camp's internationality cannot be limited to acknowledging that people from a wide range of countries were deported to Buchenwald. Like all factors in camp life, this too was subject to change. While most of the prisoners during the founding period of the camp were German and Austrian, the number of foreign prisoners grew significantly from 1939 as a result of the German war effort and then again from 1942 (see Stein 1998, 171). The prisoners' national categorisation correlated to other, for their part dynamic categorisations like 'Jew', 'political prisoner', 'homosexual', etc. So, it was not just the size of national groups that changed; the national makeup also changed within inmate categories. Moreover, the SS ascribed some prisoners to national groups that did not correspond to the way that those prisoners saw themselves. For prisoners who had been active in the resistance, political self-attributions played an important role alongside their national self-attributions. They thus perceived other prisoner groups based on their nationality as well. While the national categories that generally reflected self-attributions had already been established for prisoner groups from Western Europe, this was more seldom the case for prisoners from Eastern Europe. The equating of 'Soviet' with 'Russian' that is still widespread today did not take into account the differences between the various nationalities within the

Soviet multinational state. National attributions, international cooperation and self-perception thus affected different prisoner groups in different ways.

The instability of the concept of the nation in these contexts is already revealed in the varied ways in which the nations represented in the camp were counted over time. Whereas the Buchenwald Report lists thirty nations and did not consider it necessary or possible to determine the nationalities of 'Angehörigen einzelner afrikanischer Negerstämme' (Hackett 1996, 141),[2] on the 'Straße der Nationen' [Street of Nations], part of a memorial built during GDR times, there are only eighteen nations represented, and Israel, which was not founded until 1948, is not taken into account at all. The original version of the metal plate that was erected in 1995 on the *Appellplatz* [roll call square] to capture the totality of prisoners and their nationalities records forty-seven nations, although it does separately list Sinti and Roma as well as Jews as they are victim groups that cannot be described on the basis of nationality. After the first plate sparked discussions about whether the nations adequately represented the ethnicities and reasons that prisoners were deported, a second plate was installed that now also includes Armenians and, in particular, accounts for the nations that were considered Russian, i.e., Kyrgyzes, Uzbeks, Belarussians, etc. Yugoslavia, on the other hand, was struck from the plate as it had been broken up by this point. The new plate takes into account six more nations than the first one did. The supplement 'und weitere, unbekannte Häftlinge' ['and other, unknown prisoners'[3]] points to the inevitable inadequacy of these kinds of attributions.[4]

The first step in the camp's internationalisation initially took place in the category of political prisoners as the SS assigned most non-German 'new arrivals' to this category (Stein 1998, 155). In August 1942, this group was made up of people from eighteen nations, although the proportion of Soviet prisoners was largest in this group. In 1944, inmates from the 'German empire' only comprised 11.4% of overall occupancy, while the proportion of French, exclusively political prisoners had grown to 16%, and the Polish group had also surpassed the German one (Stein 1998, 179).

It was another story for the group of prisoners who had been persecuted as Jews. Their experience of the camp often differed markedly to that of other prisoner groups.[5] This had to do with the reasons why they were deported, the fact

2 The language used in the translation is much friendlier than that of the original: 'members of various African nations' (Hackett 1995, 110).

3 Unless stated otherwise, all translations are by Lydia J. White.

4 For more detail about the history of these two memorial plates, see Mendler 2022.

5 As a prime example with media impact, the survivors of the camp who were already prominent at this point in time – Joge Semprún and Elie Wiesel – agreed on the categorial difference

that they received worse treatment and provisions, their social position within the camp, and the size and makeup of the group as well. They made up only a small proportion of the camp's overall occupancy to begin with, growing discontinuously until the camp's liberation, above all during its final months. The SS decided who was assigned to the prisoner category of 'Jew' – completely irrespective of whether that person identified as a Jew or not. While the Jews imprisoned in Buchenwald were originally German and Austrian citizens, they did not just overtake political prisoners to become the camp's largest group as the camps in the east were being evacuated and the Buchenwald camp neared its end (Stein 1998, 187); they now also came from Hungary, Rumania, Latvia, Greece, Poland, the Czech Lands and Slovakia.

Other prisoner groups like the homosexuals and the so-called *Berufsverbrecher* [career criminals] and *Asoziale* [asocial elements] were more nationally homogeneous. For the most part they were Germans. However, the texts written about the camp do not raise the question of the national makeup of these prisoner groups with the same urgency because their authors almost exclusively belonged to the group of political or Jewish prisoners, while other prisoner groups were smaller and came from different educational and social backgrounds, and the reasons for their internment stigmatised the victims even once their time in the camp had ended.

Finally, apart from the women in the brothel of the main camp and a number of special prisoners,[6] female inmates were exclusively imprisoned in Buchenwald's sub-camps, which were expanded above all from 1943 (Stein 2004, 176 – 190; Wachsmann 2015, 464 – 479). When a series of inmates who had formerly been imprisoned in one of Ravensbrück's sub-camps were transferred into the custody of the Buchenwald camp in late 1944, the proportion of female prisoners in the Buchenwald camp increased drastically (Wachsmann 2015, 476 – 479).[7] There were huge differences in their experiences, depending on the sub-camp in which they were housed, and, unlike the main camp, their population was

between their camp experiences. The political prisoner Semprún and the Jewish prisoner Wiesel, the latter having arrived in Buchenwald's final days after being evacuated from Auschwitz, 'did not experience the same camp' (Semprún and Wiesel 2012, 7).

6 This included, for example, the *Sippenhäftlingen* ('kin prisoners,' i. e., the relatives of people imprisoned for committing crimes against the state), who were taken prisoner after 20 July 1944. Compared with the total number of prisoners, their number was infinitesimally small and their experience of internment completely atypical. Isa Vermehren's account gives an impression of this (Vermehren 2005, 198 – 203).

