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# (Re)Negotiating Boundaries in German Concentration Camp Poetry

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## Thesis Abstract

German-language concentration camp poetry has been repeatedly undervalued and misrepresented. When not overlooked entirely, these texts have primarily been conceptualised as historical documents, testimony, or cultural artefacts, and their identity as poems has been of secondary (or no) importance. Concerns over both the historiographical and aesthetic merit of this poetry have also contributed to critical neglect.

Whilst a small number of more in-depth studies – those by Moll (1988), Jaiser (2001) and Nader (2007) – have helpfully asserted the value of these poems, my thesis contributes to filling the significant research gap that remains. It is, crucially, a gap which is not only quantitative but also qualitative. Building upon the work done by Nader in particular, my thesis sets out from the assumption that these texts deserve to be considered as poems, as well as testimonial and historical documents, and therefore uses detailed textual analysis to provide a more nuanced picture of the corpus. Crucially, the poems are considered to be valid and valuable forms of witnessing and subsequently allowed to speak for themselves.

Close readings of these texts reveal that inmates used poetry to regain agency and make sense of their circumstances in a diverse range of ways. The creation and removal of boundaries was often central to these attempts. Whilst boundary negotiation is occasionally mentioned in the three previous in-depth studies, it has never been examined systematically, despite its prevalence and ability to further our understanding of these texts. Analysing the poems under this rubric provides a deeper insight into daily reality in the camps and some of the diverse and creative ways in which inmates sought to survive and resist this. The focus is no longer on what these poems are and whether they can be successful in such a role; instead, I concentrate on the rather more enlightening question of what these poems do and how and why they do it.



## Lay Summary

This thesis examines German-language poetry written in concentration camps between 1933 and 1945. When not overlooked entirely, these poems have often been criticised for a lack of artistic merit. Other critics have ignored any poetic features and focused instead on what information the poems might contain about their historical context. Although a few, more in-depth studies – those by Moll (1988), Jaiser (2001) and Nader (2007) – have argued that the poems are valuable, the sheer volume of poetry means that there is still much to be said about them.

Building upon the work done by Nader in particular, my thesis sets out from the assumption that these texts deserve to be considered as poems, as well as testimonial and historical documents, and are therefore allowed to speak for themselves. Through careful analyses of the poems, my thesis explores some of the many ways in which concentration camp inmates used poetry to regain a measure of control over their circumstances and make sense of their daily experiences. This often took place through the creation or removal of boundaries within their poems. For example, many inmates used poems to strengthen positive relationships and distance themselves from harmful relationships and circumstances. This has not been looked at in detail in previous studies of these poems. By closely analysing these strategies in a wide range of concentration camp poems, my thesis shows how these texts can improve our understanding of daily reality in the camps and the diverse and creative ways in which inmates sought to survive and resist this.



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## Declaration

I declare that this thesis has been composed solely by myself and that it has not been submitted, in whole or in part, in any previous application for a degree. Except where stated otherwise by reference or acknowledgment, the work presented is entirely my own.

*eRself*  
22.6.19



## Introduction

### Originality, importance, and aim of project

Concentration camp poetry – that is, poetry written not only about but also within National Socialist concentration camps – has been repeatedly undervalued and misrepresented. Whilst other genres of writing produced in the camps have been the object of extensive study, the camp poem remains overlooked, and the German-language camp poem even more so.<sup>1</sup> Despite the number of poems produced outnumbering other written forms, consideration of poetry's role and significance within the camps has been infrequent. When not overlooked entirely, these texts have primarily been conceptualised as historical documents, testimony, or cultural artefacts, and their identity as poems has been of secondary (or no) importance. Concerns over both the historiographical and aesthetic merit of this poetry have also contributed to critical neglect. Assertions that camp poetry is mostly unskilled and unmediated have been frequently and confidently made but poorly substantiated.

A small number of more in-depth studies – those by Moll (1988), Jaiser (2001) and Nader (2007) – have helpfully asserted the value of these poems, proposing and expounding the poem's ability to reassign a degree of agency to the author and enable them to make sense of some aspect of the senselessness that surrounded them.<sup>2</sup> Amongst the techniques by which this occurs, they propose, are the use of illusion, imaginative acts and humour. A key, and largely underexamined, factor in regaining agency and making sense of their circumstances is the (re)negotiation of boundaries through and within poetry. Indeed, the

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<sup>1</sup> Diaries, for example, have been studied in works such as: James E. Young, 'Interpreting Literary Testimony: A Preface to Rereading Holocaust Diaries and Memoirs', *New Literary History*, 18.2 (1987), 403-423; Renata Laqueur, *Schreiben im KZ: Tagebücher 1940-1945* (Bremen: Donat, 1991); Robert Moses Shapiro, ed., *Holocaust Chronicles: Individualizing the Holocaust Through Diaries and Other Contemporaneous Personal Accounts* (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 1999); Alexandra Garbarini, *Numbered Days: Diaries and the Holocaust* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> Michael Moll, *Lyrik in einer entmenschlichten Welt: Interpretationsversuche zu deutschsprachigen Gedichten aus nationalsozialistischen Gefängnissen, Ghettos und KZ's* (Frankfurt a.M.: R.G. Fischer, 1988); Constanze Jaiser, *Poetische Zeugnisse: Gedichte aus dem Frauen-Konzentrationslager Ravensbrück 1939-1945* (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 2000); Andrés Nader, *Traumatic Verses: On Poetry in German from the Concentration Camps, 1933-1945* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2007).



aforementioned techniques can all be better understood by considering how they create or remove particular boundaries.

Boundaries have long been a common theme within the discourse of Holocaust testimony and poetry. The limits of representation have been considered at length, but it is not my aim in this thesis to tackle this contentious issue. Thorough and balanced discussions of the arguments regarding (un)representability can be found in Friedländer (1992), Lang (2000), and Trezise (2001).<sup>3</sup> Whilst I intend to investigate how camp poets attempt to speak the unspeakable, my starting point will be the assertion that the poems concerned are valid and valuable forms of witnessing. The poems will be scrutinised not for traces of the 'essence' of the Holocaust but for the ways in which they 'give concrete shape to the history of internment' and work against silence.<sup>4</sup> Rather than focusing on the somewhat arbitrary question of whether camp poets succeed in representing extremity within the bounds of the poem, I will investigate the boundaries that poetry enables them to construct and remove, and the significance of these, and thereby contribute to filling the significant research gap that remains in this field.

Exploring camp poets' diverse means of boundary negotiation will enable more accurate conceptualisation of their work, providing a better understanding of the reasons behind and effects of the decision to write poetry. It will prove the important role camp poems played in restoring agency to inmates and helping them to make a measure of sense of their daily reality. Crucially, the thesis will demonstrate that the (re)negotiation of boundaries through poetry was central to this endeavour.

## Holocaust poetry

Until recently, study of Holocaust poetry has focused almost exclusively on post-1945 texts. Many such poems, written by those who lived through or narrowly escaped National

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<sup>3</sup> Saul Friedländer, ed., *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the "Final Solution"* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1992); Berel Lang, *Holocaust Representation: Art Within the Limits of History and Ethics* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2000); Thomas Trezise, 'Unspeakable', *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, 14.1 (2001), 39-66.

<sup>4</sup> Nader, p.70.

Socialist persecution, have come to be regarded as canonical. The works of poets such as Paul Celan and Nelly Sachs have been, and continue to be, scrutinised. When Holocaust poetry is mentioned, it is names such as theirs which most readily come to mind; whether critical opinion is positive or negative, the renown of their work cannot be denied. In *The Holocaust Encyclopedia*, James E. Young describes how ‘neither the Holocaust nor its literature can be reduced to anything approaching an essential truth, work, or canon’, yet shortly before comments on the widespread acceptance of Celan’s ‘Todesfuge’ as ‘the greatest post-war poem in the German language’, and names Sachs as ‘the other great German-language poet of the Holocaust’.<sup>5</sup> The formation of a canon of Holocaust writing in post-war German-language culture, responsible for ‘granting cultural legitimacy to certain voices of the Holocaust and denying it to others’, is increasingly being acknowledged and studied in greater depth. Up to this point, there has been little attempt at a systematic account of the formation of this canon or the reasons for which certain writers were excluded.<sup>6</sup>

When considering the prominence of a relatively small number of post-war poets, it is pertinent to also assess the relation of their writing to that of Theodor W. Adorno. Dominick LaCapra states that ‘[t]hrough canonization texts are presumed to serve certain hegemonic functions with reference to dominant values and structures’.<sup>7</sup> Adorno’s 1951 dictum – ‘nach Auschwitz ein Gedicht zu schreiben, ist barbarisch’ – was highly influential in shaping those dominant values, and remains ‘an authoritative force’ in German-language criticism, despite efforts to highlight the ways in which it has been misinterpreted and misquoted.<sup>8</sup> Klaus Hofmann, for example, describes how the corruption of Adorno’s statement – its interpretation as a prohibition of all poetry – became worryingly prevalent,

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<sup>5</sup> James E. Young, ‘Literature’, in *The Holocaust Encyclopedia*, ed. by Walter Laqueur and Judith Tydor Baumel (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 392-398 (pp.397-398).

<sup>6</sup> Arts and Humanities Research Council, Myriam Volk, ‘How Holocaust survivors bear witness in German-language literature’, <https://ahrc.ukri.org/research/casestudies/holocaustsurvivorsingermanliterature/> [accessed 1 September 2018]

<sup>7</sup> Dominick LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1994), pp.20-21.

<sup>8</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, ‘Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft’, in *Soziologische Forschung in unserer Zeit. Ein Sammelwerk Leopold von Wiese zum 75. Geburtstag*, ed. by Karl Gustav Specht (Cologne: Opladen, 1951), pp.228-240 (p.240); Lawrence Langer, *Using and Abusing the Holocaust* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), p.123.

and overshadowed his actual verdict on the barbarism of writing poetry.<sup>9</sup> Charlotte Ryland similarly argues that interpretations of Adorno's words by German writers and intellectuals have frequently failed to engage with the dialectical detail of his essay, that is, the collapse of the distinction between culture and barbarism.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, their responses are able to reveal more about their individual background and cultural or political agenda than about the issue of post-Holocaust literature.<sup>11</sup> Ryland makes a thoughtful differentiation between the responses of literary critics and those of poets to Adorno's statements: although literary critics' understanding and engagement with Adorno gradually deepened, poets were generally influenced by a desire to 'defend and assert the legitimacy of their own position as post-Holocaust poets' and continued to accept Adorno's argument as an 'assertion of impossibility or impropriety'.<sup>12</sup>

Ryland's most important point in relation to a Holocaust canon is that authors' and poets' views had more impact than those of literary critics. This caused the focus to remain on poetry and the question of how it could respond to the Holocaust, rather than on 'the idea, implicit in Adorno's words, that the state of society exemplified by Auschwitz may not have come to an end'.<sup>13</sup> Significantly, and undoubtedly influenced by Adorno's choice of preposition, the emphasis was specifically on poetry *nach* Auschwitz, rather than poetry *aus* or *in* Auschwitz.

Views differ as to how or if canonical poets respond to Adorno's pronouncements. The relationship between Celan and Adorno is particularly complex and has been discussed in much depth.<sup>14</sup> Certain comments made by Adorno suggest he believed that Celan, as the

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<sup>9</sup> Klaus Hofmann, 'Poetry after Auschwitz - Adorno's Dictum', *German Life and Letters*, 58.2 (2005), 182-194.

<sup>10</sup> The full statement in which Adorno's dictum is found, but which is rarely quoted in full, is: 'Kulturkritik findet sich der letzten Stufe der Dialektik von Kultur und Barbarei gegenüber: nach Auschwitz ein Gedicht zu schreiben ist barbarisch, und das frißt auch die Erkenntnis an, die ausspricht, warum es unmöglich ward, heute Gedichte zu schreiben.' Adorno, 'Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft' (1951), p.240.

<sup>11</sup> Charlotte Ryland, 'Re-membering Adorno: Political and Cultural Agendas in the Debate about Post-Holocaust Art', *German Life and Letters*, 62.2 (2009), 140-156.

<sup>12</sup> Ryland, p.155.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Robert Weninger, *Streitbare Literaten. Kontroversen und Ekklats in der deutschen Literatur von Adorno bis Walser* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2004), and David Cunningham and Nigel Mapp, eds., *Adorno and Literature* (London: Bloomsbury, 2008).

‘bedeutendste[n] Repräsentant[en] hermetischer Dichtung der zeitgenössischen deutschen Lyrik’, was able to evade cultural barbarism:

Diese Lyrik ist durchdrungen von der Scham der Kunst angesichts des wie der Erfahrung so der Sublimierung sich entziehenden Leids. Celans Gedichte wollen das äußerste Entsetzen durch Verschweigen sagen. Ihr Wahrheitsgehalt selbst wird ein Negatives.<sup>15</sup>

Although the poet’s response to Adorno’s polemics was somewhat more ambiguous, the persistent influence of the latter has resulted in an unequivocal ‘emphasis on the resistant, modernist aesthetics of writers such as Celan’.<sup>16</sup> These writers were able to withstand criticism and achieve renown because their work was judged to satisfy Adorno’s ‘wish for a committed, autonomous art’.<sup>17</sup> There is certainly an emphasis in such works on ‘unspeakability’, on the impossibility of using language to communicate the reality of the Holocaust, hence Adorno’s above-mentioned praise of Celan’s ‘Verschweigen’. Kathrin Bower describes this advocacy of using language in such a way as to represent its own inadequacies and the necessity of silence:

Holocaust literary scholarship has proclaimed speech an impossibility (thereby denying the victims a conventional voice) while simultaneously privileging a certain kind of language, a poetics of horror, fragmentation, and silence for which Paul Celan has been celebrated ever since Adorno’s proclamation [...]. This concentration on silence and its representations points to the increasingly self-referential nature of Holocaust literary studies.<sup>18</sup>

Despite Nelly Sachs also appearing to privilege silence, as well as unconventional, fragmentary forms, the reasons for her prominence are slightly more complex.<sup>19</sup> It has been frequently asserted that modernist lyric poetry is best suited to ‘recreate the senselessness

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<sup>15</sup> Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1973), p.477.

<sup>16</sup> See pp.37-41 in Weninger, *Streitbare Literaten*. It has been argued that Celan disagreed with Adorno’s ‘Gedicht nach Auschwitz’ pronouncement. His statement – ‘Was wird hier als Vorstellung von <Gedicht> unterstellt? Der Dünkel dessen, der sich untersteht hypothetisch-spekulativerweise Auschwitz aus der Nachtigallen- oder Singdrossel-Perspektive zu betrachten oder zu berichten’ – is often taken as a simple rebuttal of Adorno’s dictum, but might instead be interpreted as the need to consider more carefully what kind of poetry Adorno was referring to and why this would be barbaric. Antony Rowland, *Poetry as Testimony: Witnessing and Memory in Twentieth-century Poems* (New York: Routledge, 2014), p.8.

<sup>17</sup> Rowland, p.39.

<sup>18</sup> Kathrin Bower, ‘Claiming the Victim: Tokenism, Mourning, and the Future of German Holocaust Poetry’, in *German Studies in the Post-Holocaust Age: The Politics of Memory, Identity, and Ethnicity*, ed. by Adrian Del Caro and Janet Ward (Colorado: University Press of Colorado, 2000), pp.131-139 (p.137).

<sup>19</sup> Sachs wrote ‘Schweigen ist Wohnort der Opfer’. Nelly Sachs, *Suche nach Lebenden: Die Gedichte der Nelly Sachs*, ed. by Margaretha Holmqvist and Bengt Holmqvist (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1971), p.70.

of the Holocaust on a formal level by means of its own dissolution', but the degree to which Sachs' poetry fulfils modernist criteria, however, has not been agreed upon.<sup>20</sup> Though many of her poems evidence 'Schwierigkeiten der Wortwahl, d[as] rapidere[...] Gefälle der Syntax oder de[n] wacheren Sinn für die Ellipse', they have also at times been rejected as 'sentimental, mannerist, and distinctly unmodern attempts to represent the unrepresentable'.<sup>21</sup> Once more, as with Celan, whatever the attitude towards her work, it is Adorno's writing which is frequently used to situate it. In this respect, her renown can be seen to stem from two somewhat contradictory conclusions: the former being the belief that Sachs succeeded in refuting Adorno's dictum; the latter being the belief that her work endorses Adorno's dictum, encapsulating the aporia he describes between the necessity of witnessing and the impossibility of doing so.<sup>22</sup> These two positions might not be as irreconcilable as they seem: their differences are arguably due more to the particular interpretation of Adorno's writing than to the evaluation of Sachs' poetry.

This example illustrates well the primacy of Adorno in the critique and analysis of such texts. Regardless of interpretation, his writings have provided a significant point of reference for interpretation of Holocaust poetry. They are the reason for which some poems have been deemed successful and others failed. Such precedence is now, however, beginning to be challenged. Antony Rowland, for example, asserts that 'Adorno's maxim about barbaric poetry – and his simultaneous call for such modernist poetics – still haunts post-Holocaust debates about poetry like a form of critical melancholia, and the time has come to break the spell'.<sup>23</sup> Part of this so-called spell is the almost exclusive focus on poetry written after the Holocaust. Adorno's preposition choice is either the cause or the marker for the foregrounding of the question: how and why should poetry be written now, in the light of the Holocaust? Poetry that had already been written as the events of the Holocaust played out was either ignored for being irrelevant to the question or dismissed for its

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<sup>20</sup> Elaine Martin, *Nelly Sachs: The Poetics of Silence and the Limits of Representation* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011), p.114.

<sup>21</sup> Paul Celan, 'Der Meridian. Rede anlässlich der Verleihung des Georg-Büchner-Preises', in *Lyrik nach Auschwitz? Adorno und die Dichter*, ed. by Petra Kiedaisch (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1995), pp.78-81 (p.79); Bower, p.135.

<sup>22</sup> For example, Hans Magnus Enzensberger claimed in his *Merkur* article of 1959: 'Wenige vermögen [den Satz Adornos zu widerlegen]. Zu ihnen gehört Nelly Sachs. Ihrer Sprache wohnt etwas Rettendes inne. Indem sie spricht, gibt sie uns selber zurück, Satz um Satz, was wir zu verlieren drohten: Sprache'. Enzensberger, 'Die Steine der Freiheit', *Merkur*, 138 (1959), 770-775 (p.772).

<sup>23</sup> Antony Rowland, p.8.

inability to answer Adorno's 'call for such modernist poetics', as Rowland phrases it. It has been assumed that poetry *in* Auschwitz should have the same role and purpose as poetry *nach* Auschwitz; if it does not, there is little to be said about it, and if it does, it is markedly less successful in its ability to achieve those aims.

There is a consequent urgent need to acknowledge the significance and value of Adorno's thinking whilst simultaneously recognising that its remit is limited. Indeed, rather than anachronistically using it to judge all Holocaust poetry, his writing might itself be better understood and interpreted by acknowledging the existence and nature of those poems written during the Holocaust.

### Overview of German camp poetry

The very number of poems produced in the camps presents a case for their inclusion in discussions about Holocaust poetry. In his 1988 study, Michael Moll draws from a corpus of 1193 German-language poems, of which 548 were written in National Socialist concentration camps, and the remainder in National Socialist prisons, ghettos and internment camps. Despite this sizable corpus, Moll notes a considerable discrepancy between the number of poems to be consulted during his study and the knowledge of further German-language poems which remained at the time inaccessible to him.<sup>24</sup>

It is helpful now, drawing in particular on Moll's study and my own archival research, to give a brief overview of the origins of those poems which have survived and which give some indication as to who wrote them and when and where they were written. Their heterogeneity is immediately striking. Whilst the majority available to us today had male authors, there still exists a significant number produced by women and also children. Amongst the poets were those who had previously published their work – with varying degrees of critical acclaim – and those who had never before written any poetry at all. Their political, religious and social backgrounds were equally diverse. The concentration camp

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<sup>24</sup> Moll's overview of his corpus can be found in Moll, pp.13-29.

poet cannot therefore be defined as a certain type, just as the concentration camp inmate cannot, for example, be assumed to be Jewish, or a Communist.

With regard to the time of writing, poems have survived from the earliest days of the camps in 1933 up until the very day and hour of liberation (as well as those written immediately afterwards). There is an observable and unsurprising correlation between the intensification in National Socialist deportations, the number of German-speaking inmates interned in concentration camps, and the number of poems written. The majority date therefore from 1939. Of these, only very few were produced in (or, at least, have survived) extermination camps.<sup>25</sup> This is understandable not only because of the nature of these camps, but also because the focus here is on German-language poems. Whilst many concentration camps would at least in their early stages have had a majority of German or Austrian prisoners (e.g. Dachau, Mauthausen), the latter were a minority in the extermination camps of Eastern Europe. There is evidence of poetry having been written in every sizable concentration camp, though marked differences exist between the volumes stemming from the various camps.<sup>26</sup> A small number of camps – namely Buchenwald, Ravensbrück and Dachau – were particularly prolific in terms of poetry production. The reasons for this are undoubtedly multifaceted and will be considered more in Chapter One. They include, but are not limited to, the initial deportation of many of those involved in German or Austrian cultural life to a relatively small number of camps, and the existence of *Arbeitskommandos* in certain camps which provided those prisoners assigned to them with time and materials for writing (albeit still at great personal risk). Regarding this latter point, the number of poems produced in a particular camp could be quite significantly skewed by just one or two inmates who had regular access to writing implements and relatively more

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<sup>25</sup> An exception here is the Austrian poet, Hugo Sonnenschein Sonka, who composed and memorised at least sixteen poems during his internment in Auschwitz. See Sonnenschein, *Schritte des Todes: Traumgedichte aus Auschwitz* (Vienna: Monte Verita, 1993).