7 There were more than 26,000 women interned in Buchenwald's twenty-seven sub-camps for women in 1945 (Seidel 2005, 149).

never dominated by German prisoners.[8] They came into contact with other guards and were younger on average than the male prisoners (Seidel 2005, 162). The work they did was different to the work performed by male prisoners, which, alongside their age, increased their chances of survival at that point in time (Wachsmann 2015, 476 – 479). These women had frequently suffered through other camps before they arrived in Buchenwald. Its sub-camps were therefore the final station of their internment, which had often been shaped more influentially by the other, more deadly camps. Aside from the relatively small number of female inmates,[9] this might have been one of the main reasons why women wrote fewer texts about Buchenwald, why Buchenwald played a smaller role in those texts, and why the texts were not perceived as being texts specifically about Buchenwald. Typical in this sense is the well-known account by Czech Jew Ruth Elias, *Triumph of Hope* (1999), most of which deals with her time in Theresienstadt and Auschwitz, a smaller part with Buchenwald's sub-camp in Taucha. Elias did not set foot in Buchenwald's main camp until after its liberation, from where she made her way to Prague. Texts that deal almost exclusively with experiences of the sub-camps were written much later, such as the account by Hungarian Jew Zahava Szász Stessel (2009), who was deported to the Buchenwald sub-camp Markkleeberg near Leipzig in December 1944 to build aircraft parts for the Junkers company; or the narrative written by the Polish Brzecka sisters (Brzecka-Kosk 2016), who were forced to work for the armaments manufacturer HASAG in Meuselwitz.

Being assigned to a certain national group influenced the reasons why prisoners were deported and, when the reasons for deportation led to them being assigned to certain prisoner categories, then also to prisoners' chances of surviving the camp. The SS marked the interplay between nationality and the reasons for deportation imposed on the victims by adding a letter designating the prisoners' nationality to the triangle that assigned them to a certain category. Until August 1942, the 'Schutzhaftlager-Rapporte' ['Preventive Detention Camp Reports'] compiled by the SS about the camp's occupancy only noted the prisoner category, after which a typewritten page was added to the report that recorded the national makeup within the prisoner categories (fig. 1a). This was probably because, with the delivery of a large number of Soviet prisoners of war, what had been the largest group of political prisoners – the Germans – was surpassed by anoth-

8 The majority of female prisoners were Hungarian Jews, Poles, Frenchwomen, and women from the Soviet Union (see Seidel 2005, 150).

9 Women accounted for a little more than 10 % of the prisoners in Buchenwald – but not until the final phase of the camp (see Seidel 2005, 149).

er national group.[10] According to the report dated November 1944, almost all of the Hungarian prisoners in the camp were Jewish (Laczó and Scheibner), while there was not a single Jew among the Danes. Whereas about two-thirds of Soviet prisoners were forced labourers, there was not one forced labourer among the Czech prisoners. The so-called *Bibelforscher* [literally: 'bible researchers', i. e., Jehovah's Witnesses] came from just four nations. The only prisoners of war in the camp were from the group of Soviet prisoners. It was a different story for the group of 22,911 female prisoned interned in the Buchenwald satellite camps in November 1944, as over 90 % of the prisoners came from Poland, the Soviet Union, or Hungary, and almost all of them belonged to the prisoner categories of slave labourers ('foreign civilian workers'/'Ausländische Zivilarbeiter') and Jews (fig. 1b).

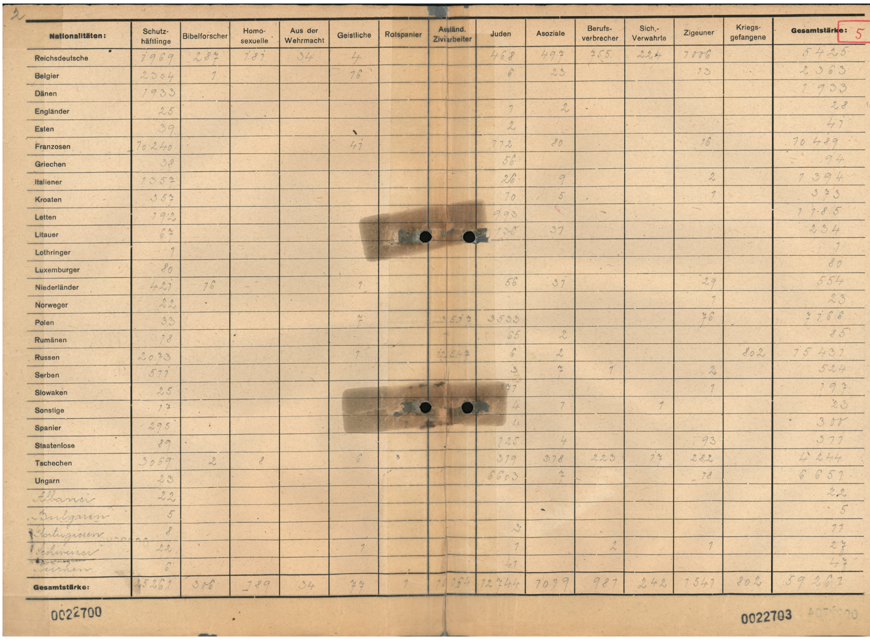
Of course, the various links between nationality and reasons for deportation determined the stories that could be told about the camp, the motivations for telling them and the way in which they were told. Though the mortality rate was low among the Norwegian students who had been deported to Buchenwald, it was very high among Soviet prisoners of war. And while German political prisoners had a chance of getting a job in the prisoner administration or in an easier work commando if they were part of the right networks, this was much more difficult for prisoners of other national groups and almost completely impossible for certain prisoner categories.[11]

> The very great majority of the aristocracy was composed of Germans. But when the camps were thrown open to the whole of Europe, strangers had to be admitted to the bureaucracy. Poles rose as high as the rank of Blockältester and Kapo. Higher than that was the forbidden territory. Czechs and Luxembourgers held strong positions in the police and in the secretariat. Very rarely, and only where there were very definite French majorities, did certain Frenchmen become Kapos and sometimes assistant Block Leaders. All others, including the Russians, never rose higher than Vorarbeiter. (Rousset 1951, 94)[12]

10 But that was not the case until June 1942, and then it was less about nationality than it was about descent, as Harry Stein writes (see Stein 1992, 122). I would like to thank Dr Harry Stein, curator of the Buchenwald and Mittelbau-Dora Memorial, for drawing my attention to the SS reports.

11 As Stein shows, these roles in the camp were initially almost exclusively assumed by German prisoners. It was only from 1943 onwards that prisoners from other nations were appointed to such positions, which changed nothing about the clear prevalence of Germans, which did not reflect the makeup of prisoners in the camp (see Stein 2006, 331–332).

12 In numbers, that meant that of the 245 Kapos in Buchenwald, 225 were Germans, the majority of them (156) political prisoners (see Stein 2004, 101).



Nationalitäten:	Schutzhäftlinge	Bibelforscher	Homosexuelle	Aus der Wehrmacht	Geistliche	Rotspanier	Ausländ. Zivilarbeiter	Juden	Asoziale	Berufsverbrecher	Sich.-Verwahrte	Zigeuner	Kriegsgefangene	Gesamtstärke: 5
Reichsdeutsche	1969	287	181	34	4			468	497	755	224	1006		5425
Belgier	2304	1			16			6	23			13		2363
Dänen	1933													1933
Engländer	25							1	2					28
Esten	39							2						41
Franzosen	10240				41			172	80			16		10489
Griechen	38							56						94
Italiener	1357							26	9			2		1394
Kroaten	357							10	5			1		373
Letten	192							993						1185
Litauer	67							130	37					234
Lothringer	1													1
Luxemburger	80													80
Niederländer	421	16			1			56	31			29		554
Norweger	22											1		23
Polen	33				7		3517	3533				76		7166
Rumänen	18							65	2					85
Russen	2073				1		12547	6	2				802	15431
Serben	511							3	7	1		2		524
Slowaken	25							171				1		197
Sonstige	17							4	1		1			23
Spanier	295					1		4						300
Staatenlose	89							125	4			93		311
Tschechen	3069	2	8		6			319	318	223	17	282		4244
Ungarn	23							6603	7			18		6651
Albaner	22													22
Bulgaren	5													5
Portugiesen	8							3						11
Schweizer	22				1			1		2		1		27
Türken	6							41						47
Gesamtstärke:	25261	306	189	34	77	1	16064	12744	1019	981	242	1541	802	59261

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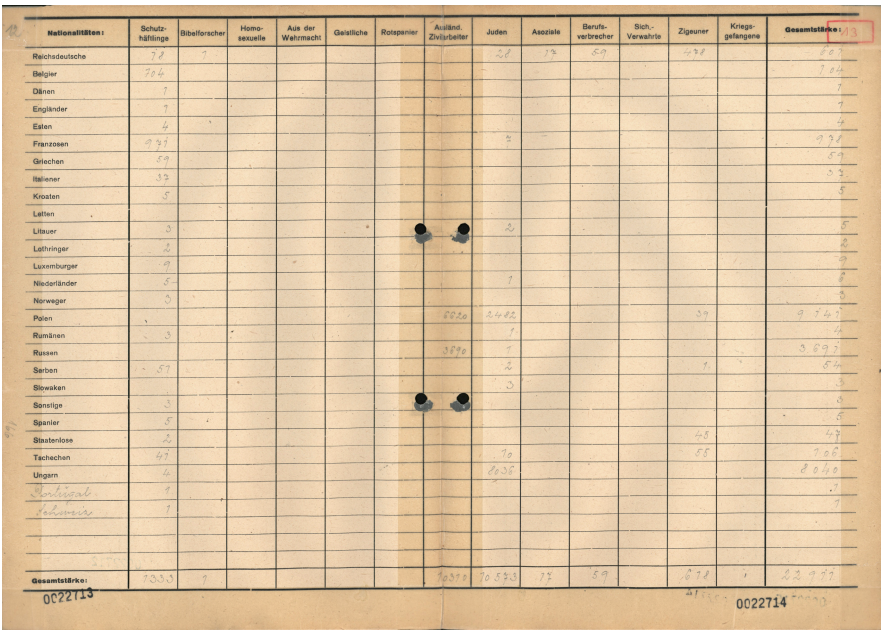
Fig. 1a: SS 'Schutzhaftlager-Rapport' (protective custody camp report) dated November 1944 (men). Arolsen Archives. 82074446.

Certain national groups were subjected to gruesome treatment, for example the Polish Jews, who were jammed into a tent camp within the camp in 1939 before most of them died under horrific conditions. Over 8,000 Soviet prisoners of war were shot directly upon arrival. The majority of a – much smaller – group of Allied secret service officers who had been delivered in the fall of 1944 were also executed. Prisoner functionaries were able to save three officers with the knowledge of SS doctor Erwin Ding-Schuler, probably due to the officers' affiliation with the Allied forces. A disproportionally large number of Polish, Soviet and French prisoners were deported to Mittelbau-Dora between 1943 and 1944, where they met their end under murderous working conditions (Wagner 2001, 400). The national makeup in the sub-camps could vary (Wagner 2001, 401).[13] Most of the Hungarian prisoners had been deported as Jews and only arrived in the camp in March 1944. The combination of nationality and prisoner category

13 For instance, female Hungarian Jews and, to a lesser extent, female French political prisoners were interned in Buchenwald's Markkleeberg sub-camp (see Szász Stessel 2021, 16).

thus influenced at which point in time and in which period prisoners became acquainted with which camps (Laczó and Scheibner).