<sup>26</sup> From now on, the term poetry will be used to designate German-language poetry, the focus of this thesis, unless otherwise specified. Relatively more attention (though arguably still insufficient) has been given to poetry in other languages, particularly Yiddish and Polish. Moll, for example, comments that Polish camp poetry 'gehört in Polen bereits zum nationalen Erbe. In Grundzügen ist ihre Kenntnis unter der polnischen Bevölkerung weit verbreitet' (p.36). Gary D. Mole's study of French deportation poetry is one of the most helpful critical studies of poetry in a language other than German: Gary D. Mole, *Beyond the Limit-Experience: French Poetry of the Deportation, 1940-1945* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002). 'Sizable' here refers to camps where more than 100,000 were imprisoned at their greatest period of use, though that is not to say that poetry was not written in smaller camps.

freedom to write. For example, Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz, a prisoner in Dachau, worked from November 1942 until liberation in the office of a screw factory known as *Präzifix*. During this time, he was able to compose at least twenty-seven poems and keep an extensive diary. Similarly, the priest Karl Adolf Gross had opportunity to write 110 poems between mid-June and December 1943 in the sick quarters of Dachau.

The vast majority of the poems of which we are aware are to be found in the archives of the concentration camp memorial sites, having been either donated by the author or the next of kin. A small number are also to be found in other public archives such as the DÖW (*Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstandes*) in Vienna, the Wiener Library in London, and Yad Vashem in Jerusalem. A systematic cataloguing of camp poems has never occurred, and it therefore remains the case that there is no definitive answer as to how many have survived or precisely where they are to be found. Such a task is complicated by the fact that many poems, preserved until liberation, were taken from the camp along with other personal effects and remain in private ownership. Given the decision taken by many former concentration camp inmates to emigrate, it is assumed that these poems are now dispersed across the world, and a large proportion are estimated to have been taken to Israel and the United States. Undoubtedly, these poems, along with those preserved in archives, are part of a much larger group. It is impossible to be sure exactly how many poems were destroyed before 1945 (often by the poets themselves as a precautionary measure) or how many have since been lost, irreparably damaged or forgotten about since. Some of the more recent published collections are a result of previously unknown poems being discovered purely by chance.<sup>27</sup>

## Publication history

When discussing the publication of camp poetry in more detail, it is useful to first note two other critical overviews of the publication history of these poems. The study already mentioned by Michael Moll details most thoroughly the publication of volumes of poetry by single authors who were particularly prolific during internment, though given the date of

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<sup>27</sup> For example, Edo Leitner's *Galgenlieder* were published in 1989 after being found in a drawer following his death. Leitner, *Galgenlieder: Reimereien* (Frankfurt a.M.: dipa, 1989).



publication of Moll's own work, some more recent collections are necessarily omitted.<sup>28</sup> Andrés Nader's overview focuses more on multi-authored anthologies of camp poetry published in the 1980s and 1990s, and is particularly insightful in its exposition of the various political aims implicit in the collections.<sup>29</sup> Moll's and Nader's observations will now be briefly summarised, commented upon, and where necessary, expanded or revised.

Immediately after the end of the war, a small number of anthologies were published. However, very few of these contained solely poems written in concentration camps. *De Profundis: Deutsche Lyrik in dieser Zeit*, for example, published in Munich in 1946 and edited by Gunter Groll contains a small number of camp poems, but the vast majority are written by authors who had been part of the so-called inner emigration.<sup>30</sup> This 'inconspicuous' inclusion of a small number of camp poems in anthologies of inner-emigration and exile poetry is typical in the post-war years.<sup>31</sup> Here it must also be mentioned that several anthologies were also published during the 1940s and 1950s which had particular ideological emphases. For example, research was undertaken to find poetry with explicitly Christian themes. Moll explains this as being rooted in the desire, 'Hinweise und Bestätigungen dafür zu finden, daß der christliche Gott auch in den verzweifelten Situationen in NS-Gefängnissen und KZs wirksam geblieben war'.<sup>32</sup> The most comprehensive of such anthologies is the 1954 *Du hast mich heimgesucht bei Nacht. Abschiedsbriefe und Aufzeichnungen des Widerstandes 1933 bis 1945*, which contained 31 prayer-like poems.<sup>33</sup> Poems are also found in monographs on various Christian figures, such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Moll, pp.18-31.

<sup>29</sup> Andrés Nader, *Traumatic Verses: On Poetry in German from the Concentration Camps, 1933-1945* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2007), pp.22-32.

<sup>30</sup> Gunter Groll, ed., *De Profundis: Deutsche Lyrik in dieser Zeit. Eine Anthologie aus zwölf Jahren* (Munich: K. Desch, 1946).

<sup>31</sup> Nader, p.28. Three other poetry anthologies of this kind are: Rudolf Felmayer, ed., *Dein Herz ist Deine Heimat* (Vienna: Amandus, 1955); Manfred Schlösser, ed., *An den Wind geschrieben* (Darmstadt: Agorà, 1960, 1961, 1962); Heinz Seydel, ed., *Welch Wort in die Kälte gerufen: Die Judenverfolgung des Dritten Reiches im deutschen Gedicht* (Berlin: Verlag der Nation, 1968).

<sup>32</sup> Moll, p.25.

<sup>33</sup> Helmut Gollwitzer, Käthe Kuhn, and Reinhold Schneider, eds, *Du hast mich heimgesucht bei Nacht. Abschiedsbriefe und Aufzeichnungen des Widerstandes 1933 bis 1945* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1954).

<sup>34</sup> See Moll, pp.25-26, for details of the main religious publications.

Regarding single-author collections, a number of poets succeeded in having their work published in the 1940s. These include Karl Adolf Gross, mentioned above, who self-published two collections in 1946: *Sterne in der Nacht. Lieder und Reime eines Ausgestoßenen* and *Komm wieder, liebe Bibel*, both strongly marked by Gross' Christian faith.<sup>35</sup> A similarly 'eindeutig weltanschaulich geprägt' collection was *Seelenstimmungen in Hymnen*, containing 56 poems by the priest Johannes Maria Verweyen, who was imprisoned in various Berlin prisons, before being transported to Sachsenhausen and finally Bergen-Belsen.<sup>36</sup> Other poets who managed to publish their poetry include Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz (Dachau), Roman Gebler (Dachau, Flossenbürg), Gösta Durchham (Buchenwald), Karl Schnog (Buchenwald), Hasso Grabner (Buchenwald), Katharina Staritz (Ravensbrück) and Hugo (Sonka) Sonnenschein (Auschwitz).<sup>37</sup>

The relatively large number of publications appearing in the immediate post-war years can be largely attributed to the victims' desire to document their suffering under the National Socialist regime, as well as their attempts at resistance. Moll argues that this motivation was strengthened by 'die von den Siegermächten erhobene These einer Kollektivschuld aller Deutschen'.<sup>38</sup>

Anthologies appearing from the early 1960s onwards can be distinguished relatively unproblematically according to whether they were published in the FRG, the GDR, or reunified Germany. Though not all were politically motivated, the majority reflect developments in both Holocaust Studies and the Cold War. Regarding the former, there

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<sup>35</sup> Karl Adolf Gross, *Sterne in der Nacht. Lieder und Reime eines Ausgestoßenen* (Munich: Neubau, 1946); Gross, *Komm wieder, liebe Bibel: Lied der Sehnsucht des Dachauer Häftlings Nr. 16921* (Munich, Neubau, 1946).

<sup>36</sup> Moll, p.21; Johannes Maria Verweyen, *Seelenstimmungen in Hymnen* (Kleve u. Kevelaer: Boss, 1950).

<sup>37</sup> Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz, *Kette der Tage: Gedichte aus Dachau* (Stuttgart and Calw: Gerd Hatje, 1946); Roman Gebler, *Aus dämmernden Nächten* (Munich: Neubau, 1947); Gösta Durchham, *Ich hasse nicht. Dichtungen aus Buchenwald* (Vienna: Österreichischer Bundesverlag, 1945); Karl Schnog, *Jedem das Seine: Satirische Gedichte* (Berlin: Ulenspiegel, 1947); Hasso Grabner, *Fünfzehn Schritte Gradaus: Gedichte* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1959); Katharina Staritz, *Des großen Lichtes Widerschein. Berichte und Verse aus der Gefangenschaft* (Münster: Evangelische Frauenhilfe, 1952); Hugo (Sonka) Sonnenschein, *Schritte des Todes: Traumgedichte* (Zürich: Limmat, 1964). Little appeared then until the late 1980s, when a few more single-author collections were published, including Edo Leitner's *Galgenlieder* in 1989, and Heinrich Steinitz, *Noch mehr. Sonette eines Häftlings in Buchenwald*, ed. by Eckart Früh (Vienna: gratis und franko, 1988).

<sup>38</sup> Moll, p.29.

have been 'several waves' of interest in the Holocaust since 1945, and these have often been concomitant with attempts to prevent the Holocaust being denied or forgotten.<sup>39</sup> Oral history became increasingly more prominent, and from the 1970s onwards a number of large projects were undertaken to allow Holocaust survivors to bear witness and remember, an act which had rarely been facilitated in the immediate post-war years.<sup>40</sup> A more focused interest on women's experience of the Holocaust also began to develop, and this resulted in many works in the 1980s, several of which made use of oral history methods. A small number of poems written by women during imprisonment are printed for the first time in these works.<sup>41</sup> Whilst some of these autobiographical and biographical texts are apolitical, unreligious, and not aligned with any other ideology, a number of them have a strong political slant.<sup>42</sup>

Cold War rhetoric can be most clearly seen in the poetry anthologies published between 1960 and 1990, the majority of which are implicitly or explicitly shaped by political ideology. The degree to which these are 'interessegeleitet' can be best illustrated with a few examples from the introductions to West and East German publications.<sup>43</sup> Manfred Schlösser, for example, editor of *An den Wind geschrieben* (West Germany), claims to have refrained 'weislich einer Parteinahme' when selecting poems for the anthology, but then

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<sup>39</sup> Nader, p.24. The history of Germany's relationship to the Holocaust and how and where the latter should be remembered and memorialised is obviously extremely complex and is discussed in works such as: Bill Niven, *Facing the Nazi Past: United Germany and the Legacy of the Third Reich* (London: Routledge, 2002); Bill Niven and Chloe Paver, eds, *Memorialization in Germany since 1945* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2010); Mary Fulbrook, *German National Identity after the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Polity, 1999); Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

<sup>40</sup> For example, the Fortunoff Video Archive of Holocaust Testimonies at Yale University started in 1979.

<sup>41</sup> For example, Grete Salus's autobiographical work, *Niemand, nichts – ein Jude* (Darmstadt: Darmstädter Blätter, 1981), contains seven poems written during her imprisonment in Auschwitz; Antonia Bruha's autobiographical work, *Ich war keine Heldin* (Vienna: Europa, 1984), contains six poems written in Ravensbrück; Margarete Glas-Larsson's *Ich will reden. Tragik und Banalität des Überlebens in Theresienstadt und Auschwitz* (Vienna: Molden, 1981) contains four previously unprinted poems written 'für sich selbst' in Auschwitz. Moll surmises from the fact that these poems seem to have been printed only by chance, as part of larger historical or biographical texts, forty to fifty years after they were first written, that a considerable proportion of 'dieser speziellen Gelegenheitslyrik von Frauen' remain in private ownership (p.27).

<sup>42</sup> For example, Guste Zörner, ed., *Frauen-KZ Ravensbrück* (Berlin: Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1971) contained two poems. It was published with the assistance of the 'Komitee der Antifaschistischen Widerstandskämpfer der DDR', and this is clearly reflected in the content and the focus on antifascist resistance. This is also the case with Gerda Szepansky's edited work, *Frauen leisten Widerstand 1933-1945* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1983), again containing two poems.

<sup>43</sup> Moll, p.29.

declares that 'Beiträge jener Autoren, die, unserer Information nach, nur für eine andere Spielart eines totalitären Regimes kämpften oder litten und nicht grundsätzlich gegen die Entwürdigung der menschlichen Persönlichkeit, - daß diese Autoren hier keinen Platz haben können'.<sup>44</sup> That is to say, the poetry of Communist opponents to National Socialism was deemed unsuitable for publication in West Germany, and this is representative of attitudes in the FRG as a whole, where Communist and Socialist sources and testimony played 'eine untergeordnete und damit auch historisch verzerrte Rolle' into the 1970s.<sup>45</sup> Andrés Nader comments on the much milder remarks in the 1960 edition of Schlösser's anthology, intimating that the erection of the Berlin Wall in 1961 affected the editor's opinion of Communist authors.<sup>46</sup> Like other publications in the FRG, the emphasis is on the battle 'gegen die Barbarei', a battle not fought with political aims.<sup>47</sup> The focus is very much on the victims, who are frequently referred to as 'Märtyrer', and the suffering they underwent.<sup>48</sup> At times, 'ein die historischen Fakten verfälschendes Übergewicht' is given to Christian resistance fighters, perhaps out of a desire for a moral revival of the Church and society.<sup>49</sup>

In East Germany, the emphasis is very different. Wolfgang Schneider's 1973 collection contained both art and poetry produced in Buchenwald, of which there are 55 German-language poems.<sup>50</sup> Its very title is revealing: *Kunst hinter Stacheldraht: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des antifaschistischen Widerstandskampfes*. The book seeks to make known the heroism of Communist (rather than, amongst others, Christian, Jewish, or bourgeois) resistance fighters in the camp, and consequently stresses their political agenda and resolve above any suffering they endured. This was an important part of the 'Programmatik und Legitimierung des neu entstehenden Staates als erstem antifaschistischem Staat auf deutschem Boden'.<sup>51</sup> Even Heinz Seydel's anthology (1968), unique (both in East and West Germany) in its focus on Jewish persecution, puts this persecution 'in the acceptable context in official East German history': the Final Solution was only 'ein Ausschnitt' of the

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<sup>44</sup> Schlösser, 1962, p.9.

<sup>45</sup> Moll, p.30.

<sup>46</sup> Nader, p.29.

<sup>47</sup> Schlösser, 1962, p.10.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 1960, p.17; 1962, p.7.

<sup>49</sup> Moll, p.30.

<sup>50</sup> Wolfgang Schneider, ed., *Kunst hinter Stacheldraht: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des antifaschistischen Widerstandskampfes* (Weimar: Nationale Mahn- und Gedenkstätte Buchenwald, 1973)

<sup>51</sup> Moll, p.29.

National Socialist 'Hölle' and the GDR is presented as the only solution to the class antagonism supposedly at the heart of anti-Semitism.<sup>52</sup>

Bernd Jentsch's collection, *Der Tod ist ein Meister aus Deutschland: Deportation und Vernichtung in poetischen Zeugnissen*, should be mentioned briefly here, for it neatly illustrates the political agendas behind the publications.<sup>53</sup> Jentsch, an author who grew up in the GDR, protested strongly against the expatriation of Wolf Biermann in 1976; following Biermann's departure, he felt compelled to also leave, and moved to Switzerland. His anthology is not unique in that a handful of camp poems are included under somewhat vague headings (e.g. 'Frachtzettel', 'Partisanenwald', 'Kinderkreuzzug', and 'Schädelpyramide') alongside works by Brecht, Celan, Enzensberger, and Spies, with no indication as to where and when most of the poems were produced. The introduction, however, is more unusual, for it recognises the broad political and religious spectrum of the victims of National Socialism: 'Sechs Million Juden. Und wie viele Gewerkschafter, bekennende Christen, Zeugen Jehovas, Sozialdemokraten, Kommunisten?'<sup>54</sup> It also details the controversy over works by GDR dissidents and West German poets being published alongside those of GDR supporters. A number of such poems had to be removed from the published edition, 'getilgt vom Büro für Urheberrechte'.<sup>55</sup> The political agenda of the GDR was to ultimately determine the way in which and the degree to which the poetry of those who suffered under National Socialism should be presented:

Aber, so fragt man sich, wessen Geistes Kind ist, wer mit derart fadenscheinigen Begründungen das Zustandekommen von drei Büchern zu hintertreiben versucht, deren Anliegen es ist, die Verbrechen des deutschen Faschismus mit den Mitteln des Gedichts zu dokumentieren?<sup>56</sup>

A separate but still politically motivated group of works published during this period were monographs on particular camps. For example, Walter Bartel's extensive publication, *Buchenwald. Mahnung und Verpflichtung*, appeared in four editions between 1960 and 1983 and contained twenty-one poems from the camp (fifteen of which were German) in

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<sup>52</sup> Nader, p.30; Seydel, p.9.

<sup>53</sup> Bernd Jentsch, ed., *Der Tod ist ein Meister aus Deutschland: Deportation und Vernichtung in poetischen Zeugnissen* (Munich: Kindler, 1979)

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p.iii.

<sup>55</sup> Jentsch, p.iv.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

the chapter, 'Kunst und Literatur im antifaschistischen Kampf'.<sup>57</sup> It was edited also by the 'Komitee der antifaschistischen Widerstandskämpfer der DDR'. The secretary of this committee between 1970 and 1975, Willy Perk, had published his study on the Emsland camps in 1960.<sup>58</sup> Though published in West Germany, *Hölle im Moor* focuses predominantly on the antifascist struggle of well-known Communist inmates. Twenty-one German-language songs and poems written in the camp are included at the end of the book, though these are presented without editorial comment: at most, the author's name is given.<sup>59</sup>

After reunification, this strong political emphasis was mostly displaced by the West German focus on the suffering and persecution of the victims of the Third Reich. The first anthology published in reunified Germany, Hanna Elling's 1990 *Mitten in tiefer Nacht: Gedichte aus Konzentrationslagern und Zuchthäusern des deutschen Faschismus, 1933-1945*, was also the first anthology containing exclusively camp poetry, signifying a growing recognition that these poems could constitute a genre of their own and might even have a value beyond the theme of resistance.<sup>60</sup> Elling, herself a former camp inmate, organises the poetry extremely systematically and provides the reader with historical background to the texts. The focus has clearly shifted from 'the nobility and heroism of political opposition to personal trauma'.<sup>61</sup> The publications which followed maintained this focus on the individual's experience of suffering, and this reflects a similar trend in Holocaust Studies.<sup>62</sup>

Just as scholarly investigation into the Holocaust increased significantly in the 1990s, so the number of poetry anthologies also increased. The 1994 publication of an anthology by the publishing house Fischer, *Draußen steht eine bange Nacht: Gedichte und Lieder aus*

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<sup>57</sup> Walter Bartel, *Buchenwald. Mahnung und Verpflichtung* (Frankfurt a.M.: Röderberg, 1960), pp.451-500.

<sup>58</sup> This group of fifteen camps, built between 1933 and 1938 in the remote wasteland area near the border to the Netherlands, are relatively unknown.

<sup>59</sup> Willy Perk, *Hölle im Moor. Zur Geschichte der Emslandlager 1933-1945* (Frankfurt a.M.: Röderberg, 1970), pp.121-135.

<sup>60</sup> Hanna Elling, ed., *Mitten in tiefer Nacht: Gedichte aus Konzentrationslagern und Zuchthäusern des deutschen Faschismus, 1933-1945* (Frankfurt a.M.: Verlag für Akademische Schriften, 1990).

<sup>61</sup> Nader, p.31.

<sup>62</sup> Michael Moll, for example, published a compilation of poetry in 1991 with Barbara Weiler, a Social-Democratic Bundestag representative; Weiler petitioned a small publishing house to print *Lyrik gegen das Vergessen: Gedichte aus Konzentrationslagern* (Marburg: Schüren Presseverlag, 1991), the emphasis once again being on the victims' 'Gefühle' and 'Einzelschicksale, die aus der Namenlosigkeit herausgeholt sind'. (pp.7-8)

*Konzentrationslagern*, was especially significant.<sup>63</sup> It was the first collection by a major publisher and confirms again that camp poetry was now being regarded as a self-contained genre.<sup>64</sup> There is a particular emphasis in the introduction on the role of creativity in the camps, an emphasis which persisted throughout the 1990s and is reflected in the number of publications on other cultural activities within the camps.<sup>65</sup>

During this decade, a number of single-author and single-camp anthologies were also published. An example of the former is Armin Freudmann's collection of 58 poems, *So sang zu mir der Stacheldraht: KZ-Gedichte*, all written in forced labour or concentration camps between 1940 and 1945.<sup>66</sup> In 2012, an electronic version of the poems was published by Freudmann's son, Gustav.<sup>67</sup> Regarding single-camp anthologies, *Mein Schatten in Dachau: Gedichte und Biographien der Überlebenden und Toten des Konzentrationslagers* and *Kazett-Lyrik: Untersuchungen zu Gedichten und Liedern aus dem Konzentrationslager Sachsenhausen* are the most comprehensive, and include more biographical and historical background to the poets and poems than previous publications.<sup>68</sup> More recently, the book *Stimmen aus Buchenwald: Ein Lesebuch* contained a few poems; *Der gefesselte Wald: Gedichte aus Buchenwald* is a bilingual edition of André Verdet's 1946 (new edition in 1995) *Anthologie des poèmes de Buchenwald*.<sup>69</sup> This new edition highlights a continued German interest in camp poetry in the twenty-first century, but also typifies the persistent unscholarly treatment of these poems. This will be discussed in more detail shortly, but it is sufficient here to note that several German-language poems were translated into French

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<sup>63</sup> Ellinor Lau and Susanne Pampuch, eds, *Draußen steht eine bange Nacht: Gedichte und Lieder aus Konzentrationslagern* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1994)

<sup>64</sup> This anthology also contains French, Polish, Yiddish, and Czech poems, but all with German translations.