Nationalitäten:	Schutzhäftlinge	Bibelforscher	Homosexuelle	Aus der Wehrmacht	Geistliche	Rotspanier	Ausländ. Zivilarbeiter	Juden	Asoziale	Berufsverbrecher	Sich.-Verwahrte	Zigeuner	Kriegsgefangene	Gesamtstärke:
Reichsdeutsche	78	7						28	17	59		488		807
Belgier	764													764
Dänen	7													7
Engländer	7													7
Esten	4													4
Franzosen	971							7						971
Griechen	59													59
Italiener	33													33
Kroaten	5													5
Letten														
Litauer	3							2						5
Lothringer	2													2
Luxemburger	9													9
Niederländer	5							1						6
Norweger	3													3
Polen							5020	2482				39		9747
Rumänen	3							1						4
Russen							3890	1						3893
Serben	52							2				1		54
Slowaken								3						3
Sonstige	3													3
Spanier	5													5
Staatenlose	2											45		47
Tschechen	43							10				55		708
Ungarn	4							8036						8040
Portugal	1													1
Schweiz	1													1
Gesamtstärke:	7033	7					8910	10543	17	59		628	1	22797

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Fig. 1b: SS 'Schutzhaftlager-Rapport' (protective custody camp report) dated November 1944 (women). Arolsen Archives. 82074453.

Sometimes national groupings were preserved in the camp. Prisoners themselves often had an interest in utilising their nationalities. In some cases, there were even nationalist reasons for doing so, but sometimes it was simply a question of feeling belonging, of communicating, of the associated opportunities for obtaining information and of solidarity. Some groups like the French, the Yugoslavs, the Polish, the Austrians, the Dutch and the Soviets were organised into national committees (see Kogon 1998, 287; and Neumann-Thein 2014, 43ff., 49). National groups were often concentrated in certain blocks, even though the blocks' occupancy could change at any time and was not just determined by criteria of national attribution.[14] The group photos that became a very popular

14 For example, Block 38 was occupied relatively continuously – from 1939 to 1943 – by Czech political prisoners. From 1941 to 1944, Poles were housed in Block 15 and Block 21, 'Hollanders' in Block 49 from 1941 to 1943, etc. Former prisoner Max Mayr compiled an overview of the

image genre among prisoners after liberation show the members of certain work commandos but also national groups (fig. 2a; fig. 2b). This reflects administrative practice in the camp after liberation, when attempts were made at the '[n]ationalmäßige Zusammenlegung' ['somewhat national consolidation'] of prisoners in certain blocks, likely with a view to repatriation (Verwaltungskommission 1945). Moreover, during the May celebrations that marked the liberation of the camp, prisoner blocks marched under their respective national flags (fig. 3a; fig. 3b). This is echoed in part in the genesis of some Buchenwald texts penned immediately after the camp's liberation. Some of them were written in national collectives, like the account of the Soviet prisoners – *Концентрационный лагерь Бухенвальд/Buchenwald Concentration Camp* (Fedtke and Landau) – and the collective diary written by Yugoslav inmates (Vučenović), which was also intended to help build national identity.

Initially, camp memory was quite deliberately nationally demarcated and written down in narratives that reflected that. Even the founding of the National Buchenwald Memorial in 1958 announced not just that it was intended as a German memorial but also that it is a memorial that records prisoners according to a national system, which is then spatially represented by the steles for each individual nation on the memorial site. The fact that Arnold Zweig notes the absence of 'die Fahne mit dem uralten Symbol des Davidsterns' ['the flag with the age-old symbol of the Star of David'] (Zweig 1958, 9) among the nations represented also has to do with the way that the history of the Jews was sacrificed for the nationally restrictive apparatus of memory.

A large number of above all early camp texts attempt to typify the different national prisoner groups, thereby revealing the tensions between them. This applies to even the earliest texts, such as the *Buchenwald Report*. David Rousset's *L'Univers Concentrationnaire* [*A World Apart*] dedicates a whole chapter to national differences, 'In no estuary is there true confluence' (Rousset 1951, 29). It addresses the connection between the reasons for deportation specific to each nation and the resulting social selection, thus attempting to explain the differences in behaviour among the prisoner groups in the camp. However, Rousset goes beyond providing what is essentially a sociological explanation and pronounces rather powerful value judgements on said behaviour, based to a large degree on national 'stereotypes' (Kranebitter 2021). For example, he portrays Russian forced labourers and prisoners of war as criminals. Nor do Polish people come off well, as they were, according to Rousset, 'astonishingly uneducated and

blocks' occupancy in the 1960s (see Mayr 1966). I would like to thank Dr Harry Stein for drawing my attention to this.

chauvinistic' (1951, 31). Rousset also viewed the majority of Greeks as 'Levantine bandits', while most of the Dutch were embroiled in 'rackets' (1951, 31). He has little to say about the Danes, apart from the fact that they 'died with excessive facility' (Rousset 1951, 32). Czech people come off well, although Rousset's friendlier verdict clearly has to do with the fact that most of them were political prisoners who knew how to organise themselves in the camp. However, Rousset does not paint a positive picture of French inmates either. The entire segment on them is shaped by Rousset's preconceptions regarding the sincerity of their political motivations.

Fig. 2a: Group portrait of liberated Austrians in front of one of the watch towers. Photo taken by Alfred Stüber. 21 April 1945. Buchenwald Memorial Collection 000-03.040.