<sup>65</sup> Works have been published on art (e.g. Mickenberg, Granof, and Hayes, 2003; Wendland, 2017), religion (e.g. Rahe, 1999), music (e.g. Fackler, 2000, and Gilbert, 2005), and drama (e.g. Rovit and Goldfarb, 1999) within the camps.

<sup>66</sup> Armin Freudmann, *So sang zu mir der Stacheldraht: KZ-Gedichte* (Vienna: REMAprint, 1992).

<sup>67</sup> The e-book can be found at <<https://www.smashwords.com/books/view/248694>> [accessed 30 September 2018].

<sup>68</sup> Dorothea Heiser, ed., *Mein Schatten in Dachau: Gedichte und Biographien der Überlebenden und Toten des Konzentrationslagers* (Munich: Pfeiffer, 1993); Katja Klein, ed., *Kazett-Lyrik: Untersuchungen zu Gedichten und Liedern aus dem Konzentrationslager Sachsenhausen* (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 1995).

<sup>69</sup> Holm Kirsten and Wulf Kirsten, eds, *Stimmen aus Buchenwald: Ein Lesebuch* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2002); Wulf Kirsten and André Verdet, eds, *Der gefesselte Wald: Gedichte aus Buchenwald. Französisch-Deutsche Ausgabe*, trans. by Annette Seemann (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2013); André Verdet, ed., *Anthologie des poèmes de Buchenwald* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1946).

for Verdet's collection; unfortunately, for the new edition of this collection, the French translations were re-translated into German, resulting in obvious disparities with the German originals.

The current situation, then, is somewhat conflicting. Whilst collections continue to be published, very few of the anthologies were or are widely available.<sup>70</sup> Publication has been unsystematic, and there has never been an exhaustive anthology of all German-language camp poetry, or even all German-language poetry from just a single camp. Michael Moll commented in 1988: 'Es existiert weder ein umfassendes Biographienwerk, noch ein quantitativer oder qualitativer Überblick über die Kunst, Musik oder Literatur, die in den NS-Haftstätten geschaffen worden ist'.<sup>71</sup> This is still true today, yet in spite of this, the poems have managed to attract and sustain a measure of popular interest. This popularity has been attained and attested to not only through publications, but also through newspaper articles, and poetry readings at Holocaust memorial services and cultural events. These readings take various formats and often combine poetry with music from the camps. For example, a reading of the poems in *Der gefesselte Wald* by the translator, Annette Seemann, took place in November 2014 in Weimar, accompanied by clarinet music.<sup>72</sup> Similarly, an evening event entitled 'Musik und Lyrik im Konzentrationslager' occurred at the KZ-Gedenkstätte Mittelbau-Dora in June 2010, and included a talk on the importance of music and poetry within the camp, as well as musical and poetic recitals.<sup>73</sup> The year before, a CD, *Lyrik gegen das Vergessen: Gedichte und Lieder aus Ghettos und Konzentrationslager 1933-1945*, was released, containing readings of many of the poems from Moll and Weiler's 1991 anthology along with a cello accompaniment.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> For example, after years of careful research, a revised, more accurate edition of Emil Rheinhardt's diaries, many of which were kept in Dachau, was published in 2012. This edition also included a number of poems written at the time. Emil Alphons Rheinhardt, *"Meine Gefängnisse": Tagebücher 1943 - 1945*, ed. by Dominique Lassaigue, Uta Schwarz, and Jean-Louis Georget (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012).

<sup>71</sup> Moll, p.30.

<sup>72</sup> Literarische Gesellschaft Thüringen e.V., <<http://www.literarische-gesellschaft.de/veranstaltungen/veranstaltung/30-annette-seemann>> [accessed 29 September 2018]

<sup>73</sup> KZ-Gedenkstätte Buchenwald, Weimar, *Musik und Lyrik im Konzentrationslager*, <<http://www.buchenwald.de/en/317/date/2010/06/02/musik-und-lyrik-im-konzentrationslager>> [accessed 29 September 2018]

<sup>74</sup> Anka Hirsch and Ursula Illert, *Lyrik gegen das Vergessen: Gedichte und Lieder aus Ghettos und Konzentrationslager 1933-1945* (Ernst-Ludwig Chambré-Stiftung zu Lich, 2009) [on CD]



A final example of the persistent interest in art from the camps can be found in the Wiener Library's newsletter for July 2018 and the following appeal: 'BBC Radio 4's *The Reunion* seeking Holocaust artists'.<sup>75</sup> Whilst this most recent example is limited neither to poetry nor to art produced by German-speaking artists, the announcement is indicative of a sustained public interest in creativity in the camps:

Were you a young poet, painter or musician in a Nazi concentration camp? Are you interested in sharing your story? Radio 4 are looking to bring together Holocaust artists for a special episode of the series *The Reunion*, presented by Sue Macgregor. In the programme we gather four or five people who were part of a key moment in history to share their experiences and discuss how they feel about it now.

## Critical research

There is an undeniable disparity between the positive public reception of the poetry mentioned above and the distinct lack of critical attention it has been given. It is important now to consider the field of academic research and examine how camp poetry has previously been analysed. The most striking point here is simply how little research has been carried out. To come back briefly to Adorno's dictum, discussed above, this poetry has repeatedly been overlooked or set aside in favour of post-Holocaust poetry. Reasons for this may be practical as well as theoretical: the poems, as just described, are widely dispersed and relatively difficult to track down as either published or unpublished texts. It would however be naive to assume that this is the main reason for critical oversight. The sporadic attention these poems have received has been largely negative and has frequently resulted in them being dismissed without any attempt at in-depth analysis of their content, form, or value.

Despite this widespread dismissal, critical opinion has not been at all unified in its critique of camp poetry. These works have been faulted on different grounds by different critics, and these grounds can be divided more or less neatly into three categories: the ethical, the historical, and the aesthetic. Before examining these categories more closely, it is pertinent to firstly propose that these poems have received such diverse treatment because of a

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<sup>75</sup> Wiener Library E-Newsletter (July 2018), <<http://www.wienerlibrary.co.uk/E-Newsletters>> [accessed 9 July 2018]

prevailing uncertainty as to what exactly they *are*. 'Camp poetry' is a neat and concise way of referring to this body of texts, yet the issue of genre is too complex here to be satisfied with a single term – poetry. Sandra Alfers' article, 'The Precariousness of Genre', is extremely helpful in expounding the generic dilemma surrounding these texts.<sup>76</sup> Essentially, there has never been any consensus as to whether these poems constitute a new genre of their own or are part of an existing one. If the latter, are they most accurately classified as poems, historical documents, cultural artefacts, testimony, or something else?

Whilst my thesis will set out from the assumption that these texts deserve to be analysed as poems, it is helpful to firstly consider previous classifications, not least because, according to Alfers:

Investigating the use of generic classifications of Holocaust writing could [...] shed light on reading expectations and practices and offer an explanation why German-language poetry written during the Holocaust has been so noticeably marginalised in *Germanistik* in comparison to poetry written "after Auschwitz".<sup>77</sup>

With this aim in mind, Alfers explores the usage of the term 'Holocaust poetry' in both an Anglo-American and a German context. In the former, for example, the term 'Holocaust poetry' has been used to refer to poems 'written by those involved in the events unfolding in Europe between 1933 and 1945', but those works may not necessarily have been written in this time period.<sup>78</sup> Post-Holocaust poems, then, would be those written by poets who were at a distance from the events themselves. This distinction is most helpful in the Anglophone context where the emphasis has frequently been on these so-called post-Holocaust poems, and the ways in which post-1945 British and American writers 'developed strategies such as proxy-witnessing and prosopopoeia for shaping their frequently self-reflexive narratives'.<sup>79</sup> In a German context, such a distinction is inappropriate as the first category of 'Holocaust poetry' would be much too broad: as Alfers points out, it would include camp poetry, the poetry of exiles such as Bertolt Brecht and Hilde Domin, and all poetry written since 1945 by those who lived through the Holocaust.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Sandra Alfers, 'The Precariousness of Genre', *Oxford German Studies*, 39.3 (2010), 271-289.

<sup>77</sup> Alfers, p.272.

<sup>78</sup> Antony Rowland, *Holocaust Poetry: Awkward Poetics in the Work of Sylvia Plath, Geoffrey Hill, Tony Harrison and Ted Hughes* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), p.3.

<sup>79</sup> Alfers, p.273.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p.274.

In the German-speaking context, a number of descriptive phrases are used, most of which are rather exclusive. For example, 'Lyrik nach dem Holocaust', 'Lyrik nach Auschwitz', and 'Lyrik über den Holocaust' are all common, and even the last one, with no temporal preposition, is used primarily to refer to post-Holocaust poems. The exclusion of camp poetry from critical research is therefore reflected in the terms used to describe poetry, and the choice of words in many of the terms 'almost inevitably invokes' Adorno's dictum.<sup>81</sup> A precise term to refer to poems from the concentration camps has not been established, resulting in these works being grouped together with texts that have a very different production history. For example, Hermann Korte's *Lyrik des 20. Jahrhunderts (1900-1945)* has a chapter entitled 'Lyrik in finsternen Zeiten. 1930-1945', the summary of which does not differentiate at all between texts produced in exile and those produced in prisons, ghettos and camps.<sup>82</sup> A more nuanced view is therefore essential in German-language criticism, as Wilhelm Haefs argues:

Wer das Literatursystem der Jahre 1933-1945 beschreiben will, kann sich also nicht mehr mit den nach wie vor verbreiteten schlichten Kategorisierungen und Attributen des Literarischen ('nationalsozialistisch', 'völkisch', 'Innere Emigration', 'Opposition', 'Widerstand') begnügen, sondern wird auch Verbindungen zwischen der 'gespaltenen' Literatur im 'Dritten Reich' und im Exil nachzugehen und insgesamt eine Verknüpfung von institutionen-, autoren- und textorientierter Forschung vorzunehmen haben.<sup>83</sup>

The term 'camp poetry', used in this introduction, is by no means widespread but has recently begun to be used in English publications that focus on this body of texts (e.g. those by Andrés Nader and Sandra Alfes). Similar German terms such as 'Lagerlyrik' and 'KZ-Lyrik' can also be found in works dealing specifically with poems from the camps.<sup>84</sup> Interestingly, Michael Moll does not decide on one particular term, choosing to use various, sometimes lengthy, paraphrases to refer to the poems (e.g. 'Gedichte aus KZs', 'KZ-Literatur', 'in den deutschen Lagern und KZs geschaffene Gedichte'); this may be because his was the first critical work to focus on camp poetry (along with poetry from prisons and ghettos) and specific terms were therefore even less common.

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<sup>81</sup> Alfes, p.274.

<sup>82</sup> Hermann Korte, *Lyrik des 20. Jahrhunderts (1900-1945)* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2000), pp.113-152.

<sup>83</sup> Wilhelm Haefs, 'Einleitung', in *Hansers Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur vom 16. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart: Nationalsozialismus und Exil 1933-1945*, ed. by Wilhelm Haefs (Munich: Hanser, 2009), pp.7-52 (p.12).

<sup>84</sup> 'Lagerlyrik' was first used by Karl Schnog in *Unbekanntes KZ: Erlebtes von Karl Schnog. Stimmen aus dem KZ* (Luxembourg: Bourg-Bourger, 1945), p.14; 'KZ-Lyrik' is used by Katja Klein in *Kazett-Lyrik*, 1995.

Crucially, none of these focused works employ the epithet 'Holocaust' in their labels, and I will likewise avoid the term in this thesis. There are two main reasons for this, neither of which should justify the omission of camp poems in previous analyses of 'Holocaust poetry'. Firstly, the term 'Holocaust', capitalised, is most often understood as 'the mass murder of the Jews by the Nazis in the war of 1939–1945'.<sup>85</sup> Whilst this definition, provided by the *OED*, is widespread, 'the Holocaust' is also frequently interpreted more broadly, encompassing all victims of the National Socialist regime. It would be problematic then to use the term 'Holocaust poetry' to refer to works by non-Jewish authors, who, according to official definitions such as that in the Oxford English Dictionary, were not victims of the Holocaust.

Secondly, even if one were to adopt the broader definition of 'Holocaust', it would arguably be anachronistic to propose that the (Jewish and non-Jewish) authors of my corpus were writing 'Holocaust poetry'. As argued by Haefs, it is essential that this umbrella term be much more carefully differentiated.<sup>86</sup> The authors of camp poems were writing in response to an ongoing catastrophe, the extent of which they were unaware of, the outcome of which was uncertain, and which did not yet have even a name.<sup>87</sup> It would be unwise for those poems written in response to the Holocaust by those with a post-war, retrospective understanding of its nature and extent to be placed alongside and considered analogous to camp poetry. Whilst there may be similarities between the two groups of poetry, the distinction between them must necessarily be recognised and they should be approached and analysed accordingly.

Moving on now to consider previous critical responses to camp poetry, the first category – the ethical – is particularly interesting. Taking into account the circumstances in which the poetry was produced – that is, amidst the extreme suffering, deprivation and uncertainty of

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<sup>85</sup> 'holocaust, n.' in *OED Online* (Oxford University Press), <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/87793>> [Accessed 27.09.2018]

<sup>86</sup> Haefs, p.12.

<sup>87</sup> The specific usage of 'Holocaust' first occurred in the 1940s and 1950s, but did not come into common use until the 1960s. For further discussion of the usage of the term, see: Jon Petrie, 'The secular word Holocaust: Scholarly myths, history, and 20<sup>th</sup> century meanings', *Journal of Genocide Research*, 2 (2000), 31-63. The euphemistic 'Final Solution' would not have been heard or used by those outside of the NSDAP.

a National Socialist concentration camp – some have deemed it ethically reprehensible to form any kind of critical judgment regarding these poems. Their value is undeniable, but is primarily due to the conditions of production, rather than their form or content. David Roskies notes the common practice of viewing ‘as Scripture every scrap of paper rescued from the Holocaust’. There is the presupposition that the Holocaust ‘defies all modes of historical and critical analysis’, that ‘aesthetic standards cannot be brought to bear on texts written under such terrible conditions’, and so all are treated as ‘equally naive, primitive, and holy’.<sup>88</sup> Andrés Nader argues that this ‘fetishistic treatment’ is more disrespectful to the victims than critical engagement with their work would be.<sup>89</sup>

The second category – the historical – also overlooks the aesthetic value of camp poems. Their literary quality is suppressed in order to consider them as historical documents. If they have worth, it is because they can provide accurate, reliable, corroborated factual insights into the concentration camp system and the objective reality of life there. Where this does not occur, the poems are dismissed. In this respect, they face a similar problem to prose testimony: as soon as details are discovered which are not factually verifiable, they are viewed with suspicion. There is a particular likelihood of this in poetry, which makes frequent use of metaphor. James E. Young has described the unease with which many critics regard metaphor:

Since the transmission of facts in Holocaust writing still dominates this literature’s function for so many writers, and since metaphor cannot directly transmit these facts, many critics still regard metaphor as not only ineffective but even dangerous for representing the Holocaust. In purporting to present the facts, they would say, Holocaust metaphors can ultimately do no more than falsify the facts and, therefore, deceive the readers.<sup>90</sup>

Young goes on to make the valid argument that ‘the language and metaphors by which we come to events tell us as much about how events have been grasped and organized as they do about events themselves. Rather than seeing metaphors as threatening to the facts of the Holocaust, we must recognize that they are our only access to the facts, which cannot exist apart from the figures delivering them to us’.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> David Roskies, ‘Yiddish Writing in the Nazi Ghettos and the Art of the Incommensurate’, *Modern Language Studies*, 16.1 (1986), 29-36 (p.29).

<sup>89</sup> Nader, p.19, p.68.

<sup>90</sup> James E. Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), p.91.

<sup>91</sup> Young, p.91.

This leads to the third way of treating these works. Where their use of metaphor and their poetic treatment of experience have not been disregarded for their obfuscation of the facts, they have, commonly, been subject to unfavourable aesthetic analysis, as Alfery summarises: 'Scant knowledge of these texts on the one hand and a prevailing critical discourse privileging aesthetic analysis on the other have sustained the early and far too general conjecture that poetry written in spaces of confinement mostly consists of clumsy meter, dull rhymes, and inadequate figurative language'.<sup>92</sup> Though this thesis will challenge the notion that aesthetic analysis in some way disadvantages camp poems, Alfery is accurate in her proposal that, unlike the experimental, innovative and fragmentary use of language by poets such as Celan and Sachs, camp poets are not believed to satisfy extremity's supposed demands for new forms.<sup>93</sup> The purportedly widespread use of 'conventional verse and easily discernible narratives' has resulted in these texts being considered an inadequate response to the conditions in which they were written and of limited literary aesthetic interest.<sup>94</sup> Assertions of their aesthetic failings are common. Hermann Korte, for example, wrote in his 1999 article:

Holocaust-Lyrik gibt es nicht, so wie es Natur-, Großstadt, Liebes- und Alltagslyrik gibt. Und es gibt auch kein Auschwitz-Gedicht, so wie es Gedichte über Rom, Paris und Berlin gibt. Gedichte über Rom, Paris und Berlin sind schon deshalb möglich, weil sie meist auf Anschauung und Erfahrung, subjektive Eindrücke und individuelle Erlebnisse gegründet sind. In solcher literarischen Topographie läßt sich zumindest potentiell der Standort des lyrischen Subjekts näher bestimmen. Dagegen entziehen sich die Orte des Holocaust dem Gedicht in einem prinzipiellen Sinne. Das lyrische Subjekt rekonstruiert Erfahrungsräume und produziert Bilder und Vorstellungen von der Topographie des Grauens und des Todes. Von den Erfahrungen selbst ist es ausgeschlossen.<sup>95</sup>

Within this citation are a number of interesting assumptions. Firstly, Korte assumes that images of 'Grauen' and 'Tod' necessarily have nothing to do with poetry. The sites of the Holocaust are claimed to evade the poem, with the inference that they are somehow beyond the real world of humans. In contrast to city poems, it is implied that 'Holocaust-Lyrik' is not, and cannot be, based on subjective impressions and individual experiences. The question of genre, then, is again pertinent here. The poetic nature of these texts has

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<sup>92</sup> Alfery, p.277.

<sup>93</sup> Carolyn Forché, ed., *Against Forgetting: Twentieth-Century Poetry of Witness* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1993), p.42.

<sup>94</sup> Nader, p.183.

<sup>95</sup> Korte, "Es ist in aller Trauer der tiefste Hand zur Sprachlosigkeit." *Der Holocaust in der Lyrik nach 1945*, *Text und Kritik*, 144 (1999), 25-47 (p.25).

frequently been disparaged before assigning them to what is believed to be a more fitting generic category. For example, Dieter Lamping stated that camp poems 'als menschliche Dokumente unsere Aufmerksamkeit verdienen, kaum aber als literarische Werke', going on to say that 'solche Literatur häufig künstlerisch gescheitert ist'. Lamping then remarks that this failure is not necessarily due to a lack of talent, but simply 'zu große Nähe' to the events of the Holocaust.<sup>96</sup> Wolfgang Emmerich also laments 'der Mangel an ästhetisch innovativen Elementen', which he describes as 'eklatant'. For him, the poems' 'mehrfach belegte menschliche und politische Funktion' is much more important, and for the inmates too.<sup>97</sup> This emphasis on poems as political manifestations is interesting, considering Emmerich's chapter was published in a West, not East, German collection, where political motives were frequently downplayed. More interesting still is that Emmerich's viewpoint has been challenged so little in over three decades.

Alfers proposes that 'exclusion based on aesthetic deficiency was less troublesome than reading camp poetry in the specific context of its production and use, since doing so would have entailed an uncomfortable return into the politics of the past'.<sup>98</sup> This may be one reason for the prevalence of dismissive attitudes such as those detailed above, along with the focus on unconventional, avant-gardist works by poets such as Celan. Another cause suggested by Alfers for the marginalisation of camp poetry is the rigid conception of genres within *Germanistik*. She describes the 'normative view of literature' taken up in the post-war period, dependent on 'strictly defined generic characteristics and boundaries that became the basis for aesthetic judgments'.<sup>99</sup> Thus, when camp poetry failed to meet 'sowohl baugesetzliche als auch wertästhetische Normen', the prevailing aesthetic discourse allowed them, as Jost Hermand notes, to be easily dismissed: 'Alles, was diesem formalen Anspruch nicht entsprach, wurde [...] aus der Innenzone der dichterischen Großleistungen ausgeschlossen und ins Vorfeld des zweitrangigen Schrifttums verwiesen

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<sup>96</sup> Dieter Lamping, *Dein Aschenes Haar Sulamith: Dichtung über den Holocaust* (Munich: Piper, 1992), pp.285-286. H.G. Adler agreed with the problem of too great a proximity to events in his chapter, 'Kulturelles Leben' in *Theresienstadt 1941-1945: Das Antlitz einer Zwangsgemeinschaft*, 2nd edn (Tübingen: Mohr, 1960), pp.584-623.

<sup>97</sup> Wolfgang Emmerich, 'Die Literatur des antifaschistischen Widerstands in Deutschland', in *Die deutsche Literatur im Dritten Reich. Themen, Traditionen, Wirkungen*, ed. by Horst Denkler and Karl Prümm (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1976), pp.427-458 (p.442).

<sup>98</sup> Alfers, p.280.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p.279.

[...].<sup>100</sup> In particular, when it was suspected that poetry from the camps might cross what had been thought of as immovable, timeless generic boundaries, it was deemed preferable to swiftly relegate these texts to a single, distinctive genre (e.g. sociological or historical documentation) rather than reconsider longstanding conceptions of genre.

Only the most recent analyses have begun to recognise the complex generic character of these poems without resorting once again to a more simplistic categorisation. Alferts, for example, comments on the way in which testimony and poetry might be seen as interrelated, a concept which would allow us to better appreciate this body of poems. Commenting on Constanze Jaiser's work, which will be discussed further in due course, she writes that the texts' frequent classification as both 'poetry' and 'testimony' exemplifies

the complex textual dimensions that constitute the open-endedness of generic frames. While form, structure and language might determine the texts as poetry, their content is perceived as a reflection of or a link to the experience of internment. Rather than being at opposite ends of the spectrum, however, 'poetry' and 'testimony' might also be understood in relation to each other.<sup>101</sup>

Wilhelm Haefs, cited above as challenging 'verbreitete[n] schlichte[n] Kategorisierungen', makes a very brief reference to camp poetry in the final paragraph of his chapter, 'Lyrik in den 1930er und 1940er Jahren'.<sup>102</sup> His comment on these 'gleichermaßen lyrisch-poetischen wie lebensgeschichtlichen Zeugnisse' indicates another rare attempt to reconcile the various functions of this poetry, 'die nicht zu unterschätzen sind'.<sup>103</sup> Also citing Jaiser's work, Haefs emphasises the symbolic, poetic aspects of these texts along with their social and psychological functions.

It is indicative, however, that the abovementioned, seven-hundred-page work on German literature in the period 1933-1945 contains just a short eight-line paragraph on camp poetry. It is helpful now to consider those works which have focused exclusively on camp poetry (or on poetry produced in places of internment). Here, the key (and indeed only) works are Michael Moll's *Lyrik in einer entmenschlichten Welt: Interpretationsversuche zu deutschsprachigen Gedichten aus nationalsozialistischen Gefängnissen, Ghettos und KZ's*

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<sup>100</sup> Jost Hermand, *Geschichte der Germanistik* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1994), pp.127-128.

<sup>101</sup> Alferts, p.283.

<sup>102</sup> Haefs, 'Lyrik in den 1930er und 1940er Jahren', in *Hansers Sozialgeschichte*, pp.392-416 (p.416).

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.



(Frankfurt a.M.: R.G. Fischer, 1988), Constanze Jaiser's *Poetische Zeugnisse: Gedichte aus dem Frauen-Konzentrationslager Ravensbrück 1939-1945* (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 2000), and Andrés Nader's *Traumatic Verses: On Poetry in German from the Concentration Camps, 1933-1945* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2007).

Jaiser's study may seem to be incongruous with the other two in that it considers only poems from Ravensbrück, the majority of which were not written in German. This understandably limits its broader relevance. It nonetheless forms a valuable contribution to the study of camp poetry generally and the study of its testimonial value in particular. With a corpus of almost 1200 poems, Jaiser considers issues such as the difficulty in constructing a poetic subject, and the interaction between text and reader. She also touches upon the complex form-content relationship when analysing the use of figurative language in the poems. Though there is only minimal biographical information about the individual poets (for the most part the poems are analysed collectively), Jaiser does adopt a socio-historical approach, describing where possible the circumstances in which the poems were written and their value to the poets and other inmates. The most important point to note is that Jaiser categorises these poems as 'poetische Zeugnisse', believing their 'Zeugnischarakter' to be the 'bestimmende[s] und verallgemeinerbare[s] Kriterium für einen angemessenen Umgang innerhalb der Forschung'.<sup>104</sup> Though Jaiser does not include in her study poems which have a more 'dokumentarische[n] Absicht', signifying her desire to investigate poetic as well as testimonial features, it is noteworthy that she chooses to classify the works as 'poetic testimonies', rather than 'testimonial poems' for example.<sup>105</sup> In this respect, Jaiser appears to situate camp poems first and foremost within the genre of testimony.

This classification, in line with Alferts' statement above, is not necessarily problematic. A fixed genre such as poetry (or even camp poetry) can be qualified thematically or tonally by certain 'modes' which function similarly to adjectives. Alferts proposes that Jaiser's study might therefore focus on 'testimonial' camp poetry; though her emphasis may appear to be on testimony, this emphasis is situated, and best understood, within the poetic genre.<sup>106</sup> However, despite the positive nature of this more nuanced generic classification,

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<sup>104</sup> Jaiser, p.20.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p.19.

<sup>106</sup> The idea of genres having different modes is adopted from John Frow, *Genre* (London: Routledge, 2006), p.67.

statements such as the following reveal an underlying uncertainty about these works' poetic value, one I will challenge through my thesis:

Als *Poesie* genommen, fällt es schwer, sie in ihrer einfachen, ja oft trivialen Ausgestaltung auf ihren ästhetischen Gehalt hin zu befragen. Von einigen Ausnahmen abgesehen [...] fallen in den Texten weder eine ausgesuchte metaphorische Sprache noch außergewöhnliche Stilmittel auf.<sup>107</sup>

The main arguments and emphases in the studies carried out by Moll and Nader, the only two comprehensive studies of German camp poetry up to this point, will now be discussed. Firstly, Michael Moll's work was pioneering in that it was the very first to consider the unique value and significance of camp, prison and ghetto poetry.<sup>108</sup> Having conducted considerable archival research, Moll presents a foundational overview of the breadth of the corpus as well as previous treatment of the poems in the first chapter. His categorisation and organisation of the poems according to their place of production and their main themes and focus is particularly informative, and the scholarly, in-depth and inclusive nature of his study is all the more commendable given the prevailing treatment of camp poetry at the time of writing (1988). His study is an attempt, 'exemplarische Interpretationen zu entwickeln, die den Texten, dem Schicksal ihrer Autoren und der entmenslichenden Hermetik ihrer Entstehungssituation in den NS-Haftstätten gerecht werden'.<sup>109</sup> For the first time, this body of poems is strongly endorsed: Moll argues they have a fundamental legitimacy, not because of their possible aesthetic value, but because of their function within the camps and their ability to distract, relieve, and entertain.<sup>110</sup>

However, the nature of this endorsement is at times problematic. Having stressed the validity of inmates' attempts to convey the reality of their existence, Moll argues that camp poetry has the ability to overcome complete 'Sprachlosigkeit': 'Wo die Kunst der schreibende Aufschrei gegen die trostlose und ausweglose Verlassenheit ist, wird im Schreiben die totale Kommunikationslosigkeit überwunden'.<sup>111</sup> Despite this, his study also,

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<sup>107</sup> Jaiser, '„Ich flüchte heimlich, in tiefer Nacht, in die Welt mit dem Wind“'. Zum Umgang mit poetischen Zeugnissen aus Konzentrationslagern', in *Der Nationalsozialismus im Spiegel des öffentlichen Gedächtnisses: Formen der Aufarbeitung und des Gedenkens*, ed. by Petra Fank and Stefan Hördler (Berlin: Metropol, 2005), pp.167-180 (p.169).

<sup>108</sup> The differences between the poetry from these differing places of imprisonment could be discussed more thoroughly and explicitly.

<sup>109</sup> Moll, p.9.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., p.255.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., p.257.

somewhat paradoxically, emphasises the futility of poetic attempts to overcome speechlessness. Whilst he is less critical of those works which seek to alleviate suffering through distraction and illusion-formation, he questions the efficacy of both content and form in those which seek to represent suffering. Regarding content, Moll proposes that it was impossible for writers to communicate anything beyond the purely physical, quantitative details of the extermination process, that their capacity for reflection had already been 'ausgeschaltet', and all that remained was their 'sprach- und gedankenabwesende, gemartete Körpernatur'.<sup>112</sup> In light of this, he suggests a new aesthetics, more suited to reality, was required, even though this could never, as repeatedly stated, fully represent what it intended.<sup>113</sup> Regarding poetic form, he is even more critical. When poets did not escape into illusion and chose instead to focus on elements of their experience, Moll argues that the forms of the resulting poems either became 'gehaltlosen Hüllen' or 'gerieten in einen Strudel der Selbstaflösung'.<sup>114</sup> Form became worthless – 'nur das rhythmische Gewand für das Gesagte ohne spezifischen Eigenwert' – as any relationship it might have with the poem's content was lost.<sup>115</sup> There was an unavoidable 'Unzulänglichkeit der ästhetischen Form bei bestimmten Inhalten': if the poet sought to establish an aesthetic form, the content and function of the poems was reduced 'zur Marginalie'.<sup>116</sup> Conversely, 'der inhaltsbezogene Mitteilungsdrang sprengt die lyrische Form, oder löst sie überwuchernd auf'.<sup>117</sup> Confronted with what he calls the *conditio inhumana*, art is said to lose any 'sprachliche und ästhetische Kommunizierbarkeit'.<sup>118</sup> This is a stance I will challenge through my thesis: within my exploration of boundaries, I will use detailed textual analysis to discard the image of the uncrafted, unmediated camp poem, uncover and defend form's various roles, and demonstrate the validity of inmates' attempts to represent their suffering through poetry.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Moll, p.236.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., pp.239-240.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., p.246.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., p.248.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., pp.251-252.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., p.253.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Moll's argument is refuted explicitly in Chapter Four, though all central chapters seek to establish the validity of camp poetry's form.

Andrés Nader refers to Moll's study on several occasions as a groundbreaking work (though he interestingly disregards that of Jaiser). Nader's own work is also pioneering in its own way, being the first extensive English-language study of German camp poetry. Whilst the testimonial nature of the poems is certainly recognised, their aesthetic value is also given centre-stage for the first time. In particular, the use and significance of form is carefully considered, and conventional forms are presented as being skilled, deliberate responses to the poet's experience, rather than clumsy, unmediated, inadequate attempts to represent it. His close-readings of poems by nine authors are accompanied by detailed biographical information, and the central chapters are organised thematically, providing insightful commentary on poetic attempts to counter the de-individualisation, 'everyday' suffering, and torture experienced by camp inmates. Nader identifies tropes that can be seen across his corpus of texts, and his exploration of the resolution and 'poetic re-signification' of daily experiences within many of the poems is especially interesting and a theme I will explore further in this thesis.<sup>120</sup>

Nader labels his approach as 'dialogic', seeking to undertake 'engagement with the texts, their language and their history, rather than a presumptuous critique of their content'.<sup>121</sup> A review of his study picks up on this aim: 'Allowing them to speak to us means creating a frame in which they can be read and received as literary and historical productions, despite their compromised origins (by amateur poets) and unreliable forms (poetic and aestheticized, rather than testimonial and raw)'.<sup>122</sup> The language of this review neatly summarises the pertinence of Nader's aim: in 2009, the poems were still being regarded as compromised, unreliable, and inferior to prose testimony.

Along with Moll, Alferts, and a number of other critics, Nader recognises that camp poetry has been overlooked and misconstrued to such an extent that further study is essential.<sup>123</sup> In his introduction, for example, he states: 'The selection presented here is intended to give a sense of both the range and the commonalities in the corpus as a whole and to stimulate

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<sup>120</sup> Nader, p.93, p.108. See Chapter Four of this thesis for further discussion of poetic resolution and re-signification.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., p.20.

<sup>122</sup> Sara Guyer, review of Andrés Nader, *Traumatic Verses: On Poetry in German from the Concentration Camps, 1933–1945* (2007), *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 23 (2009), 115-117 (p.116).

<sup>123</sup> For example, Alferts, p.282, and Moll, pp.29-31.

the examination of further poems'.<sup>124</sup> Whilst the three studies discussed above, and Nader's especially, constitute helpful contributions to the field, my thesis contributes to filling a significant research gap. It is, crucially, a gap which is not only quantitative but also qualitative. Building upon the work undertaken by Nader in particular, my thesis sets out from the assumption that these texts deserve to be considered as poems, as well as testimonial and historical documents, and therefore uses detailed analysis of a broad range of camp poems to provide a more detailed and nuanced picture of the corpus than has previously been created. Crucially, the poems are allowed to speak for themselves, as opposed to being shoehorned into preconceived roles. Taking this approach, my thesis conducts a more thorough examination of what these poems *do* than has previously occurred.

In particular, close readings of the poems reveal that inmates used poetry to regain agency and make sense of their circumstances in a diverse range of ways, and that the creation and removal of boundaries was often central to these attempts. Whilst boundary negotiation is occasionally mentioned in the three previous studies (the use of distancing mechanisms, for example, is commented upon by all three), it has never been examined extensively or systematically, despite its prevalence and ability to further our understanding of these texts. Analysing the poems under this rubric provides a deeper insight into daily reality in the camps and some of the diverse and creative ways in which inmates sought to survive and resist this. The focus is no longer on what these poems are and whether they can be successful in such a role, as has been the case in so many previous studies; instead, I concentrate on the rather more helpful and enlightening question of what these poems do and how and why they do it.

### Corpus of poems

The corpus of German-language poems examined in this thesis includes texts from published anthologies, as well as unpublished texts discovered during my own archival research. The three main camps in which the poems to be studied were produced are

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<sup>124</sup> Nader, p.2.

Dachau, Buchenwald and Ravensbrück. These camps have been chosen predominantly for the availability of source material, biographical information about the poets, and general and specific information on cultural production there. A small number of poems from other camps, including Flossenbürg, Neuengamme, and some lesser known camps such as those in Transnistria (in what is now Ukraine), will also be studied. Importantly, poems from Theresienstadt will not be analysed in this thesis. There are a number of reasons for this omission. Firstly, there has been much disagreement as to whether Theresienstadt should be classed as concentration camp, ghetto, or placed within a category of its own. The various arguments will not be discussed here, but whichever name is assigned to it, Theresienstadt's propaganda function as a 'model camp' allowed the inmates considerably more freedom to engage in cultural practices, including drama, music, art, and writing. Consequently, Theresienstadt had a significantly greater cultural output than all other camps. Over 400 poems written there survive today, and the two poetry competitions that took place there in 1942 and 1944 each received at least two hundred entries.<sup>125</sup> Indeed, H.G. Adler commented rather derisively on the volume of poetry produced there, calling it the 'Theresienstädter Reimkrankheit'.<sup>126</sup> Given the somewhat unique status of Theresienstadt, then, as well as the greater degree of critical attention given to cultural production there, its poetry will not be examined in detail in this thesis.<sup>127</sup>

A brief overview of the surviving poetry from the three camps listed above will now be given. This will focus on archival documents which do not appear in the published collections already detailed. Those works for which there is no indication, implicit or explicit, of their having been written during, not after, imprisonment, are not included here.

Firstly, the archives at the Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial Site contain twenty-seven poems by Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz which formed the collection, *Die Sonne hinter Stacheldraht*, written and compiled during imprisonment.<sup>128</sup> Only sixteen of these were

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<sup>125</sup> Philip Manes, *Als ob's ein Leben wär: Tatsachenbericht Theresienstadt 1942-1944*, ed. by Ben Barkow and Klaus Leist (Berlin: Ullstein, 2004), p.94.

<sup>126</sup> Adler, p.618.

<sup>127</sup> This decision is based on the reasons cited above, rather than an acceptance of Adler's view that poetry from Theresienstadt is in some way less valuable than that from other camps because of its profusion.

<sup>128</sup> Archiv KZ-Gedenkstätte Dachau (AKGD), Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz, 3336/1-06-3-7.

later published in *Die Kette der Tage*, and only a few of the remaining eleven have been subsequently published in anthologies. There are three other poems – one by ‘K.W.’, one by Franz Weber, and one by Friedrich Joos, Simon Soldmann, Dr Rosenfelder and Georg Koch – and a typed collection of nine poems, seven of which are anonymous.<sup>129</sup> It is interesting to note briefly here that the collaborative poem with four authors was commissioned by the SS.<sup>130</sup> The archives at Dachau also contain a collection of twenty poems, entitled *Die Lieder des Grauens*, written by Georg von Boris during his imprisonment in Flossenbürg concentration camp between 6<sup>th</sup> July 1942 and 15<sup>th</sup> July 1945.<sup>131</sup> These were presented as a gift to a family with whom Boris stayed whilst on holiday in the years following his liberation.

The archives at Buchenwald Concentration Camp Memorial Site contain seven poems by Franz Hackel, of which three have not been published.<sup>132</sup> There are also thirty-nine anonymous poems, including a collection of nine works by the same anonymous author, all dated in 1945 from 22<sup>nd</sup> February until the day of liberation.<sup>133</sup> Another anonymous collection consists of eleven light-hearted poems, of which five are humorous, and six are more emotive, designed to be sent to loved ones in ‘Sonntagsbriefe nach Hause’.<sup>134</sup> There is also a collection of seventeen satirical poems, many of which disparage the behaviour of the *Kapos*. Within this group, there are five poems under the heading ‘Der Kampf gegen das Häftlings-Bordell’, presenting arguments against the use of the camp brothel set up by the SS.<sup>135</sup> Finally, there are a number of plays written for production within Buchenwald which deal with experiences in the camp and contain sections of verse within the dialogue: ‘Der Lagerbaron’ by Otto Halle, ‘Naja’ by Bruno Apitz, and the anonymous ‘Vier mal Radio’.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> AKGD, ‘K.W.’, 1093/161; Franz Weber, 42.163; Friedrich Joos and others, A28.020; 6202–6209. One of the non-anonymous poems is ‘Die Sonne’, by Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz (AKGD, 6204), which is replicated in his own collection. The other is by Ferdinand Römhild (AKGD, 6203).

<sup>130</sup> AKGD, A28.020. Whilst the SS are known to have commissioned a number of songs and works of art from camp inmates (the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum, for example, possesses many works produced officially in the camp for the *Lagermuseum* established by the SS), commissioned poems were, to my own knowledge, much rarer.

<sup>131</sup> AKGD, 23.486. Five of these poems are also published in Elling’s collection, *Mitten in tiefer Nacht*, pp.63–66.

<sup>132</sup> Archiv KZ-Gedenkstätte Buchenwald (AKGB), Franz Hackel, 9-95-21.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 9-95-48-59; 9-95-73; 9-95-33-43, Material Otto Horn, /18.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 9-95-33-43.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, Otto Halle, 95-20, 95-21; Bruno Apitz, BA 95-516; 9-95-44-46.

The archives at Ravensbrück Concentration Camp Memorial Site contain fifteen poems by eight named authors: one by Cläre Rupp, one by Käthe Leichter, one by Renée Skalska (a Polish inmate), two by Anna Stiegler, two by Antonia Bruha, two by Hanna Himmler, three by Alice Lesser, and three by Maria Grollmuß.<sup>137</sup> There is also a collection of poems by Hedda Zinner, entitled 'Sechs Ravensbrücker Sonette für Cilly B', and a collection of six poems presented to 'Hilde F[?]' on her birthday by Lidia Nasarowa.<sup>138</sup> Another collection contains sayings and eight poems collected by Helma Vogel from women from her block.<sup>139</sup> One collaborative poem, 'Der Wald von Ravensbrück', written by a group of women, is also present.<sup>140</sup> Finally, there are fifteen anonymous poems, of which six are dated, and six poems written for birthdays or other occasions, of which all but one are anonymous.<sup>141</sup> The other is by Anna Lessner.<sup>142</sup>

As mentioned early in this section, the availability of biographical material and information on the poems' production history is highly important in contextualising and understanding camp poetry. Consequently, this thesis will focus on those poems for which such information is present, although other poems, including those which are anonymous, will also be discussed. The central poets whose works will be analysed in this thesis are Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz and Emil Alphons Rheinhardt (Dachau); Karl Schnog, Fritz Löhner-Beda, Edo Leitner, Gösta Durchham, Ferdinand Römhild, Franz Hackel, Hasso Grabner, and Heinrich Steinitz (Buchenwald); Maria Günzl, Käthe Leichter, and Antonia Bruha (Ravensbrück); Alfred Kittner (Transnistrian camps); Georg von Boris (Flossenbürg); Armin Freudmann (various German camps).

The above list of poets is deliberately inclusive in order to allow as accurate an understanding as possible of the motivations behind and the nature of camp poetry. Within the various chapters of this thesis, the focus will necessarily be narrowed in order to

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<sup>137</sup> Archiv KZ-Gedenkstätte Ravensbrück (AKGR), Cläre Rupp, Slg CJ/1-3; Käthe Leichter, RA-LAG 18, Slg CJ/1-9 (1); Renée Skalska, Slg CJ/1-20; Anna Stiegler, Slg CJ/1-4, 1-5; Antonia Bruha, RA-LAG 18, Slg CJ/1-17, RA-Nr.II/6-5-1; Hanna Himmler, Slg CJ 1-37; Alice Lesser, Slg CJ/1-70; Maria Grollmuß, Slg CJ/5-51.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., Hedda Zinner, Slg CJ/1-33-35; Lidia Nasarowa, Slg CJ/1-76.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., Slg CJ/1-18.

<sup>140</sup> AKGR, RA-LAG 18, Slg CJ/1-47.

<sup>141</sup> These poems can also be found in the Gedichte Sammlung Jaiser (AKGR, Slg CJ).

<sup>142</sup> AKGR, Anna Lessner, V 909 F1.



concentrate on different aspects of boundary formation and thereby answer the main research question – how and why did camp poets (re)negotiate boundaries through their poems? – as fully and carefully as possible.

## Structure of thesis

In the first chapter of the thesis, *Culture in the Camps*, my corpus of poems will be contextualised by an overview of the breadth of cultural activity within a range of National Socialist concentration camps and the role of poetry within this. I will focus in particular on those camps from which the majority of my corpus stems: Buchenwald, Dachau and Ravensbrück. Public performance and written distribution of poetry will be discussed before contrasting these public aims with more personal motivations for writing poetry. Prerequisites for the production of poetry will also be discussed, again helping to contextualise the corpus by exploring who was able to write and the risks they took in doing so.