Eugen Kogon also discusses the national differences between prisoners over three pages of *Der SS-Staat* [*The Theory and Practice of Hell*]. Like Rousset, his description is accompanied by strong value judgements. According to Kogon, the French were 'helplessly exposed to every hardship' (1998, 210) of the camp because they were not capable of organising themselves politically. Kogon values the Dutch, Danes, Norwegians, English, Czechs and Poles due to their solidarity and their good relationships with other groups of prisoners. When it comes to So-

viet prisoners, Kogon differentiates between Russian and Ukrainian prisoners, who he sees very distinctly. Semprún's novel-essay *Quel beau dimanche!* [*What a Beautiful Sunday!*] goes into detail about the particular conduct of Russian prisoners in the camp's final days, the result of a large proportion of very young forced labourers and a very small proportion of political prisoners: 'The inhabitants of the fatherland of Socialism seemed to come from another planet. They were a massive, distant, hostile crowd of young savages who did not accept the rules of the game.' (Semprún 1982, 97) Passages like this convey an impression of the impact that the hierarchies of national differences might have had on the everyday lives of the prisoners, not just in terms of how they were viewed and treated by the SS but also when it came to relationships between the prisoners. There were social hierarchies at play in the camp that were also influenced by nationality:

Fig. 2b: Group photo of Czech prisoners in front of a truck shortly before their departure. Provenance: Miloslav Hejl. May 1945. Buchenwald Memorial Collection 091.001.

> When I say 'us,' that isn't quite right. There are subtle distinctions to be made. There is a sort of hierarchy at work. The most invisible of us are really us: those of us who came to Buchenwald from the occupied countries of Western Europe. We have been here since 1943, approximately. So we're ten years behind them [the German communists] [...]. Slightly

> less invisible, bearers of a minimum of real existence, are the deportees from Czechoslovakia. [...]. Not only do they come from an imperial, partly Germanized Europe, but also they have been here since 1939. [...]. Then there are the others: Poles, Russians, other Eastern Europeans. They're in a class of their own. They constitute the plebs of the camps. (Semprún 1982, 209 – 210)

Fig. 3a: Liberated prisoners marching to May Day celebrations at the roll call square. Photo taken by Alfred Stüber. 1 May 1945. Buchenwald Memorial Collection 013-02.071.

This hierarchisation led to condemnations being issued between the different national groups. Robert Antelme provides a glimpse of this: '*Alle Franzosen Scheisse*' (1998, 11) he is told by a German *Blockältester* [block senior] in Buchenwald. The fact that he does so in the original language, of course, is another indication of multilingualism as one more dimension of representation in camp texts.

Some texts, like Pierre Julitte's novel *L'arbre de Goethe* [*Block 26*], construct their plots in part around the creation of a national, in this case French, group within the camp. The entire first part of Julitte's novel revolves around the erection of a French block, which then becomes the starting point for the French prisoners being able to identify arms-relevant operations connected to the camp and smuggling news about them out of the camp, making an important contribution to the bombing of those operations in 1944. But even when texts about the camp

like Julitte's novel do not adhere so expressly to national collectives of resistance, it is clear that the reference groups of main characters still belong to certain national groups within certain prisoner categories. In Peroutka's novel too, which is devoid of all nationalistic intentions, Novotny operates within the group of Czech political prisoners and Mr Kraus in the group of Czech Jews, the latter only dissolving when Herr Kraus is deported to an extermination camp.

Fig. 3b: Freed prisoners with flags at the roll call square during the May Day rally. 1 May 1945, photo taken by Samson B. Knoll. Buchenwald Memorial Collection 077.003.

And regardless of how the texts normatively behave in relation to any national affiliation, they begin by speaking in national reception contexts. For example, Eugen Kogon's account was disseminated around the world, but his representation of the camp obviously addresses a German postwar society that is very reluctant to engage with the subject of the camps. Of course, just like the texts of Soviet, Yugoslav, Polish and, to a certain extent, Hungarian and Italian literature, Bruno Apitz' novel *Naked Among Wolves* is an apologia for the communist resistance, but it was also written in defence of the communist prisoner cadre, which had been heavily criticised for the role that it played in the camp (Taterka 2000, 325 – 326). This was a situation that only existed for writers in the GDR. Although communist prisoners in France and Hungary also felt pressure to justify them-

selves, in the one case it was solely due to the pressure of public opinion while, in the other, it remained more or less the exception (Laczó and Scheibner). The situation of writers in the GDR can be compared only with that of Soviet prisoners, although their need to justify themselves was different as it pertained to the general suspicion levelled against them of having collaborated with the Germans, as Fedtke and Landau show in this volume. There are narratives of resistance in various literatures – in German and in Polish (Morawiec), English and French (Combe) – however, they can be motivated by very different factors. In Bruno Apitz and Otto Halle, for example, 'resistance' is synonymous with 'communist resistance', which is closely connected to how prisoners organised themselves in the camp, while in Pierre Julitte it means the sabotage carried out by the national association of French prisoners, which obeyed a military ethos. In Bruce Marshall's book about the life of Forest Yeo-Thomas, although it is certainly motivated by a similar ethos, resistance tends to express itself in the plans for escape that Thomas made throughout his internment and then also put into practice in the final days of the camp. Finally, as Frøland and Hatlehol show in this volume, the Norwegian prisoners took a very unique perspective: as a small group of students, they enjoyed a certain status in the camp and were therefore given 'privileges' that other prisoner groups did not have, which is why their memories are generally unheroic and limited to observations of others' suffering.