The subsequent thesis chapters then focus on three particular aspects of boundary formation: creating connections, establishing distance, and containing experience. The second chapter explores the ways in which inmates used poetry to represent or (re)create empathic connections with a range of others, including loved ones outside the camp, inanimate objects and the deceased. I will also discuss the way in which such connections are essential to the maintenance of one's own sense of self and subsequent survival. The third chapter then examines ways in which poetry could enact the opposite, how it could separate the inmate-speaker from destructive individuals and situations. A number of strategies, ranging from confrontation to humour, silence, and illusion, were employed with this aim, many of which have not been previously considered in detail with regard to their function as distancing mechanisms. The final chapter examines poetry's ability to control through containment. Previous critics have noted how camp poems often simultaneously seek to name, contain, and banish particular details of their suffering, and this chapter examines this function more systematically. Techniques such as narrative circularity, epiphany and montage will be considered here, along with the crucial and previously contentious role of form and its relationship with the poem's contents. I explore

some of the ways in which traditional, conventional forms – criticised so often in previous studies – maintained meaning and significance despite the extreme nature of the poems' contents. As a whole, these chapters demonstrate how poetry enabled inmates to (re)negotiate boundaries they were otherwise powerless to influence, thereby allowing them to resist (and even survive) their current circumstances and regain a measure of agency.



## Chapter One

### Culture in the Camps

In the introduction I gave an overview of German poetry production within the camps and the corpus of poems upon which this thesis focuses. In this first chapter I will contextualise these poems by conveying the breadth of cultural activities within the camps and some of the ways in which inmates were able to organise or participate in these. My aim here is not to give a detailed description of the role of culture within the camps; this would require far more than a chapter and has been considered in works by Christoph Daxelmüller (1998), Maja Suderland (2004), Anne-Berenike Rothstein (2015) and others.<sup>143</sup> Whilst, notably, none of these works are comprehensive (Rothstein notes that this is ‘ein noch relative junges Forschungsgebiet’, and the majority of existing works focus on a particular camp or particular cultural activity), together they present a picture of the richness and diversity of cultural activity within the camps.<sup>144</sup> They reveal that it was not solely in Theresienstadt – often associated with cultural freedom and productivity – that culture was able to flourish; they reveal, as Irena Szymańska wrote, that culture ‘sogar in diesem Großbetrieb des Todes gegenwärtig und vital war. Entgegen aller Logik hörte sie nicht auf, das Denken und Empfinden zu bestimmen, war wesentlicher Faktor menschlichen Ausdrucks, menschlicher Ideen’.<sup>145</sup> Thomas Rahe notes this ‘erstaunlichen Umfang’ of cultural activities and also observes: ‘Die indirekten Quellenhinweise auf solche Aktivitäten, die durch keine Primärquellen mehr belegt sind, zeigen, daß es hier, angesichts der vielen Quellenverluste, eine hohe „Dunkelziffer“ gibt’.<sup>146</sup> In support of this abundance of cultural production from

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<sup>143</sup> Christoph Daxelmüller, ‘Kulturelle Formen und Aktivitäten als Teil der Überlebens- und Vernichtungsstrategie in den Konzentrationslagern’, in *Die nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager. Entwicklung und Struktur*, ed. by Ulrich Herbert, Karin Orth and Christoph Dieckmann, 2 vols (Göttingen: Wallstein, 1998), II, pp.982-1005; Maja Suderland, *Territorien des Selbst: Kulturelle Identität als Ressource für das tägliche Überleben im Konzentrationslager* (Frankfurt a.M.: Campus, 2004); Anne-Berenike Rothstein, ed., *Poetik des Überlebens: Kulturproduktion im Konzentrationslager* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015).

<sup>144</sup> Rothstein, *Poetik des Überlebens*, p.1.

<sup>145</sup> Irena Szymańska, ‘Kunst und Künstler im KL Auschwitz’, in *Kunst zum Überleben – gezeichnet in Auschwitz. Ausstellung von Werken ehemaliger Häftlinge des Konzentrationslagers Auschwitz aus dem Besitz der staatlichen Gedenkstätte Oświęcim-Brzezinka* (Ulm: Verband Bildender Künstler Württemberg e.V., 1989), pp.25-30 (p.25).

<sup>146</sup> Thomas Rahe, ‘Kultur im KZ: Musik, Literatur und Kunst in Bergen-Belsen’, in *Frauen in Konzentrationslagern: Bergen-Belsen, Ravensbrück*, ed. by Claus Füllberg-Stolberg, Martina Jung, Renate Riebe, and Martina Scheitenberger (Bremen: Edition Temmen, 1994), pp.193-206 (p.205).

the camps, Aleksander Kulisiewicz, a former inmate of Sachsenhausen, collected after his release 'über 52,000 Meter Tonband mit Berichten von ehemaligen Häftlingen aus 34 Lagern und Nebenlagern, Lieder, Gedichte, dazu Berichte über die Genesis von Gedichten und Liedern, mit Beschreibungen illegaler Liederabende, Veranstaltungen usw'.<sup>147</sup> Considering himself to be 'das lebende KZ-Archiv' in Sachsenhausen, he memorised numerous songs and poems in the camp; following liberation, he dictated from memory 716 pages of them in four languages.<sup>148</sup>

Here, then, I will consider briefly those activities which took place in the camps from which most of my corpus originates – Dachau, Buchenwald and Ravensbrück (though other camps will be mentioned briefly) – and the specific role of poetry there. Where possible, my focus will be on those inmates whose works I consider in this thesis and for whom we have further information regarding their participation in cultural activities. Within this, I will consider who wrote, how they wrote (and how they were able to write), common motives for writing, and some of the many ways in which poems were distributed and preserved within the confines of the camp. Cumulatively, this will provide a foundation for the subsequent chapters' exploration of the poems themselves and the ways in which inmates were able to use these poems to (re)negotiate boundaries.

### Breadth of cultural activity

In Benedikt Kautsky's assessment of free time activities within the camps in which he was imprisoned (Dachau, Buchenwald and Auschwitz), he writes:

Das Bild, das sich auf diesem Gebiet darbietet, ist [...] ungemein bunt – der beste Beweis dafür, daß fast jeder Mensch, wenn er nicht unmittelbar vor dem Verhungern steht, geistige und kulturelle Bedürfnisse hat, deren Befriedigung sich mit elementarer Gewalt durchsetzt.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Aleksander Kulisiewicz, *Adresse: Sachsenhausen. Literarische Momentaufnahmen aus dem KZ*, ed. by Claudia Westermann, trans. by Bettina Eberspächer (Gerlingen: Bleicher, 1997), p.36.

<sup>148</sup> Eckhard John, 'Musik und Konzentrationslager. Eine Annäherung', *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft*, 48 (1991), 1-36 (p.32); Guido Fackler, „Des Lagers Stimme“: *Musik im KZ. Alltag und Häftlingskultur in den Konzentrationslagern 1933-1936* (Bremen: Edition Temmen, 2000), p.481.

<sup>149</sup> Benedikt Kautsky, *Teufel und Verdammte: Erfahrungen und Erkenntnisse aus sieben Jahren in deutschen Konzentrationslagern* (Vienna: Verlag der Wiener Volksbuchhandlung, 1961), p.219.

Similarly, Maja Suderland notes: 'Die fundamentale Bedeutung von inkorporiertem kulturellem Kapital im Konzentrationslager zeigt sich indes auch an der Vielfalt, mit der die Inhaftierten versuchten, in der feindlichen und fremden Umgebung an die vertrauten kulturellen Muster anzuknüpfen'.<sup>150</sup> Whilst the particular identity of the camp was naturally central in defining the nature and breadth of cultural activities, eyewitness testimonies reveal that they were present, in varying degrees, in all camps.<sup>151</sup> Similarly, though cultural activities declined dramatically after the end of 1944, when living conditions in many camps deteriorated considerably and the physical and mental possibilities for pursuing activities decreased correspondingly, they did not disappear completely.<sup>152</sup> Libraries; cinemas; plays and cabarets; art exhibitions; chess Olympiads; poetry evenings; language courses; operas and orchestras; literary, religious, economic, scientific and political discussion groups: this list reveals the surprising breadth of cultural activities in Nazi camps. As Christoph Daxelmüller observed:

Die Häftlinge kamen als religiös, rassistisch, politisch oder sexuell verfolgte, zugleich aber als kultivierte, ausgebildete Menschen ins Lager, wo sie zwar ihren Besitz und ihre Kleidung, nicht jedoch ihre kulturelle Sozialisation am Lagertor abgaben, sie vielmehr als Prägung, Erinnerung und als Strategie bewahrten.<sup>153</sup>

The reasons for which these diverse activities have been so little studied range from the difficulty in collating information about them (the picture we now have has been formed primarily by piecing together brief mentions in disparate testimonies), to a difficulty in knowing how to classify those works produced in the camps, to a fear that knowledge of such cultural richness might result in the 'Verharmlosung' of the horrific conditions in the camps.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Suderland, p.142.

<sup>151</sup> Thomas Rahe notes that, apart from a few exceptions, eyewitness testimonies are the only source of information about cultural activities in the camps. (Rahe, 'Kultur im KZ', p.194). Cultural artefacts can also provide important information, however. With regard to eyewitness testimonies, including those used in this chapter, one must of course be aware of the worldview of the particular author. Though the sources are of great value, they are not necessarily objective. For example, one must be mindful of a potential desire amongst former political prisoners to portray all cultural activities as acts of resistance.

<sup>152</sup> Thomas Rahe, for example, describes how this occurred in Bergen-Belsen and how the deteriorating conditions are reflected both quantitatively and qualitatively in the cultural activities undertaken: Rahe, 'Das Konzentrationslager Bergen-Belsen', in *Der Ort des Terrors. Geschichte der nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager*, ed. by Wolfgang Benz and Barbara Distel, 9 vols (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2008), VII, pp.187-220 (p.197, p.205).

<sup>153</sup> Daxelmüller, p.993.

<sup>154</sup> For further discussion of these difficulties, see Rothstein, pp.1-4, and Rahe, 'Kultur im KZ', pp.193-194.

Before considering some of these activities more closely, however, it is firstly important to differentiate between those which were legal (that is, permitted or even commissioned by the SS; the former were often intended as a means to raise work productivity) and those which took place clandestinely.<sup>155</sup> Due to the focus of my thesis – my exploration of the ways in which poems enabled inmates to resist the conditions of their imprisonment and those who enforced these conditions – I am less interested here in those activities directly commissioned by the SS which served little to no benefit to the inmates involved.<sup>156</sup> These ranged from the creation of orchestras to play music during roll call, the public humiliation and punishment of inmates, and even the walk to the gas chambers, to the commissioning of portraits and sculptures by individual guards, and the showing of propagandistic films in Dachau and Buchenwald.<sup>157</sup>

Other SS-initiated activities were, however, able to be extensively subverted. Libraries, for example, were set up in Dachau and Buchenwald, yet their management was undertaken by (predominantly political) inmates and they very often housed books which were not easily attainable outside the camps.<sup>158</sup> The Buchenwald library, for example, established in early 1938, contained over 15,000 works. Though tens of thousands of Marks were taken from the inmates as a so-called ‘Spende’ for the library, only 1009 books were bought by the SS with this money, including sixty copies of Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*. The other books were acquired by the inmates by various means: for example, those who were allowed to write

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<sup>155</sup> See Falk Pingel, *Häftlinge unter SS-Herrschaft. Widerstand, Selbstbehauptung und Vernichtung im Konzentrationslager* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1978), pp.166-168.

<sup>156</sup> It must be noted here that those inmates with a particular skill or trade (for example, professional craftsmen, artists and musicians) could be protected to some extent by their perceived value to the SS; in this sense they could be said to ‘benefit’ from the activities they were forced to participate in. Sonja Staar for example, comments on the protection afforded by being part of the Buchenwald *Lagerkapelle*, writing that ‘die Existenzbedingungen hier günstiger als im Steinbruch und anderen Arbeitsstellen [waren] und damit die Überlebenschancen ein wenig größer’. Staar, ed., *Kunst, Widerstand und Lagerkultur: eine Dokumentation (Buchenwaldheft, 27 (1987))*, p.9.

<sup>157</sup> For more information on the role of camp orchestras, see, for example, Guido Fackler, ‘Music in Concentration Camps, 1933-1945’, trans. by Peter Logan, *Music and Politics*, 1 (2007), 1-25; Shirli Gilbert, *Music in the Holocaust: Confronting Life in the Nazi Ghettos and Camps* (New York: Clarendon Press of Oxford University Press, 2005). For more information on commissioned art, and camp cinemas see, respectively: Jörn Wendland, *Das Lager von Bild zu Bild: Narrative Bildserien von Häftlingen aus NS-Zwangslagern* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2017), pp.33-36; Staar, pp.25-27.

<sup>158</sup> For more information on camp libraries, see Torsten Seela, *Bücher und Bibliotheken in nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslagern. Das gedruckte Wort im antifaschistischen Kampf der Häftlinge* (Munich: K. G. Saur, 1992).

home asked for books to be sent to the camp, which they then donated to the library. The inmates in charge of the library were also allowed to use prisoner donations to acquire books.<sup>159</sup> Eugen Kogon noted another way in which illegal works by authors such as Heine, Klabund and Mehring, could be read by inmates. Such illegal works having been confiscated from many public libraries, a large number of them arrived in the camp as waste paper and were frequently used as toilet paper. As Kogon writes, 'Man konnte sie zuweilen noch vom Klosett weg retten, mußte dann allerdings dort, um eine Revolte der Mithäftlinge zu vermeiden, rasch für Ersatz sorgen, was gar nicht leicht war, da erheblicher Papiermangel herrschte'.<sup>160</sup> The final library collection also included many works of foreign literature from countries at war with Germany: these should have been destroyed but were allowed in the library after an inmate explained that they were mostly non-fiction works.<sup>161</sup> As Benedikt Kautsky observed:

Die hauptsächlich mit der Hilfe jüdischer Häftlinge zustande gekommen Bibliothek ist ein staunenswertes Beispiel für die ungebrochene Moral der Häftlinge. Eine Veröffentlichung des Katalogs würde beweisen, auf welchem Niveau in literarischer und wissenschaftlicher Beziehung diese Bibliothek stand, denn sie enthielt wirklich Schätze geschichtlicher, militärwissenschaftlicher, soziologischer, philosophischer Werke [...]. Dieser Katalog ist ein wahrhaftes Kulturdokument aus Hitlerdeutschland – geschaffen von den Häftlingen und merkwürdigerweise geduldet von der SS, die analphabetisch wie sie war, zweifellos nicht ahnte, welche Waffe sie den Häftlingen damit in die Hand gab [...]. An diese Bibliothek knüpften sich natürlich Bildungsbestrebungen aller Art an – von Sprachkursen bis zu Fachgesprächen aus allen Fakultäten. Daß viele praktische Ergebnisse dabei erzielt worden sind, bezweifle ich; aber schon die Konzentration auf geistige Probleme irgendwelcher Art war ungemein wichtig.<sup>162</sup>

Similarly, the Buchenwald cinema was established by the SS in 1941. Inmates were charged ten Pfennig to see films, which, although propagandistic, provided a change from the camp surroundings. On days on which no films were shown, however, the camp orchestra used the cinema building for concerts, which soon turned into 'bunte Abenden' in which songs and sketches were performed. From 1943 onwards, these evenings took place every six to eight weeks.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> Staar, p.22.

<sup>160</sup> Eugen Kogon, *Der SS-Staat. Das System der deutschen Konzentrationslager* (Munich: Kindler, 1974), p.155.

<sup>161</sup> Anton Gäbler, 'Die Häftlingsbücherei', in *Der Buchenwald-Report. Bericht über das Konzentrationslager Buchenwald bei Weimar*, ed. by David A. Hackett (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1996), pp.303-304; Kogon, p.155.

<sup>162</sup> Kautsky, quoted in Staar, pp.22-23.

<sup>163</sup> Bruno Apitz, 'Kunst im KL Buchenwald', in *Der Buchenwald-Report. Bericht über das Konzentrationslager Buchenwald bei Weimar*, ed. by David A. Hackett (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1996), pp.301-303 (p.301).



These two examples illustrate the way in which many cultural activities, particularly those of a subversive nature, took place through working within the boundaries of SS-sanctioned pursuits.<sup>164</sup> This was frequently the case for public performances. Plays, cabarets, concerts and poetry readings were often permitted by the guards (though this permission could be removed arbitrarily at any moment) – and often attended by them, too. Inmates repeatedly took great risks in performing works, from inside or outside the camp, which implicitly subverted or satirised their oppressors. Occasionally this criticism was surprisingly overt.<sup>165</sup> This was the case for the premiere of the Austrian journalist Rudolf Kalmar's satire, *Die Blutnacht auf dem Schreckenstein – oder: Die wahre Liebe ist das nicht*, which took place in Dachau in summer 1943. The main character was made to strongly resemble Hitler and the spectating inmates acknowledged political allusions with laughter and applause:

Die Parodie war offenkundig. Die Mehrzahl der SS-Leute (die hier ebenfalls die Ehrenplätze im Zuschauerraum besetzten) hätten aus angeborenem Stumpfsinn auch bei noch größerer Deutlichkeit nicht bemerkt. Die intelligenteren schnupperten zwar, aber sie hielten, was ihre Ohren berichteten, für zu unwahrscheinlich, um gründlicher darüber nachzudenken und die wenigen, denen klar war, was hier gespielt wurde, hörten darüber hinweg.<sup>166</sup>

Most cultural activities, however, took place clandestinely, and therefore at greater risk to those involved. These ranged from individual cultural pursuits – reading forbidden books, or writing poems, diaries, and even plays and novellas, for example – to small groups of inmates gathering to discuss or learn about politics, literature, or art, to large-scale gatherings within a particular barrack for public performances.<sup>167</sup> All such activities required an expenditure of energy which is striking within the context of the camps. Some are especially notable: a German-language production of Shakespeare's *As You Like It* in

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<sup>164</sup> It must be noted that these boundaries were not fixed and could change at the whim of a particular guard.

<sup>165</sup> For other examples from Buchenwald of this kind of overt satire and criticism, see Staar, pp.48-49.

<sup>166</sup> Rudolf Kalmar, *Zeit ohne Gnade* (Vienna: Schönbrunn, 1946), p.183. For more details, including how the play became known in other camps, see 'Gespenst im Dach', *Der Spiegel*, 24 (10 June 1985), 202-204. <<http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-13514442.html>> [accessed 10 June 2018].

<sup>167</sup> The relatively few examples of literary fiction produced in the camps – Bruno Apitz's novella *Esther* (Halle: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1988) is one of these – point to the overlapping of the unimaginable with one's daily reality. Even the aforementioned novella, for example, limits its fictionality through its setting in a concentration camp and its sombre contents. As Jean Améry proposed: 'Nirgendwo sonst in der Welt hatte die Wirklichkeit soviel wirkende Kraft wie im Lager, nirgendwo anders war sie so sehr Wirklichkeit. An keiner anderen Stelle erwies sich der Versuch, sie zu überschreiten, als so aussichtslos'. (Jean Améry, *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne: Bewältigungsversuche eines Überwältigten* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1966), p.37.)

Buchenwald, for example, was rehearsed for an hour and a half every evening after the nightly roll call, in diverse rehearsal venues which included the latrines. Wigs were made by the wigmaker of Prague's municipal theatre, and the costumes by a professional costumer. Wooden frames were specially constructed, paper sacks stretched over them, and these were spray-painted blue by a professional painter and formed the side and rear walls of the stage. The text for rehearsals was taken from the library, and the final production also involved dance and musical interludes.<sup>168</sup>

### Who took part?

Whilst the frequency and diversity of such activities is striking, it is important to note here that only certain inmates were able to benefit from them. Though Willi Dehnert, a Buchenwald inmate, commented, 'Im Lager erlebten viele von uns zum ersten Mal überhaupt kabarettistische Darbietungen prominenter Künstler', such experiences were not necessarily available to all.<sup>169</sup> As Hermann Langbein noted:

Unter den Lebensbedingungen eines nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslagers konnten sie nur einen sehr geringen Prozentsatz der Internierten erreichen. Die Klage des deutschen Intellektuellen Johannes Maass, der im Sommer 1941 nach Dachau eingeliefert worden war, daß er vergeblich politische Gespräche gesucht hat, steht sicher stellvertretend für viele, die außerhalb des aus konspirativen Gründen notwendig eng gehaltenen Kreises derer standen, die einander auf diesem Weg halfen, und die niemand fanden, der ihre Mutlosigkeit zu überwinden half.<sup>170</sup>

Similarly, Benedikt Kautsky wrote that in Auschwitz the limited number of cultural performances could be attended only by the 'Lagerprominenz', predominantly German criminals.<sup>171</sup> Maja Suderland likewise comments that a 'gewöhnlicher Häftling' would rarely have been able to access camp libraries, and other groups such as Jewish inmates would have been entirely excluded except in exceptional circumstances.<sup>172</sup> Thus, in Buchenwald, only five percent of prisoners were registered to use the library.<sup>173</sup> Falk Pingel estimates that, overall, only around ten percent of inmates, the so-called 'Oberschicht', were able to

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<sup>168</sup> Staar, p.45.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., p.46.

<sup>170</sup> Hermann Langbein, *...nicht wie die Schafe zur Schlachtbank. Widerstand in den nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslagern 1938-1945* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer Taschenbuch, 1980), p.341.

<sup>171</sup> Kautsky, p.215.

<sup>172</sup> Suderland, p.84.