The fact that these texts speak within certain contexts of national memory means not just that there were certain ideological attitudes and political interests at play but also that there were national literary contexts in which they speak, to which they stand in relation, and with which they go beyond the stigma of being mere *Lagerliteratur*, which has often excluded them as outliers from the more general history of literature. Of course, German texts like those by Ernst Wiechert or Walter Poller frequently make reference to Goethe; Mieczysław Lurczyński's play *The Old Guard* provides a sarcastic commentary on Mickiewicz' Polish national epic *Pan Tadeusz* [*Master Thaddeus*] (Gall); while Semprún incorporates into his text the French modernist authors who followed Proust (Siguan). This does not mean that these texts normatively legitimize those national literary contexts. On the contrary, intertextuality in camp texts can also have the function of transcending nationality and, in the works of some authors, it does both. This is to say that they emerge and exist within precisely these contexts. This is another reason – alongside language proficiency – why it is not possible to engage with camp texts within the philologies, which generally have a national framework.

These national differences are in danger of disappearing within the idea of the Holocaust, which often threatens to replace the concrete experiences that people had in the camps with a reference to an abstract and – inasmuch as

the term 'Holocaust' generally refers to the persecution and murder of European Jews (Hilberg) – a sometimes very different event.[15] This volume reveals the risks of (mis-)understanding that accompany this historical act of abstraction: Silke Segler-Messmer writes about the conditions in which Robert Antelme's account *The Human Race* was canonised as Holocaust literature, while Arkadiusz Morawiec relates an anecdote about the Polish artist Jósef Szajna. At an exhibition in Boston, Szajna had to explain to his audience that he was a survivor of Auschwitz and Buchenwald but not a Jew. His audience no longer seemed to make any difference between the various victim groups and equated the Holocaust with the concentration camps. When the articles in this volume begin by looking at the national specifics of camp experience, they are doing so due to their conviction that the internationality of the camps and the texts that were written about them can only be adequately described against this backdrop and only by taking into account the concrete conditions of experience.

III

Buchenwald's internationality was thus grounded in the fact that prisoners from a wide range of almost exclusively European countries were deported there, where they had experiences that were also related to their nationality. Internationality, then, designates an experience of national differences that could be bridged or exacerbated in the camp. The reality in which this internationality reveals itself to be an experience of difference is that of the camp's multilingualism (Taterka 1994, 38), 'the brutal herding together of nationalities so that any proper understanding between them was precluded' (Rousset 1951, 65). This does not mean that these languages were equal within the camp. Because the SS guards were almost exclusively German, German was, of course, literally the ruling language. This was also one of the reasons why German prisoners played such a prominent role in prisoner self-administration and why prisoner groups like

15 This abstract universalisation of the 'Holocaust' has been carried out by various authors, sometimes with differing motivations. The point they make is generally that the specific crime committed against the Jews is losing its historic identity (see Diner 2020, 20). However, all other Nazi crimes are losing their identity as well as they are in danger of being subsumed within the term 'Holocaust'. There are certainly tendencies towards welcoming this universalisation as the beginning of a cosmopolitan community of memory. When they speak of the 'universal "container"' of the Holocaust, it is more about liberating memory from the 'national container' (Levy and Sznaider 2006, 195; 148; 183; 192).

the Luxembourgers, who had good command of German, had better changes of being deployed to relatively safe workplaces (Schmit).

However, internationality also meant that these differences sometimes overlapped with the reality of the camp, the political and racist reasons for deportation, and the normative attitudes of prisoners. This concerns, firstly, the similarities between the experiences that different national groups had. Prisoners all received a number, they all had to wear a certain marking, they all more or less starved, they all had to stand for several hours each day during roll call, and they were all abused by SS men at some point. In these texts, certain experiences quickly condense into the tropes of *Lagerliteratur* that can be found – sometimes in very different manifestations – in texts by very different authors, regardless of which country they came from. Examples include inmates arriving at the train station, the camp gates, roll calls, hunger, the dangerous work commandos, the punishments, the bunkers, the evacuation marches, etc., which the authors describe time and again.

Secondly, there are similarities in the reasons for deportation. This applies, firstly, to the political prisoners, primarily the communists, whose political affiliation sometimes overshadowed their nationality:

> National allegiance very nearly held the balance [with] party allegiance, though the latter was perhaps a little stronger. Judged by his everyday conduct, a French Communist was as a rule closer to a German Communist than he was to his own bourgeois compatriot. (Kogon 1998, 316)

In this case, internationality pertained not just to the inevitability of working together in the camp but also to the way a given group saw itself. One small episode that Rousset – who had been one of the founders of the Trotskyist Parti ouvrier internationaliste [Internationalist Workers Party] in 1936 – relates in *A World Apart* declares the communists' internationality to be its own agenda. When a Frenchman suggests holding a national demonstration on the *Appellplatz*, the communist *Blockältester* refuses, not just because it would be dangerous for the prisoners but because it goes against his communist convictions: 'I am an internationalist. That is the reason I am in the camp.' (Rousset 1951, 101)

This is also reflected in the way that the prisoners organised the work they performed together. In the camp's final phase, sporadic forms of cooperation transformed into the *Internationale Lagerkomitee* [International Camp Committee], where predominantly communist prisoners from Belgium, France, Italy, Yugoslavia, the Netherlands, the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia organised themselves based on the model of the Communist Internationale, although this too was carried out under the leadership of German prisoners (see Neumann-

Thein 2014, 51). Completely irrespective of what this politically motivated international cooperation looked like in practice, it played a decisive role in the way that the story of the camp was told by political, predominantly communist prisoners (on Hungary, see Laczó and Scheibner).