<sup>173</sup> Seela, p.69.

access the various forms of cultural activities.<sup>174</sup> As well as determining access to cultural activities, then, one's standing in the camp also determined the inmate's motivation to do so, affecting as it did one's individual experiences and the particular degree of deprivation. As Pingel observes, 'diese Veranstaltungen waren in der Regel nur für diejenigen interessant, die einen soziomateriellen Stand erreicht hatten, der sie aus unmittelbarer Not heraushob'.<sup>175</sup>

Indeed, the prerequisites for participation in cultural events and activities were extensive and will now be considered in more detail. As mentioned above, the individual camp played an important role in determining the scope of cultural activities and this was due not only to the distinction between concentration and extermination camps. Buchenwald, for example, shared many similarities with Dachau, yet culture flourished to a greater extent here in the early years of the camp, a difference attributed by some to the influx of prominent artists to the camp (Hermann Leopoldi, Fritz Grünbaum, Paul Morgan, and Fritz Löhner-Beda, for example) as a result of the 1938 *Judenaktionen*.<sup>176</sup> Similarly, Thomas Rahe attributes the possibility of cultural and religious activities in Bergen-Belsen to the relatively better living conditions in comparison to other concentration camps, as well as to the fact that the so-called *Austauschhäftlinge* were allowed to bring luggage with them to the camp.<sup>177</sup> Consequently, important material prerequisites such as books, pens and paper were more readily available.

Moreover, within the particular camp there were great disparities of opportunity and privilege. This thesis, focusing as it does on German-language poetry, does not consider in great detail the role and development of cultural works and events in other languages; here it is worth noting, however, that whilst being a native German speaker was problematic in many ways, it also brought with it a level of privilege in camps where German was the central language. Kautsky, for example, notes that speaking German was 'erforderlich bei

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<sup>174</sup> Pingel, pp.179-181. See also Kautsky, p.159.

<sup>175</sup> Pingel, p.167.

<sup>176</sup> See, for example, Apitz, 'Kunst im KL Buchenwald', p.301.

<sup>177</sup> Thomas Rahe, 'Das Konzentrationslager Bergen-Belsen', p.197. *Austauschhäftlinge* (also known as *Vorzugsjude* and *Austauschjude*) were Jewish prisoners who, because of foreign connections, were chosen to be 'exchanged' for Germans imprisoned abroad (or sometimes materials to be used for armament).

der Prominenz'.<sup>178</sup> This could translate to cultural privilege in a number of ways. For example, it might result in a position in a relatively more favourable work team which could facilitate access to certain materials (paper, for example) or which was less physically demanding and did not deprive the inmate of the energy needed for mental engagement in their free time. As Falk Pingel notes, 'Von den deutschen, nichtjüdischen Häftlingen kann angenommen werden, daß sie insbesondere in den Lagern, in denen ihr Anteil am geringsten war, nahezu vollständig an solchen [relativ gesicherten, bevorzugten] Arbeitsplätzen unterkamen'.<sup>179</sup> In Buchenwald, for example, the so-called *Lagerinnenkommandos* (such as *Küche*, *Effektenkammer*, and *Schneiderei*) were for the most part less gruelling than those outside the camp such as the *Steinbruchkommando* and *Straßenbaukommandos*.<sup>180</sup> Gaining a position in one of these less arduous, inner work teams gave inmates such as Heinrich Steinitz (*Strumpfstopferei* between spring 1939 and October 1940) and Hasso Grabner (*Lagerbibliothek*) more time, and physical and mental space and energy to compose poetry, both inside and outside of working hours.<sup>181</sup> One final point regarding language is that, whether German or not, larger scale cultural events were often easier in single-language barracks; those barracks which housed inmates of several nationalities were the site of fewer cultural gatherings, not just because of differing native tongues but also, relatedly, differing political views and cultural heritage, and a greater risk of betrayal.<sup>182</sup>

Above, I mentioned the significance of the inmate's work team in determining their ability to participate in cultural activities. This significance extended to the individual's prisoner

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<sup>178</sup> Kautsky, p.162. Regarding the problems of being a native German speaker, one must consider both the psychological difficulties in sharing the language of their oppressors and also the fact that writing or performing in German carried with it greater risk in being readily understood by the SS, thereby making any subversive content more hazardous.

<sup>179</sup> Pingel, p.168.

<sup>180</sup> Some of the harder *Innenkommandos* included the *Latrinekommando* and *Gärtnerei*. (Walter Bartel, ed., *Buchenwald: Mahnung und Verpflichtung, Dokumente und Berichte*, 3rd edn (Berlin: Kongress, 1961), p.231.)

<sup>181</sup> This relatively secure position was particularly valuable for Steinitz, both because of his age (born in 1879) and his status as a Jewish (as well as political) Austrian prisoner. After October 1940, Steinitz was transferred to much more arduous teams (*Steinbruch*, *Gärtnerei* and *Latrine*) before being deported to Auschwitz in October 1942, where he was murdered at the end of October or beginning of November. Of the posthumously printed Buchenwald sonnets, those five which are dated (or which can be through their contents) were all written before transfer to the more physically demanding roles.

<sup>182</sup> Apitz, 'Kunst im KL Buchenwald', pp.301-302.

category, their position in the camp hierarchy (dependent on numerous factors including their political status and race) and their barrack.<sup>183</sup> Some of these effects are self-evident: a (German) Jewish inmate would, except in exceptional circumstances, have had fewer privileges than a (German) political prisoner in the same camp. This would have resulted in harsher working conditions (resulting in less time and energy for cultural activities); the risk of greater punishment if discovered participating in a clandestine activity; restricted or no access to SS-sanctioned cultural events and institutions (for example, the library or public performances), as well as fewer opportunities to obtain writing or artistic materials.<sup>184</sup> Moreover, such limitations varied from individual to individual, influenced as they were by numerous factors. A particularly corrupt *Blockältester*, for example, was likely to severely curtail clandestine activities within his barrack, whereas a more lenient *Kapo* might tolerate political or literary discussions within his work team. The German Jewish Communist, Rudi Arndt, for example, became a *Blockältester* in Buchenwald and consequently

machte die größten Anstrengungen, um gegen die Degradierung des Menschlichen durch die Nazis alles das aufzubieten, worin sich dieses Menschliche wahrhaft manifestiert. Darum ermutigte er begabte Kameraden, Gedichte und Lieder zu schreiben, darum brachte er schließlich auch die Aufstellung eines Streichquartetts zustande, das [...] Mozart, Haydn und Beethoven spielte.<sup>185</sup>

Similarly, Olga Benário Prestes, a Communist inmate of Ravensbrück, also became *Blockälteste*; in her barrack, she organised lectures, courses, and literary evenings at which Goethe, Schiller and Möricke were recited.<sup>186</sup>

Finally, one's individual background – one's worldview; any previous literary, artistic or political engagement, for example – also contributed to one's motivation to organise or participate in cultural activities. Daxelmüller writes that 'Solidargruppen mit ethischer Zielsetzung' were particularly active.<sup>187</sup> For example, political and strongly religious inmates were more likely to maintain hope 'auf eine überwindbare Gegenwart und fortschrittliche Zukunft', thereby making them less likely to succumb to hopelessness and more motivated to participate in cultural activities which strengthened one's own and others' mental

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<sup>183</sup> For more discussion of the complexities of the inmate hierarchy (summarised by Kautsky as 'Die Prominenz – Der Mittelstand – Die grosse Masse – Der Musulmann'), see Kautsky, pp.158-163.

<sup>184</sup> As Falk Pingel notes: 'Schon seit dem Krieg [...] erhielten politische Häftlinge in Schreib- oder Buchführungstätigkeiten eine Monopolstellung'. (Pingel, p.159.)

<sup>185</sup> Stephan Hermlin, *Die erste Reihe* (Berlin: Neues Leben, 1951), p.52.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, p.74.

<sup>187</sup> Daxelmüller, p.997.

outlook.<sup>188</sup> Moreover, Kathrin Mess notes that it was often easier for such inmates 'die Haft als eine folgerichtige Etappe ihrer Persönlichkeitsentwicklung in einem sinnvollen Lebenszusammenhang zu sehen'.<sup>189</sup> As members of a fixed group, they also benefitted from greater emotional support. Sonja Staar writes that antifascist foreign inmates considered 'ihren Widerstandskampf im Konzentrationslager selbstverständlich und bewußt als Teil des Befreiungskampfes ihres Volkes von der faschistischen Herrschaft [...] und die Nationalkultur als eines der zu verteidigenden Güter schätzten, ja pflegten'.<sup>190</sup> When, for many, the lack of free time made reading a book less about relaxing and more about expending energy, it was often political prisoners who found a weapon in reading for their political and intellectual struggle.<sup>191</sup>

Similarly, those with an artistic background, who were used to processing events and experiences artistically, were more likely to seek such recourse within the camp. Emil Alphonse Rheinhardt, for example, was an Austrian expressionist poet and writer, imprisoned in Dachau between July 1944 and his death in February 1945 from typhus. Writing for him was an instinctive 'Kraftquelle', as he sought to write 'wie es mir aus Hirn und Feder will' as a means of finding himself.<sup>192</sup> Similarly, Annette Seemann notes: 'Für viele der zahlreichen Künstler und Publizisten aus ganz Europa war es bereits während ihres Aufenthaltes in Buchenwald überlebenswichtig, ihre schreckliche Lage künstlerisch zum Ausdruck zu bringen oder dokumentarisch festzuhalten'.<sup>193</sup> This was also the case for Alfred Kittner, who continued to write poems throughout his imprisonment in a range of camps in Transnistria. As Peter Motzan wrote, 'Die poetische Bewältigung der ihn umzingelnden feindlichen Realität wurde zum Rettungsring aus der Flut des Grauens'.<sup>194</sup>

Finally, to illustrate the complex interaction of the various factors mentioned above, let us consider two poets whose works will be examined in later chapters. Edgar Kupfer-

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<sup>188</sup> Pingel, p.173. Despite this, one must not assume that 'allgemein derjenige, der dazu neigte, seine Lagererfahrung intellektuell zu verarbeiten, bessere Überlebenschancen hatte. Der Status des Intellektuellen galt im Lager als minderwertig' (Pingel, pp.176-177).

<sup>189</sup> Kathrin Mess, „... als fiel ein Sonnenschein in meine einsame Zelle“: *Das Tagebuch der Luxemburgerin Yvonne Useldinger aus dem Frauen-KZ Ravensbrück* (Berlin: Metropol, 2008), p.273.

<sup>190</sup> Staar, p.7.

<sup>191</sup> Daxelmüller, p.991.

<sup>192</sup> Rheinhardt, p.94.

<sup>193</sup> Annette Seemann, *Weimar: eine Kulturgeschichte* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2012), p.304.

<sup>194</sup> Alfred Kittner, *Schattenschrift. Gedichte* (Aachen: Rimbaud, 1988), p.116.

Koberwitz, for example, gained work in the office of the Dachau screw factory, 'Präzifix'. Known as a 'Gelegenheitsdichter', Kupfer-Koberwitz had poems commissioned by many civilians who also worked in the screw factory. This allowed him to inconspicuously write texts which had nothing to do with his office work.<sup>195</sup> When a typhus epidemic broke out in the main camp, prisoners who worked in the construction office began sleeping in barracks next to the factory to prevent the disease spreading to civilians there; this allowed Kupfer-Koberwitz to stay after official working hours in his office. Furthermore, the documents of the arms factory found in Kupfer-Koberwitz's office were so confidential that even the factory guards were not allowed to view them, allowing the poet even greater privacy. Finally, with the help of friends, Kupfer-Koberwitz was able to seal his manuscripts (a diary of over 1800 pages and over 30 poems) in a concrete-lined hole in the camp, thereby protecting them from discovery until the camp was liberated.<sup>196</sup> On 12<sup>th</sup> September 1944, he wrote the following foreword to his collection of writing, which reveals some of the risks he took in writing and the improbability that it would survive:

Diese Blätter sind Erinnerungen, geschrieben hier in Dachau, in der steten Gefahr entdeckt zu werden. – Einmal war diese Entdeckung sehr nahe. – Im Zeitraum von Sekunden gelang es mir jedoch die Blätter noch rechtzeitig zu verstecken. – Sollte man sie finden, so werde ich es mit dem Leben bezahlen und mein Tod wird kein schöner sein. –

Nur durch ganz besondere Umstände begünstigt gelang es mir überhaupt diese Blätter zu schreiben und zu verwahren. – In großer Heimlichkeit musste das geschehen und unter steter Gefahr.<sup>197</sup>

Another inmate, Franz Hackel, a left-wing writer from Prague, considered composing poetry in Buchenwald to be a means of preserving his 'menschliche und politische Widerstandskraft' and bringing 'Freude und Entspannung' to many of his fellow inmates. Initially writing down his poems, he later memorised them and destroyed the written copies. Though his early years of imprisonment were spent in the harshest of work teams (*Steinbruch* and *Schachtkommando*), he was later able, through the help of friends, to work

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<sup>195</sup> These included a lengthy diary, many poems, and a number of short stories and books, including 'Ein Märchen: Das Märchen vom Findelkinde Nadine', *Apotheke des Lebens: Ein Buch für junge Menschen*, written for a Yugoslavian fellow inmate, and *Die Tierbrüder*, a book about living ethically which he later published. (AKGD, Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz, 1762/1-04-2-2; 1-04-2-6.)

<sup>196</sup> Langbein, pp.69-70.

<sup>197</sup> AKGD, Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz, 28.740. Kupfer-Koberwitz's detailed description of the reasons for his ability to write so extensively can be found in the foreword to the first volume of his published diaries: Kupfer-Koberwitz, *Die Mächtigen und die Hilflosen. Als Häftling in Dachau. Band I: Wie es begann* (Stuttgart: Friedrich Vorwerk, 1957), pp.9-13.

in the *Häftlingsschneiderei*, where working conditions were more bearable and allowed him more time and energy for writing.<sup>198</sup>

## Poetry in public

Having discussed some of the many factors contributing to one's involvement in cultural events, some of the forms these events took, and the means by which they occurred, I turn now to the public role of poetry. Poetry from outside the camps was often performed at cultural or political evenings, or recited and discussed in smaller groups. As Daxelmüller observed, the concentrationary system 'zwang die Häftlinge zu neuen Techniken und Strategien wie etwa zur mündlichen und imaginären Rekonstruktion des Kulturerbes; die auf Schriftlichkeit beruhende Kultur des bürgerlichen Lebens geriet zur illiteralen Oralität'.<sup>199</sup> Jaiser interprets the prevalence of 'mündliche Dichtung' in the camps as proof of its 'Unentbehrlichkeit innerhalb der menschlichen Sozialität' and as a fundamental support for 'einen Gruppenzusammenhalt'.<sup>200</sup> Eugen Kogon, for example, commented on the considerable effect of the reading of Heinrich Heine's revolutionary satirical poems in Buchenwald.<sup>201</sup> Paul Martin Neurath, a former inmate of Dachau and Buchenwald, also notes the way in which the 'recollection of treasures of art, plays, poems' aided survival. He recalls spending seven hours reciting the poems of Hans Christian Morgenstern with a friend whilst filling up a hole with clay:

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<sup>198</sup> Staar, p.42.

<sup>199</sup> Daxelmüller, p.988.

<sup>200</sup> Jaiser, *Poetische Zeugnisse*, p.224. Anne-Berénike Rothstein described this as an 'interaktive Literaturrezeption', whereby remembering and sharing literary passages not only helped to distract inmates but also, often, to change their perception of their surroundings through the awakening of a 'selbstreflexive Bewusstheit' (p.5). This 'interaktive Literaturrezeption', along with the importance of reading in the camps, is also discussed in: Rolf D. Krause, 'Vom kalten Wind: Leseverhalten und Literaturrezeption in den nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslagern', in *Alltag, Traum und Utopie. Lesegeschichten - Lebensgeschichten*, ed. by Rainer Noltenius (Essen: Klartext, 1988), pp.124-140. In Chapter Two I will discuss how this interactive literary reception extends to the writing of poems, and how the interaction between the author and the poem they have written serves to strengthen their own sense of self.

<sup>201</sup> Kogon, p.331.



When we had dug up every line we remembered, we passed the treasure along to our friends, as an important contribution of something that did not smell of clay. For two days Morgenstern was in vogue at this working place.<sup>202</sup>

Another eyewitness testimony from Ravensbrück reports:

Manchmal, in der Freistunde auf der Lagerstraße, rezitierten die Frauen leise Gedichte; sie sprachen über Bücher, die sie gelesen, über Theaterstücke, die sie gesehen hatten. Sie trieben, wie einige von ihnen es selbst scherzhaft nannten „Gehirnakrobatik“. Sie wollten nicht stumpf und apathisch werden, sondern ihre geistigen Kräfte nutzen.<sup>203</sup>

In the same vein, whilst discussing the recital of poetry (and prose) in Buchenwald, Evert Straat wrote:

Wir waren bereit, in den Tod – welche Form der immer haben würde – in der Gewißheit zu gehen, daß die Kultur stärker als das Körperliche, Schmerz und Elend, Leben und Tod ist und daß es einen Sinn hat, sich zuletzt an ein Gedicht, einen Paragraphen und eine mathematische Formel zu erinnern.<sup>204</sup>

Alongside the discussion and recital of poems in smaller groups, cultural evenings provided a larger audience for poetic performance. Karl Schnog, for example, is recalled to have performed Wilhelm Busch poems, which allowed him to present ‘den „Führer“ als das [...], was er war: ein leerer Sack, der sich mit Körnern füllte’.<sup>205</sup> Similarly, Franz Hackel recalls cultural evenings in the barracks of the ‘Pathologische Abteilung’ in Buchenwald: ‘Es war ein wirkliches Erlebnis für mich, in dieser Baracke zu sitzen und revolutionäre Gedichte von Heine, Weinert u. a. sprechen zu hören’.<sup>206</sup> As will be discussed more in Chapter Three, maintaining this link to one’s cultural heritage, through poetry, was of great value.

Poetry written within the camps was also recited at larger gatherings and was also often shared and passed on orally from individual to individual. Jaiser, for example, notes that the poem ‘Kopf hoch!’, written in 1942 by an unknown Austrian inmate of Ravensbrück, was ‘im Lager sehr bekannt, wahrscheinlich gesungen, umgedichtet und mehrfach überliefert’.<sup>207</sup> Similarly, the Jewish inmate Käthe Leichter, a prominent member of the Austrian Social Democratic Party whose poetry will be considered later in this thesis, would

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<sup>202</sup> Paul Martin Neurath, *The Society of Terror: Inside the Dachau and Buchenwald Concentration Camps*, ed. by Christian Fleck and Nico Stehr (London: Paradigm Publishers, 2005), p.134.

<sup>203</sup> Zörner, p.198.

<sup>204</sup> Evert Straat, quoted in Staar, p.39.

<sup>205</sup> Staar, p.42.

<sup>206</sup> Franz Hackel, quoted in Staar, p.41.

<sup>207</sup> Jaiser, ‘„Ich flüchte heimlich“’, p.170.

read the poems she composed in Ravensbrück to her fellow inmates.<sup>208</sup> One of her poems, 'An meine Brüder in den Konzentrationslagern', was memorised by other inmates.<sup>209</sup> Sonja Staar's collection of Buchenwald testimonies also contains frequent references to the public performance of poetry written in the camps.<sup>210</sup> For example, Otto Halle's report of cultural evenings in the *Pathologie* barrack describes the recital of poetry from inside the camps (as well as that of texts from outside):

Nachdem als erste Veranstaltung in der Pathologie selbst ein Abend mit rein literarischem Inhalt durchgeführt wurde (geboten wurden Beispiele aus der modernen und klassischen Literatur) wurde bereits bei der zweiten Veranstaltung in der Pathologie am 8. August 1943 dieser Rahmen gesprengt. Im geheimen und nur von geladenen Gästen wickelte [sic] sich das Programm ab, welches eine starke und offene Tendenz trug (u. a. Spitteler: „Sturz der Götter“, Büchner: Szenen aus „Danton“). Im November 1943 ein weiterer Abend in der Pathologie: politische Gedichte unserer Genossen Ferdinand Römhild und Bruno Apitz, die berühmte von den Nazis verbotene Rede des Marquis Posa aus Schillers „Don Carlos“, politisch-satirische Szenen bildeten die Grundlage des Programms. Dieser Abend wurde im Februar 1944 vor einem größeren Kreis geladener Kameraden in der Effektenkammer wiederholt.<sup>211</sup>

Special poems were also often written for occasions such as commemorative services or public holidays: Easter, Christmas, New Year and May 1<sup>st</sup> were all commonly marked in the camps, as were important holidays in other countries. Poetry frequently played a role in such gatherings, along with songs and prose readings.<sup>212</sup> Willi Dehnert, for example, remembered a particular Sunday afternoon, 'an dem wir zu den Rezitationen des jungen österreichischen Lyrikers [...] auch Lenins, Liebnechts und Rosa Luxemburgs gedachten' and there was 'eine kleine, aber doch unvergessene LLL-Feier im Judenrevier des Konzentrationslagers Buchenwald'.<sup>213</sup> Services to mark the murder of the Communist leader Ernst Thälmann in August 1944 were also organised by Communist prisoners and several poems were written in commemoration. The five-stanza poem, 'Höre, Welt!', mentioned again in Chapter Three, was written by the Russian prisoner Fedor Krutik and dedicated to Thälmann. Originally written in Russian, the text was then translated into

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<sup>208</sup> Langbein, p.336. Leichter (along with Olga Benário Prestes) also published a camp newspaper – 'alle ihre Beiträge atmeten den Glauben an den Sieg der tapferen Sowjetarmee' (Archiv KZ-Gedenkstätte Ravensbrück (AKGR), RA-LAG 18, Slg CJ/1-9 (1)) – and wrote a play ('Schum-Schum') with fellow political prisoner Hertha Breuer which was performed in the camp (Jaiser, *Poetische Zeugnisse*, p.357). For more biographical information on Leichter, see Jaiser, *Poetische Zeugnisse*, pp.356-357.