On the other hand, nationality also played a role for the prisoners who had been deported as Jews. The main character in Josef Bor's novel *The Lost Doll* (on Bor, see Ibler), like its author, is first deported to Theresienstadt and later to Buchenwald, and witnesses a conflict between various Jewish groups while still in Theresienstadt – between groups who primarily identify as Jews and groups that first and foremost see themselves as Czechs (Bor 1964, 151). But this national affiliation, regardless of how the Jewish deportees felt about it as individuals, is also overshadowed by the racist reasons for their deportation. This is something with which the Jewish Czechs and the Czech Jews in Bor's novel have to come to terms (Bor 1964, 227). It was a forced transcendence of nationality that was not a choice and sometimes had little to do with the attitudes of the deportees themselves: 'What made me Jewish was the Holocaust,' writes Imre Kertész (2013, 116), and it is no different for Josef Kramer in H. G. Adler's novel *Das Panorama* [*Panorama*] or Mr Kohn and Mr Kraus in Peroutka's novel *Oblak a valčík* [*The Cloud and the Waltz*]. The more the dissolution of the camps progressed, the more the national groups among the Jews dissolved as well. Fred Wander's tale *Der siebente Brunnen* [*The Seventh Well*] describes this dissolution on two levels: in relation to the life stories of Jewish prisoners and in relation to the work to which they were forced:

> De Groot from Amsterdam handed me some wood from the great stack the night shift had unloaded. I passed it on to Chukran from Tour, Chukran handed it to Modche Rabinowicz from Krakow, who gave it to Feinberg from Paris, and Feinberg threw it on the conveyor belt, which had already transported whole forests to the chopping plant of the Phrixa cellulose factory in the Giant Mountains, where it was reduced to tiny wood shavings. (Wander 2009, 18)

What connected Jewish prisoners and political prisoners was the transcendence of their nationality. This had already been at the heart of the reason why they had been deported, even though the reason was a different one in each case, which led them to experience the camp in different ways and to produce different transnational narrative patterns. In Adler's and Kertész' novels, resistance does not play any role. It had nothing to do with why they were deported and did not reflect the experiences that they had as Jews in the camp. Unlike the narratives of political prisoners, who often spent the entire period of their internment in one or two camps, these Jewish texts tell the tale of multiple camps, making them more stories of deportation than of camp life. Sometimes, the

boundaries between the camps blur in Fred Wander's texts, whereas Adler very deliberately obliterates them. Typical of the Jewish experience of Buchenwald in Elie Wiesel's and Josef Bor's narratives is the way that the camp is only mentioned as the final station on a long journey of deportation and then only takes up a few pages.

Interpretations of this experience also transcend deportees' nationalities. For Imre Kertész, for example, the consequence of being deported as a Jew was that he had to undergo 'the universal experience of people under totalitarianism':

> If I am Jewish, then I say that I am a denial, a denial of all human conceit, a denial of security, of peaceful nights, of peaceful spiritual life, of conformism, of free choice, of national glory – I am a black page in the book of triumphs, through which writing cannot penetrate, I am a denial, not Jewish, but a universal human denial, a 'mene, tekel, upharsin' on the wall of total oppression. (Kertész 1992, 60 – 61)

And he extends this no longer national but still system-specific experience to describe a fundamental existential situation:

> Because they [his books] solely and exclusively bear witness to the person who has produced them and because they have sprung from the homelessness of that individual, I could just as well have written them in Sanskrit, because there is no nation and no community that would acknowledge these statements as their own. (Kertész 1992, 93 – 94)[16]

In contrast, texts that are truly international are rare. At the Buchenwald camp, André Verdet edited the *Anthologie des poèmes de Buchenwald*, with contributions from mainly French but also Polish, German, Belgian and Russian authors. The Buchenwald oath that was read aloud during the remembrance ceremony held on 19 April 1945 for those murdered in Buchenwald speaks on behalf of many of the nations represented in the camp, with the result that the Jews, who did not fit easily into this national logic, were not named as a special group. It expressly includes 'Russians, the French, Poles, Czechs, Slovaks and Germans, Spaniards, Italians and Austrians, Belgians and the Dutch, the English, Luxembourgers, Romanians, Yugoslavs and Hungarians' (Internationales Lagerkomitee Buchenwald 1945, 174). It is unclear who composed the oath, although it was supposedly written by the German communist Walter Bartel, probably on behalf of the International Camp Committee (Neumann-Thein 2014, 75).

16 Kertész interprets the Jewish experience as the experience of existential 'vulnerabilty' (Kertész 1992, 149). I would like to thank Tamás Scheibner for his translations of the passages from Kertesz' *Gályanapló* [*Galley Boat-Log*].

What was later referred to as the *Buchenwald Report* compiled eyewitness statements made by prisoners from a wide range of nations, some of whom wrote not as individual speakers but as national collectives (Hackett 1995, 284, 286, 289, 291). Fleck and Kranebitter speak in this volume of the 'implicit multiperspectivity' of the report. However, the accounts given in the *Buchenwald Report* are dominated by German prisoners, and the editorial collective was made up almost exclusively of German and Austrian prisoners. This asymmetric internationality is then also adopted in Kogon's *The Theory and Practice of Hell*, which was based on the report. It is not possible to ascertain who was involved in in the writing of the report by the Buchenwald International Camp Committee *KL Bu/Konzentrationslager Buchenwald* by reading it. Its 'authorlessness' could in principle include all prisoners. The foreword by Ernst Busse, however, makes exclusive reference to the collective of German anti-fascist prisoners and addresses a German public. The files of the Buchenwald trial held in Dachau comprise a document of real international text production, in which eyewitnesses from various nations make statements.