<sup>209</sup> AKGR, RA-LAG 18, Slg CJ/1-9 (1).

<sup>210</sup> See Staar, pp.41-45.

<sup>211</sup> Otto Halle, quoted in Staar, p.41.

<sup>212</sup> See, for example, Staar, p.56.

<sup>213</sup> Willi Dehnert, quoted in Staar, p.53.

German, revealing its wider audience.<sup>214</sup> Despite the loss of his leader, Krutik's language is triumphant, as the poem's final two stanzas illustrate, and this reveals poetry's role in encouraging fellow prisoners:

Hörst du, Welt! Wir ehren heut den Helden,  
Der ein Opfer des untergehenden Faschismus wurde.  
Ernst, du bist nicht von uns gegangen.  
Wir schwören, deine Losung zu befolgen.  
Der Henker hat nur deinen Körper getötet,  
Uns blieb die Idee.

Einen Lorbeerkranz hast du dem Volke gewunden,  
Jahrhunderte wirst du im Volke leben.  
Wir heben das Banner des Kampfes höher.  
Den Weg wird uns die Freiheit erhellen.  
Die deinigen werden die von der Sklaverei gebeugten  
Rücken wieder aufrichten  
Und nach deinem Vermächtnis leben.<sup>215</sup>

Similarly, the Jewish Communist inmate Karl Schnog, a German actor, cabarettist, radio speaker and satirical poet, wrote 'Nachruf für Albert Kaiser' in memory of the German Communist politician who died from typhus in Buchenwald in October 1944.<sup>216</sup> Schnog's German citizenship was rescinded in 1936 and he was arrested in 1940 after the Nazi invasion of Luxembourg. Interned firstly in a number of prisons, and then in Dachau and Sachsenhausen, Schnog spent the majority of the war (from 1941 until liberation) in Buchenwald.<sup>217</sup> His poem in memory of Kayser was read at an illegal memorial ceremony for the politician on 22<sup>nd</sup> October 1944.

Poetry's public role in the camps was not only an oral one. In Chapter Three I will discuss a series of anonymous poems from Buchenwald which were written to protest against the opening of a brothel in the camp and the widespread corruption of the *Kapo*.<sup>218</sup> Both the form and contents of these texts (for example, the brevity of those about the *Kapo*, their tone, and pronoun usage that establishes a clear 'us' and 'them' divide) suggest these poems were produced for distribution amongst inmates. Moreover, another group of texts

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<sup>214</sup> Other poems in the camp were also translated. The Polish inmate Edmund Polak, for example, described translating Polish poets' works into German and vice versa (Staar, pp.43-44).

<sup>215</sup> Fedor Krutik, 'Höre, Welt!' (24th August 1944), in *Kunst hinter Stacheldraht*, ed. by Schneider, p.174. For more details on the memorial service for Thälmann in Buchenwald, see Staar, pp.54-55.

<sup>216</sup> Karl Schnog, 'Nachruf für Albert Kaiser', in *Jedem das Seine*, p.59.

<sup>217</sup> After liberation, Schnog continued to work as an author and satirist until his death in 1964 in East Berlin. For more biographical information, see Kirsten and Kirsten, pp.317-318.

<sup>218</sup> AKGB, 9-95-33-43.

in the collection were explicitly designed to be copied and sent in letters home, either for a special occasion such as a birthday, or to express their devotion to loved ones. Here we have an excellent example of the diverse uses of poetry in the camps, ranging from polemic to the conventional *Gelegenheitsgedichte*. That these poems were distributed amongst inmates is testament, too, to the resourcefulness of those who produced the collection and their perception of the poems' value: if discovered, the more polemical works in particular would have jeopardised the safety of those in whose possession they were found. Similar evidence for the value of the printed word can be found in another publication from Buchenwald, a sheet containing two poems (by Karl Schnog and Fritz Löhner-Beda) and 'Einer von den "Prinz Kalaf Sprüchen"', with the note, 'Täglich veröffentlicht in der Strumpfstopferei des KZ Buchenwald'.<sup>219</sup> That there existed a daily publication in the camp reveals once again both the resourcefulness of the inmates responsible and the value of the written word.<sup>220</sup>

A smaller scale example of the value of written poetry is found in the numerous birthday letters and cards, and poems given as presents on other special occasions, which have survived in the camp archives.<sup>221</sup> Here there are many examples of carefully written and illustrated cards and booklets, some of which also use colour or fabric to embellish the gift. Once more fulfilling the role of *Gelegenheitsgedichte*, these poems also physically represent an enacted connection with an other, the importance of which is discussed further in the next chapter. Testimonies reveal the lasting significance of such acts. Charlotte Henschel, for example, remembered her time in the Ravensbrück infirmary, writing:

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<sup>219</sup> AKGB, 9-95-23.

<sup>220</sup> We also have here another indication of the relative safety of the *Strumpfstopferei* as a place of work and the opportunities it afforded.

<sup>221</sup> The depot at the Sachsenhausen memorial site, for example, contains the original copies of eight birthday poems or birthday cards containing poems: Depot KZ-Gedenkstätte Sachsenhausen (DKGS), 95.00533-95.00536; III 6; 06.00028.1; 11.00476; 13.00119. (A fifteen-page 'Skizzenbuch' produced in January 1945 has also been preserved here and contains illustrations by Dolfi Aussenberg, accompanied by poems by Dr Karl Szamek: DKGS, IV 138.) The Ravensbrück archives also contain a number of poem collections given to friends on their birthdays. These bear dedications such as: 'Einen kleinen Frühlingsstrauss dem ewigjungen Frühlingskind Anna Stiegler, 21.4.45, RB' (Slg CJ/1-73); 'Einiges aus den Feierstunden meines Lebens, für Anna Stiegler am 21.4.44, RB, für eine Feierstunde des Alltags' (Slg CJ/1-74); 'Geschenk an Hilde F. [?], 7.4.42, Geburtstag [?] von Nasarowa Lidia' (Slg CJ/1-76).

Besonders erinnere ich mich an die Genossinnen vom Judenblock, darunter Olga Prestes [...] und [...] Käthe Leichter, eine führende Sozialdemokratin aus Wien. Sie kamen alle Abende ans Fenster und brachten selbstgefertigte Unterhaltungsspiele, aufgeschriebene Gedichte, oder ein Stückchen Brot. Immer riskierten sie dabei, von den Aufseherinnen geschnappt und in den Bunker geworfen zu werden.<sup>222</sup>

Poetry could also enact connections through its production, as well as its reception. There is archival evidence of poems being written collaboratively, for example.<sup>223</sup> ‘Der Wald von Ravensbrück’ is one such poem, accompanied by the following note from Eva Lippold: ‘Eine in Ravensbrück unbekannte ermordete jüdische Ärztin hinterließ Motive zu einem langen Gedicht über Ravensbrück. Aus diesen Motiven stellten die Kameradinnen von Ravensbrück nachfolgendes Gedicht zusammen’.<sup>224</sup> The poem’s form and content both suggest its collaborative origins. The first-person plural pronoun persists throughout, and the four eight-line stanzas, for example, all have a very regular rhyme scheme (*abbccdd*) and are each followed by the refrain: ‘Schmerzenswald von Ravensbrück, / Gib uns dem Leben wieder zurück’. These formal features also lend themselves to oral transmission.

Whether this poem, and others written collaboratively, were distributed more widely (on paper or orally) or whether such works remained known only to their authors – sadly, as above, we have only fragmentary testimonial evidence about the oral (or written) distribution of poetry – I class them here as public uses of poetry in the sense that they brought together individual inmates. Those which were not distributed further, beyond the group of authors, can be seen also as private works, and it is these upon which the next section focuses.

## Poetry in private

For the majority of poems from the camps we have no record of any public performances, or even of their being shared, orally or otherwise, with acquaintances. This is not to say, of course, that this did not occur widely. Eyewitness accounts, however, point to the personal

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<sup>222</sup> AKGR, Slg CJ/5-28.

<sup>223</sup> For example, Margareta Glas-Larsson’s testimony of her imprisonment in Auschwitz includes several poems which she composed in the camp with fellow prisoner Aurelia Reichert-Wald (known as Orli Wald).

<sup>224</sup> AKGR, RA-LAG 18, Slg CJ/1-47.

significance of the individual act of composing a poem, regardless of whether it was then shared, and this significance – the reasons for choosing to write poetry – will be explored further below. Before doing so, I will briefly consider who chose to write poems in the camps and how they were able to do so.

### Who wrote?

Most of my corpus stems from amateur poets, that is, those who had not previously published poems. Unlike previous critics, I do not believe this is a reason for disparaging the quality of these works; instead, it is interesting that conditions in the camps prompted so many to start writing poetry. Whilst professional writers (in my corpus this includes Fritz Löhner-Beda, Karl Schnog and Heinrich Steinitz in Buchenwald, Alfred Kittner in various camps in Transnistria, and Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz and Emil Alphons Rheinhardt in Dachau, amongst others) may have felt more readily the need to convert experience into writing, in this thesis I will consider how poetry could be used by inmates of all literary backgrounds (or none) to negotiate boundaries.

### Practical constraints: prerequisites for writing

Many of the prerequisites for writing poetry have been discussed above with regard to accessing or participating in cultural activities more generally. Those who wrote poetry most prolifically in the camps were usually placed in a favourable barrack or work team and benefitted from privileges due to their position within the inmate hierarchy or alliances with other privileged inmates. Karl Schnog, for example, was able to find a place in the *Strumpfstopferei*, where working conditions were much more favourable. Otto Halle reports how this enabled Schnog to write:

Der Berliner Berufskünstler Karl Schnog war mir gut bekannt [...]. Im Lager konnte er, obgleich Jude, in die Strumpfstopferei lanciert werden. Das geschah über die Berliner Genossen, die sich an mich als den Kapo der Bekleidungskammer, dem die Strumpfstopferei unterstand, wandten [...]. Es wurde auch von uns dirigiert, an welchen Tisch die Häftlinge zur Arbeit kamen. Auf solche Weise erhielt auch Karl Schnog Gelegenheit zu schreiben und zu dichten.<sup>225</sup>

As above, those who were poets (whether professionally or not) before entering the camps may have had greater motivation to acquire writing materials and use their scarce free time

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<sup>225</sup> Staar, p.42.

and energy on composing poems; similarly, the large number of overtly political poems, seeking to encourage and engender a spirit of resistance, and also religious works, suggests once again the importance of one's particular worldview in determining one's motivation to write.

### Why write?

'Mich nicht zum Tier erniedrigen zu lassen': so stated Pelagia Lewińska-Tepicht, a Polish inmate of Auschwitz, her 'Handlungsmaxime'.<sup>226</sup> For many inmates, cultural activities played an essential role in preventing this debasement. When mentioning their participation in such activities, eyewitness testimonies frequently mention the need to distance oneself from one's current circumstances – and the guards, 'deren stumpfe Brutalität sich ihnen als „unzivilisiert“ und „tierisch“ erschloß' – and maintain a connection to one's former life and identity.<sup>227</sup> Daxelmüller has noted the significant benefits of the 'überlebensnotwendige Kreativität' that emerged in the camps, commenting specifically on the effects of remembering and retelling literary works from one's former life:

Diese Strategien erlaubten dem Häftling, sich als „Kulturwesen“ wiederzuentdecken, dessen Wurzeln in die Vergangenheit der Freiheit zurückreichten und das zugleich die Hoffnung auf die Zukunft des Überlebens ausdrückte. Kulturelle Aktivitäten versprachen folglich nicht nur Ablenkung vom Lageralltag, von Krankheit, Schmerz, Todesangst und dem stets präsenten süßlichen Geruch verbrannten Menschenfleisches, galten nicht nur als Sedidativ, sondern als Aufputzmittel und zugleich als gewaltlose, innere Rebellion gegen die Täter.<sup>228</sup>

As well as being an important source of distraction and entertainment, distancing the inmates temporarily from their daily reality, public cultural events also provided connection with other inmates.<sup>229</sup> Jaiser comments on this sense of community and solidarity – the 'gemeinsame Sprache', as she puts it – that oral performances fostered, and also notes how they served to strengthen the individual's sense of self: '[...] wird über den Einsatz der individuellen Stimme immer auch eine Differenz der Individuen als einzeln Handelnde

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<sup>226</sup> Zenon Jagoda, Stanislaw Klodzinski, and Jan Maslowski, 'Das Überleben im Lager aus der Sicht ehemaliger Häftlinge von Auschwitz-Birkenau', in *Die Auschwitz-Hefte. Texte aus der polnischen Zeitschrift „Przegląd Lekarski“ über historische, psychische und medizinische Aspekte des Lebens und Sterbens in Auschwitz*, 2 vols (Weinheim, Basel: Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, 1987), I, pp.13-51 (p.19).

<sup>227</sup> Daxelmüller, p.990.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*, p.989.

<sup>229</sup> The ways in which poems themselves – not just their public performance – could foster empathy and solidarity will be discussed in detail in Chapter Two.

wahrnehmbar, und das Ich gewinnt sich über diese Erfahrung für die Dauer der Aufführung in seiner lebendigen Existenz und in seiner Solidarität mit anderen zurück'.<sup>230</sup>

Eyewitness accounts which mention the role of culture in the camps all confirm these benefits. For example, Alfred Kantor, born in 1923 in Prague, survived Auschwitz, Theresienstadt and Schwarzheide, and wrote after his liberation:

Ich habe mich aus starkem Selbsterhaltungstrieb dem Zeichnen gewidmet, und dies hat mir sicherlich geholfen, das unvorstellbare Grauen des Lebens damals zu verdrängen. In der Rolle des Beobachters konnte ich mich wenigstens ein paar Minuten lang dem entziehen, was damals in Auschwitz passierte, und deshalb war es mir möglich, die Fäden meines Verstandes im Griff zu behalten.<sup>231</sup>

Stanisław Wolny, a Polish inmate of Auschwitz, explained the value of the evening recitals he helped to organise in his barrack in similar terms:

Stell dir vor, 400 gemarterte, oft resignierte Kollegen, die während der schweren Arbeit des Tages den Mißhandlungen der grünen Halunken ausgesetzt waren, vergessen jeden Abend vor dem Einschlafen das Schreckbild des Tages, atmen eine normale, menschliche Atmosphäre ein, reißen sich für Augenblicke von der Lagerhölle los und versetzen sich dank unserer Erzählungen in eine freie Welt.<sup>232</sup>

Personal motivations for writing poetry often overlap with the above. The lengths to which inmates would go to obtain writing materials, to conceal and protect their poetry, all suggest the psychological importance of writing: it was far more than just a whim or a spur of the moment decision.<sup>233</sup> Gösta Durchham, for example, an Austrian political prisoner, composed many poems during his imprisonment in Buchenwald and took great care to prevent their discovery. He wrote:

Sie wurden von mir meist auf Zetteln notiert und dann später in ein Heftchen eingetragen. Die Eintragungen erfolgten auf die Weise, daß einzelne Strophen und Verszeilen auf verschiedenen Seiten, unzusammenhängend, durcheinander aufgeschrieben wurden, um so eine eventuelle, unvermutete Kontrolle irre zu führen. Nur einige wenige unverfängliche Gedichte trug ich voll ein.<sup>234</sup>

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<sup>230</sup> Jaiser, *Poetische Zeugnisse*, p.221.

<sup>231</sup> Gabriele Sprigrath, 'Bilder auf dem Wege des Erinnerns. Zur Rezeption des Holocaust-Kunst', in *Kunst zum Überleben – gezeichnet in Auschwitz. Ausstellung von Werken ehemaliger Häftlinge des Konzentrationslagers Auschwitz aus dem Besitz der staatlichen Gedenkstätte Oświęcim-Brzezinka* (Ulm: Verband Bildender Künstler Württemberg e.V., 1989), pp.27-30 (p.29).

<sup>232</sup> Józef Kret, *Ostatni krag* (Krakow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1973), p.34, cited in and translated by Langbein, p.338.

<sup>233</sup> Jaiser, for example, discusses the lengths to which inmates of Ravensbrück were willing to go to protect their poetry (Jaiser, '„Ich flüchte heimlich“', p.168).

<sup>234</sup> Durchham, p.55. A number of Durchham's poems will be analysed in the following chapters.



Armin Freudmann, another Austrian prisoner, went to similar lengths to protect and preserve his poetry:

Natürlich zeigte ich sie auch vielen anderen Kameraden begreiflicherweise nur heimlich. Ich hielt sie in meinem Bett zwischen zwei Doppelbrettern versteckt. Aber eines Tages waren sie verschwunden. Wahrscheinlich hatte der Kamerad, der unter mir schlief, sie infolge des allgemeinen Papiermangels organisiert. [...] Durch das öftere Vorlesen hatte ich sie halbwegs in Erinnerung behalten und konnte sie reproduzieren. Ich verlor sie noch ein zweitesmal in Buchenwald, als ich, an Flecktyphus erkrankt, ins Revier aufgenommen und mir alles zwecks Desinfektion abgenommen wurde. [...] Durch sieben Lager und mindestens dreimal sieben Kontrollen, Leibesvisitationen, Bettdurchsuchungen habe ich sie geschmuggelt, und das war weder leicht noch ungefährlich...<sup>235</sup>

Efforts such as these – sourcing materials, concealment, protection, even destruction where necessary to protect oneself – speak in themselves of the ways in which poetry endowed the camp poet with a measure of agency, thereby strengthening their individual identity. In the second chapter I will discuss how poetry could enact connections with an other; here, it is important to note that the poem itself, especially when physically recorded, could function as an other, and one which was empathic in the sense that it responded to the poet's thoughts and personal decisions.

One should also note here that the majority of texts composed in the camps were either diaries or poems. Rahe, Jaiser and others attribute this to the difficulty in obtaining writing materials and the complete exhaustion after gruelling work, lengthy roll calls and insufficient food, suggesting that 'literarische Kurzformen wie das Gedicht und die knappe abendliche Tagebucheintragung noch am ehesten geeignet [waren], den Willen zum Schreiben im Lager auch Wirklichkeit werden zu lassen'.<sup>236</sup> Whilst practical constraints undoubtedly influenced the choice of poetry, however, I do not believe they wholly explain why so many poems were written, why the form of a poem was chosen so frequently, and for the most part by those who were not professional poets. Many poems could easily have been condensed into more succinct prose accounts which would have required fewer writing materials, less time and less mental exertion. Rahe, for example, also proposes that

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<sup>235</sup> Armin Freudmann, 'Dichter hinterm Stacheldraht', in *So sang zu mir der Stacheldraht: KZ-Gedichte* (Edition Katzenschwanz at Smashwords, 2012)

<<https://www.smashwords.com/books/view/248694>> [accessed 30 September 2018].

<sup>236</sup> Rahe, 'Kultur im KZ', p.201.

these short, relatively fragmentary forms 'erschien als formale Entsprechung der erlebten Wirklichkeit des Lageralltags' and were best able to capture this 'unentrinnbare und sinnentleerte Realität'.<sup>237</sup> Similarly, Jaiser comments that the need to write poems specifically 'wird damit begründet, in knapper Form wesentliche Dinge sagen und sich diese so besser einprägen und mitteilen zu können'.<sup>238</sup>

Additionally, the poems' intended audience was often significant. Above I discussed the public value of poetry, but the poem as witness was also a key factor in many inmates' decision to write. Jaiser, for example, notes this 'dokumentarische Absicht' of many Ravensbrück poets and also describes the poem's dual 'kommunikative und gemeinschaftsstiftende Funktion':

Das lyrische Sprechen [...] ermöglicht in seiner besonderen Rhythmik, seiner Wiederholbarkeit und im Akt des lauten Sprechens auch eine gemeinsame Sprache des Leidens und des Protestes. Dieses Sprechen, das einem Atemrhythmus oder dem Herzschlag folgt, vermag in dem Moment das Lebendige der eigenen Existenz zurückzubringen.<sup>239</sup>

In line with this, in the foreword to his collection of writing, Kupfer-Koberwitz wrote: 'ich wünsche diesen Blättern, daß sie einst den Menschen erzählen von dem, was wir hier litten und ertrugen und wie wir hier starben'.<sup>240</sup> He describes the form of these 'holperige[n] Verse' (in particular their 'ungelösten, gespannten Rhythmus') as aiding this endeavour by reflecting the reality of daily life (and death) in the camps.<sup>241</sup>

For others, the poem's intended audience was somewhat different. The Austrian inmate, Armin Freudmann, describes the use of poetry to please and gain favours in his Buchenwald poem 'Ein Dank und Schnorrgedicht (An einen Küchenjungen)':

Ich hab für meine Reimerei  
Geerntet manches Lob.  
War auch viel Schmeichelei dabei,  
Ich war doch froh darob.  
Welch tröstende Befriedigung

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<sup>237</sup> Rahe, 'Kultur im KZ', p.201.

<sup>238</sup> Jaiser, '„Ich flüchte heimlich“', p.169.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid., p.169, p.177.

<sup>240</sup> AKGD, 28.740.

<sup>241</sup> The subsequent chapters will consider the effects of formal choices on the poet's endeavour to represent and transform their experiences in the camps; moreover, Chapter Four will focus particularly on the role played by traditional forms such as those employed by Kupfer-Koberwitz.

Inmitten der Erniedrigung.<sup>242</sup>

Here, the poet-speaker uses his 'Reimerei' to gain extra food from the eponymous kitchen boy. Having recited some poems to the boy, the poet-speaker receives his reward:

Doch fürstlich war beinah dein Lohn:  
Viel Butter, Wurst und Brot.  
Ich schlich mich still beschämt davon.  
Ein Abend ohne Not.  
Und glaube mir, daß fast zwei Jahr  
Ich nicht so satt und dankbar war.