IV

On the level of texts about the camp, however, there are two additional transnational factors. Because almost no texts were written about the camp until after its dissolution, all texts include knowledge gained after the fact. In the case of Buchenwald, knowledge about the Soviet gulags had a crucial influence on the production of texts. This had to do with the enormous significance of political prisoners and their perspective in narratives of the camp. They did not just represent an ethos of political action in their texts, subject their portrayals to political purposes and come under fire due to the roles they had played in the camp, but were also challenged by the similarities between the Soviet and the German camps. David Rousset, who identified these parallels early on, also experienced animosity from other communist survivors of the camps in France (Combe). By the time Semprún addressed this issue in his second Buchenwald book *What a Beautiful Sunday!*, the public debate about the similarities had calmed down, simply because nobody on the communist left was contesting the existence, extent and brutality of the Soviet camp system anymore. However, there was still enough confusion to lead Semprún to revise his first Buchenwald book. Here, his experience of the German camp blurs with his experience of reading about the Soviet camps. What Semprún read in the works of the most important Gulag authors – Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and Varlam Shalamov – now influenced his memories of what he had experienced in Buchenwald:

> I had read Solzhenitsyn's account some days before and I was still living in that obsessional world. So, when I caught sight of the swirling snow in the light of the lamps at the Gare de Lyon, the snow of that sudden spring storm, I had not remembered Buchenwald, at five in the morning one winter's day, perhaps even a Sunday. I had remembered Ivan Denisovich at the beginning of his day, on his way to the infirmary, when 'the sky was as dark as ever,' while 'the two searchlights were cutting broad swathes through the compound'. I was not in Gerard's place in some distant memory of Buchenwald. I was in Shukhov's place, or, even more sadly, in that of Senka Klevshin, whom I may have known – in a special camp, somewhere in the USSR. (Semprún 1982, 149)

Which brings us to the second aspect of the transnationality of Buchenwald portrayals: as always, this literature is shaped not just by historical fact but also by literary conventions and intertextual contexts. This also applies at a national level: Apitz' novel would be inconceivable without Remarque's camp novel *Der Funke Leben* [*Spark of Life*], which for its part draws on Kogon's book (see Pabst 2021), while Wander responds to Apitz (see Schmidt 2006; Pabst 2021), Antelme turns on Rousset, and Semprún reviews Antelme while basing the extreme subjectivity of his representation on *The Human Race*. The article by Fedtke and Landau in this volume discusses the close intertextual connections between the various literary portrayals of Buchenwald in the Soviet Union.

But this also applies in transnational contexts. Compared with the entirety of Buchenwald literature, the proportion of texts that have been translated into other languages is easy to grasp. However, there are texts that have acquired transnational authority and gone on to influence other texts. One of the texts that have experienced the broadest international dissemination – because it does not view itself as a Buchenwald text – is Kogon's *Theory and Practice of Hell*. Fred Wander's story *The Seventh Well* could not have been written without Semprún's *Le grand voyage* [*The Long Voyage*], which was published in the GDR in 1964. Semprún, as previously mentioned, revised his camp novel by making explicit reference to the texts by Solzhenitsyn and Shalamov.

As the example of Semprún shows, these kinds of patterns and intertextual networks did not just develop through the context of German camps but also spread out in literary patterns that, at first glance, have nothing to do with the literature of the camps. For instance, Rousset, Kertész and Adler all tap into Kafka to a certain extent because they see the camps as confirmation of his anthropology and associated methods of representation. This valorisation that Kafka underwent after and due to the experience of the camps and the Holocaust, going far beyond Buchenwald literature, indicates that there is an experience of modernity that transcends specific political systems and that has made a large contribution to the camps' symbolic effect, going beyond specific national contexts. Rousset's novel *Les jours de notre morts* [*The Days of Our Death*],

moreover, identifies similarities between the experience of the modern city and the experience of the camps, which is why Rousset alludes to John Dos Passos' novel *Manhattan Transfer* in his portrayal. Ernst Wiechert draws on Fyodor Dostoevsky's *House of the Dead* for reasons of genre history and religious philosophy. Klaus Michael Bogdal compares Apitz' novel with Pierre Boulle's *The Bridge Over the River Kwai*, demonstrating that the former should be read not just in the context of its discursive function in the GDR, to which scholarship has generally reduced it, but also in the context of popular literary narratives, which were much more widely disseminated and without which it would not be possible to explain the novel's success.

This is one of the reasons why this volume refers to a 'text history'. It wants to avoid making the impression that all these texts are heading directly towards the event. They are not. One of the first and most influential texts about Buchenwald and other camps – Kogon's *The Theory and Practice of Hell* – reacts to other texts by turning against the 'deluge of experience literature [*Erlebnisliteratur*]' (Kogon 1946, X) that had appeared by the time of its publication. The texts' retroactivity is qualified not just by greater distance and changes in knowledge and ideological framing but also by the relationship that the texts have to one another, into which more and more texts inscribe themselves as more time passes. This tends to be forgotten when taking a historiographical approach towards texts, as Nikolaus Wachsmann's history of the camps shows. Wachsmann cites these texts as evidence of an experience whose conditions he describes beforehand as a historian. The texts are not permitted their own dynamic. But the text history of the camp is not the same thing as the history of the camp.

Indeed, this volume speaks of a 'text history' because it does not want to differentiate at the outset between different text genres and the claims to validity associated with each of them. Although an analytical difference can be made between factual and fictional texts, it does not change anything about the fact that camp and Holocaust texts, even if they identify as fiction, have a different responsibility towards the event they are referencing than other fictions. As ever, fictionality here is not just a given but must be negotiated in relation to its material.

V

The articles in this volume make the case for writing the text history of Buchenwald, on the one hand, as a European text history, but, on the other, by considering national differences as part of the camp experience and the texts that it produced. Prisoners' experiences of the camp were influenced by nationality.

Part of those experiences was the experience of internationality as difference, as commonality, as solidarity, as the transnational reasons for deportation and as the transnational interpretation of the camp community. Something similar can be said about the text history of the camp, though there were other reasons for the nationalisation and transnationalisation of camp portrayals that cannot be attributed to prisoners' experiences of the camp alone.

Translated by Lydia J. White

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