Moreover, the introduction to Freudmann's poetry collection also mentions the value of poetry in both developing friendship and improving one's physical situation in the camp:

Sie [meine Gedichte] haben mir über manche schwere Stunde hinweggeholfen. Ich zeigte sie einem Sanitäter, dem sie gefielen. Wir wurden Freunde. Er brachte mich als zweiter Revierschreiber unter. Von da an ging es mir besser. Ich ging nicht mehr auf die Baustelle und mußte meine Gedichte nicht mehr auf Zementpapier schreiben.<sup>243</sup>

Another Buchenwald poet, Edo Leitner, also commented on poetry's existential value.<sup>244</sup>

Constanze Jaiser observed that 'ein wichtiger Anlass für das Dichten der allgegenwärtige Tod war und ein Gedicht helfen konnte, Ohnmacht, Verzweiflung und Trauer zu bekämpfen'.<sup>245</sup> Leitner's collection of fifty short poems from the camp, published under the title *Galgenlieder*, confirms this, despite appearing light-hearted. As the title suggests, the poems closely resemble those of Christian Morgenstern. Werner Mackenbach writes that:

Scheinbar unpolitisch, dokumentieren sie jedoch nicht nur den geistigen Widerstand gegen die geistestötende Nazi-Diktatur. Sie stellen sich bewußt – wenn vielleicht auch in den Sprachspielen nicht so ausgereift und noch mehr an traditionelle Formen angelehnt – in die lyrische Tradition Christian Morgensterns. Und wie dieser formuliert auch Edo Leitner – in scheinbar so unbeschwert dahingesetzten Versen – tiefere Weisheiten, die sich oft erst auf den zweiten Blick offenbaren.<sup>246</sup>

The following two poems exemplify the language games typical of the poems and their seemingly light-hearted tone:

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<sup>242</sup> Freudmann, *So sang zu mir*. Ebook.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid., 'Dichter hinterm Stacheldraht', in *So sang zu mir*.

<sup>244</sup> Leitner was an active German Communist, arrested numerous times for his resistance activity, including the lending out of antifascist literature, and finally taken to Buchenwald in 1938. He remained there until the camp was liberated and played a significant role in this, helping to make and operate an illegal radio receiver for the US *Fliegerhilfe*.

<sup>245</sup> Jaiser, '„Ich flüchte heimlich“', p.169.

<sup>246</sup> Leitner, p.62.

Ein Regenwurm, beim Pflügen mitten  
und unerwartet durchgeschnitten,  
begann nach Würmerart darauf,  
den zweigeteilten Lebenslauf.  
Nach kurzer Zeit geschah sogar,  
daß er sich selbst begegnet war.  
Die beiden waren drauf versessen,  
das gleiche Klößchen Dreck zu fressen.  
Daraus entstand ein Dialog,  
das heißt, vielleicht doch Monolog.  
Nicht wag ich's zwischen diesen beiden  
ganz zweifelsohne zu entscheiden.<sup>247</sup>

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Ein Papagei, begabter als  
die andern, speziellenfalls  
für Violine, die er liebt,  
nach langem Studium endlich gibt  
sein erstes Violinkonzert.  
Nun wird er überaus geehrt,  
gerühmt im Generalanzeiger  
als allererster Papageiger.<sup>248</sup>

When one discovers the specific context of Leitner's writing – beyond the horrifying conditions of his imprisonment in a Nazi concentration camp – one better understands the personal significance of what might otherwise be considered trivial poems. A victim of medical experimentation, Leitner was deliberately infected with typhus and was one of only six out of the twenty-six infected who survived.<sup>249</sup> He spent the following months slowly recovering and was overcome by fear during this period of 'ständigen und unmittelbaren Konfrontation mit dem Tod der Kameraden und der Drohung des eigenen'.<sup>250</sup> For Leitner, Mackenbach writes, the daily writing of poetry became a 'tägliches (Über)Lebensmittel im wahrsten Sinne des Worte'.<sup>251</sup> In his own words, Leitner explains his need to write poetry like so:

Am Fußende meines Bettes stand auf einem Schrank der in Buchenwald unvermeidliche Lautsprecher, durch den alle Durchsagen vom Rapportführer herabgebrüllt wurden. Jedesmal, wenn das Einschalttrauschen eine neue Durchsagen [sic] ankündigte, waren meine Nerven bis aufs äußerste gespannt. Es hätte lauten können: ‚Häftling 210 zum Tor!‘

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<sup>247</sup> Leitner, p.14.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid., p.25.

<sup>249</sup> This occurred 'einige Zeit' after the illegal memorial service for Ernst Thälmann which took place on 18<sup>th</sup> September 1944; Leitner, p.61.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid., p.62.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid.

Um es kurz zu machen: ich wollte mich nicht von meiner Angst fertig machen lassen, und so habe ich mir eine Aufgabe gestellt: jeden Tag ein Gedicht (das heißt es wurden Verse). Es war für mich eine Pflichtübung, und selbstverständlich machte ich keine sentimentalen Gedichte, sondern betrieb mit kleinen Späßen Wortspielereien, die mich selbst auch aufheiterten.

Man muß sich zu helfen wissen. Mein Grundsatz war: Angst macht Angst. Also laß die Angst fahren dahin.<sup>252</sup>

Here, then, we have a very clear example of the significance of poetry within the camps. Unlike those poems written for performance, for sharing, or for documentation, Leitner's poems had a very narrow intended audience – himself – yet were arguably of equal importance. Where a brief glance at Leitner's poems might suggest frivolous word play and the concealment of the reality of the camps, reading them with the knowledge of Leitner's individual situation and his dependence on the daily act of writing them demonstrates the necessity of the camp poem. Such accounts in which the poet outlined the personal significance of poetry during imprisonment are rare, however. I believe, therefore, that my thesis, through its exploration of poetry's negotiation of boundaries, will enrich the picture we currently have of poetry's value, revealing other ways in which poetry was able to help those who wrote it and confirming Rahe's below assessment of culture's importance in the camps:

Kultur war dabei ein wichtiges Mittel, sich dem gefährlichen Prozeß der völligen Depersonalisierung zu widersetzen, gerade deshalb, weil es sich hier nicht um eine abstrakte Form der Selbstbehauptung handelte, sondern um eine mit spezifischen, nicht austauschbaren Inhalten und Formen versehene Selbstbehauptung, die der zumindest partiellen Aufrechterhaltung individueller und kollektiver Identität diene.<sup>253</sup>

This means of self-assertion Rahe describes, with its 'spezifischen, nicht austauschbaren Inhalten und Formen', will be discussed throughout this thesis by examining the – equally specific and not interchangeable – contents and forms of a range of camp poems. Rahe's comment on the value of such self-assertion for the maintenance of an individual and collective identity is particularly pertinent to the analyses in the next chapter. There I will explore the interrelationship between preserving a sense of self and extending empathy towards others, and the particular ways in which camp poetry could initiate or protect this dynamic process.

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<sup>252</sup> Leitner, p.62.

<sup>253</sup> Rahe, 'Kultur im KZ', p.205.

## Chapter Two

### Connection / Removing Boundaries

The previous chapter detailed some of the constraints and boundaries which were an unavoidable and unrelenting part of the inmates' daily lives. Former bounds afforded by one's social or legal status which provided a measure of safety and reinforced identity no longer existed. Connections to loved ones were severed as families were split up. Besides the striking physical boundaries – the barbed wire fences separating inmates from the outside world, for example – new emotional boundaries were established. The Nazis' organisation of the 'concentrationary universe' deliberately worked against empathic identification.<sup>254</sup> Despite physical proximity, the hierarchical structure within the camps, the categorisation of inmates according to gender, race, and religious and political beliefs, enforced a mindset which saw the other as different and distinct. Daily life was subject to numerous constraints, the nature of which could change without notice at the whim of those in charge. In short, inmates experienced a measure of powerlessness which was extremely difficult to fight against, such were the restrictions on every aspect of their lives.<sup>255</sup>

In this first of three chapters on boundary negotiation, I focus on the ways in which poetry enabled inmates, faced with extreme fragmentation, to (re)enact connections that had been jeopardised or destroyed by the camp environment. The previous chapter mentioned the ways in which this occurred publicly, how poems written to be shared or performed could engender and strengthen a sense of community and solidarity with other inmates. Indeed, the very orality of performance implies and necessitates an other. Usually, this community of performance was a very specific one, restricted in some way. As detailed, many poems written for mutual encouragement were founded on a shared political,

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<sup>254</sup> The term 'concentrationary universe' was first used in 1946 by David Rousset, a French political inmate of Buchenwald: Rousset, *L'Univers concentrationnaire* (Paris: Pavois, 1946).

<sup>255</sup> For an in-depth description of the regimentation of daily life, see Wolfgang Sofsky, *Die Ordnung des Terrors: Das Konzentrationslager* (Frankfurt a.M.: S. Fischer, 1993).

intellectual or religious belief system or heritage. Now, in this chapter, I propose that the stimulation of empathy was in fact much more widespread and inclusive: there is evidence of its existence not only at public events designed to promote social cohesion, but in a broad range of situations within daily camp life and towards an equally broad range of others, even those with whom the inmates had little in common besides their imprisonment. I will use the corpus of poetry considered here to show both how widespread empathy was, and how it was instigated and sheltered by the poems themselves – both those written to be shared and those which were kept private.

This argument for empathy stands in sharp contrast to other portraits of inmate relationships by historians and sociologists such as Wolfgang Sofsky:

The structure of the social world, the strata of the world of work, shared and distant world, is shattered if other people are immediately on hand yet simultaneously anonymous. They are as near, as intimately present as one's closest partners – and despite this, as alien as any distant contemporaries, an empty type, a nameless schema. It is thus mistaken to term this a forced community. The camp was not a community. The other people were not individuals whose story you knew. They were not your opposite numbers, but merely the people next to you. Physical proximity was not matched by the presence of an interpersonal "we"; there was no partnership and cooperation hand in hand with the similarity of suffering that all endured. The mass made the other person faceless; it robbed the individual of the possibility to relate to another person, and thus also to himself or herself.<sup>256</sup>

Sofsky's account has since been challenged and is now considered less a historical description than a sociological type.<sup>257</sup> Nonetheless, many others have also argued that the unavoidable physical closeness in the camps rarely engendered a similar degree of emotional closeness. Giorgio Agamben, for example, claims that, 'Auschwitz is the radical refutation of every principle of obligatory communication', and cites Primo Levi, who wrote that, "'not being talked to" was the normal condition in the camp, where "your tongue dries up in a few days, and your thought with it"'.<sup>258</sup> Similarly, Maja Suderland describes

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<sup>256</sup> Wolfgang Sofsky, *The Order of Terror: The Concentration Camp*, trans. by William Templer (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1997), pp.155-156.

<sup>257</sup> For criticism of Sofsky's analysis of the camps, see: Omer Bartov, *Germany's War and the Holocaust: Disputed Histories* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2003), pp.108-111; Karin Orth and Michael Wildt, 'Die Ordnung der Lager. Über offene Fragen und frühe Antworten in der Forschung zu Konzentrationslagern', *WerkstattGeschichte*, 12 (1995), 51-56.

<sup>258</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, trans. by Daniel Heller-Roazen (New York: Zone Books, 1999), p.65; Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, trans. by Raymond Rosenthal (New York: Random House, 1989), p.93.

how the guards exploited and deepened pre-existing social tensions and prejudices, particularly towards Jews, homosexuals, 'Gypsies', and criminals.<sup>259</sup>

However, whilst there is no doubt that communication and empathy were threatened by the concentrationary system, the body of survivor testimony has presented a more nuanced – and often more positive – picture of inmate relationships than the accounts above. Though hostility and divisions were certainly present between both individual inmates and groups, countless examples can be found to support claims such as that by Terrence Des Pres that '[s]ocial bonding among prisoners themselves was a universal phenomenon in the camps', and research on this subject is extensive.<sup>260</sup> Nikolaus Wachsmann, for example, in his recent study of the concentration camp, declares that 'mutual support among KL prisoners was not exceptional, as some observers suggest, but common'.<sup>261</sup> He goes on to describe the camps as 'social spaces' and argues that '[c]ompanionship – whether based on sympathy or pragmatism, chance or shared beliefs – was vital for all prisoners'.<sup>262</sup> Many have identified the existence and persistence of empathy and solidarity in the camps as a form of resistance, a means of maintaining both one's agency and one's humanity and thereby fighting against the Nazi desire to disempower and dehumanise camp inmates. This can be seen by the many exhibitions at concentration camp memorial sites which are entitled 'Solidarität und Widerstand' and present the two as interlinked.<sup>263</sup> A display board at the Dachau memorial site, for example, notes under this heading:

Unter solchen Bedingungen leisteten meist Einzelne oder kleine Gruppen Widerstand. Dabei ging es vor allem um die Rettung von Menschenleben. Trotz der Bestrebungen der SS-Führung, die nationalen, politischen und sozialen Häftlingsgruppierungen gegeneinander

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<sup>259</sup> Maja Suderland, *Inside Concentration Camps: Social Life at the Extremes* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013), pp.160-192.

<sup>260</sup> For further discussion of the persistence of empathy, see, for example: Michal Aharony, 'Hannah Arendt and the Idea of Total Domination', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 24 (2010), 193-224; M. Diefenbacher and G. Jochem, eds, "*Solange ich lebe, hoffe ich.*" *Die Aufzeichnungen des ungarischen KZ-Häftlings Ágnes Rózsa* (Nuremberg: testimon, 2006).

<sup>261</sup> Nikolaus Wachsmann, *KL. A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps* (London: Abacus, 2016), p.499.

<sup>262</sup> Wachsmann, p.500.

<sup>263</sup> See, for example: 11.5. *Solidarität und Widerstand* (display board), (KZ-Gedenkstätte Dachau, Dachau) (viewed March 2014); KZ-Gedenkstätte Neuengamme, Hamburg, *Selbstbehauptung, Kultur und Widerstand*, <<http://www.offenes-archiv.de/de/ausstellung/uebersichtselbstbehauptung.xml>> [accessed 31 August 2018].



auszuspielen, war im KZ Dachau Solidarität weit verbreitet. Sie rettete vielen das Leben. Die Grenze zwischen ihr und dem Widerstand war oft fließend.<sup>264</sup>

Such representations of life in the camps are pieced together through survivor accounts and are undoubtedly invaluable, yet can be further enriched by camp poems, which are able to fill in gaps made inevitable by the distance in time and space.

As my starting point for the argument in this chapter, I take the below citations from Dori Laub and Nanette Auerhahn, and Andrés Nader. Laub and Auerhahn assert the necessity of empathy. Where empathy fails, they argue, it 'not only destroys hope of communicating with others in the external world and expectation of resonance with the internal other, it also diminishes the victims' ability to be in contact and in tune with themselves, to feel that they have a self'.<sup>265</sup> Laub terms this the breakdown of the 'communicative dyad' and claims that such a breakdown constitutes trauma:

Reality [...] can be grasped only in a condition of affective attunement with oneself. Massive psychic trauma, however, is a deadly assault, both on the external and the internal "other", the "thou" of every dialogic relationship. The executioner does not heed the victim's plea for life, and relentlessly proceeds with the execution. The "other", the "thou", who is empathically in tune and responsive to one's needs, ceases to exist, and faith in the possibility of communication itself dies. There is no longer a "thou", either outside or inside oneself, a thou whom one can address. An empathic dyad no longer exists in one's internal world representation. There is no one to turn to, even inside oneself. It is an utterly desolate landscape, totally void of life and humanity, permeated by the terror of the state of objectlessness.<sup>266</sup>

Nader, as a literary scholar and Germanist, identifies the relationship that camp poetry was able to create between the poet and an other, and notes the value of this act:

Composing a poem is an act of verbal communication. [...] As communication, whether internal (with oneself) or addressed to an actual or imaginary "other", a poem connotes a social field, creates a relation between an author and an implied audience, brings to life a narrator, a subject, and a narrative.<sup>267</sup>

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<sup>264</sup> 11.5. *Solidarität und Widerstand* (display board), (KZ-Gedenkstätte Dachau).

<sup>265</sup> Dori Laub and Nanette C. Auerhahn, 'Failed Empathy – A Central Theme in the Survivor's Holocaust Experience', *Psychoanalytic Psychology*, 6.4 (1989), 377-400 (pp.379-380).

<sup>266</sup> Dori Laub, 'Traumatic shutdown of narrative and symbolization: A failed empathy derivative. Implications for therapeutic interventions', in *Psychoanalysis and Holocaust Testimony: Unwanted Memories of Social Trauma*, ed. by Dori Laub and Andreas Hamburger (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), pp.43-65 (p.50).

<sup>267</sup> Nader, p.127.

These two approaches, the psychoanalytical (Laub and Auerhahn) and the literary (Nader) are brought together and elaborated upon in my argument, as I illustrate the role of camp poetry in both representing and establishing empathy. I do not propose that social bonding was straightforward or inevitable, but rather that it could and did exist, on a widespread scale, and was the result of determined efforts to resist the structure of experience camp authorities sought to impose upon the prisoners.<sup>268</sup> In the subsequent analyses I substantiate my argument that empathy existed in the camps and was key to establishing connections, gaining agency, and, most importantly of all, surviving. Whether by representation or (re)creation, the poems discussed here all demonstrate that empathy was possible. Moreover, they reveal that it was extended to a wide range of others. The poems chosen for analysis help to illustrate this comprehensive typology of others, which has hitherto not been explored in any detail.

### The other and the self

Before examining this typology of others, however, let us consider more closely one of the most significant effects of extending empathy to an other, mentioned in the citations above. Through poetry, inmates were able to enact empathic links that either did not exist or were under threat in their daily lives. The value of such links went beyond restoring faith in interpersonal communication. In line with this, Constanze Jaiser proposes:

Als symbolisches Ich ermöglicht Dichtung im Konzentrationslager über ihre lyrische Form einen autokommunikativen Akt, bei dem sich das Ich (vorübergehend) zurückgewinnt [...]. Dies bildet die Voraussetzung für die Begegnung mit einem Du. Doch auch dieses Du ist im Konzentrationslager nicht mehr als ansprechbares Gegenüber verfügbar. Das Gedicht vermittelt aber als „drittes Element“ in dieser an diesem Ort unmöglich gewordenen Beziehung zwischen Ich und Du und stiftet über das gesprochene Wort Gemeinschaft.<sup>269</sup>

Here, Jaiser posits that the poem allows the poet to regain a sense of self, which in turn allows communication with an other; this communication between self and other is mediated, she argues, by the poem. Laub and Auerhahn, on the other hand, approach this causal chain from a slightly different angle, proposing not that a sense of self is a

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<sup>268</sup> Terrence Des Pres, *The Survivor: An Anatomy of Life in the Death Camps* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), p.154.

<sup>269</sup> Jaiser, *Poetische Zeugnisse*, p.221.

prerequisite for communication with others, but rather that a lack of communication with others destroys one's sense of self. In their study of empathy, they noted that where '[f]aith in the possibility of communication dies [...], intrapsychically there may no longer be a matrix of two people – self and resonating other'.<sup>270</sup> That is to say, as they argue above, the lack of empathy in the camps extinguishes not only one's hope of communicating with others but also one's individual identity.<sup>271</sup> By restoring the empathic communicative dyad, camp poems therefore prevent not only the annihilation of object but also that of self.<sup>272</sup> Bringing together Jaiser's argument with that of Laub and Auerhahn, I propose that this is a two-way, self-sustaining process: the poem allows the maintenance and expression of an 'Ich', which can then communicate with a 'Du'; in turn, this possibility of communication further strengthens and preserves the 'Ich'.

Returning to Jaiser's appraisal of the camp poem 'als symbolisches Ich', I will show in this chapter how the poem does not simply strengthen the internal other, but externalises and preserves it within itself: 'An das Gedicht werden die Reste eines Ich delegiert, das seiner Vernichtung ausgeliefert ist'.<sup>273</sup> The numerous threats to one's individual identity within the camps naturally make such a delegation of great value. Whilst the use of the third person plural 'wir' is common in camp poetry, reflecting 'a high degree of social bonding', just as in post-Holocaust testimony, the pronoun can be used evasively, as well as inclusively, as a means to avoid individual expression.<sup>274</sup> Indeed, despite Jaiser's above assessment, she goes on to note the frequent loss of the 'lyrischen Ich', commenting that it was often replaced by the collective 'wir', not named directly at all, or underwent fragmentation into its constituent parts (heart, soul, hands, eyes, for example).<sup>275</sup>

Such an appraisal might seem to undermine Jaiser's initial argument for camp poetry's significant role in self-preservation. To counter this, I believe the relatively frequent occurrence of 'Ich' in the texts analysed below will confirm the poem's significance in protecting or restoring a sense of self. The notion of the poem itself as a symbolic 'Ich' also

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<sup>270</sup> Laub and Auerhahn, p.379.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid., pp.379-380.

<sup>272</sup> Laub and Auerhahn, p.380.

<sup>273</sup> Jaiser, 'Benennen und Bewahren', in *Poetik des Überlebens: Kulturproduktion im Konzentrationslager*, ed. by Anne-Berénike Rothstein (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), pp.84-102 (p.96).

<sup>274</sup> Laub and Auerhahn, p.383. (See also Des Pres, p.29, pp.37-38.)

<sup>275</sup> Jaiser, 'Benennen und Bewahren', pp.91-92.

supports the idea that even when there is little or no mention of the poet-speaker, or indeed when the loss of their individual identity is the subject, the very act of writing enacts a connection to the self which, however implicit or fragile, seeks to resist this loss, asserting the poet's right to independence and individuality. Nader has commented on this intrinsic value of writing poetry:

A wilful, deliberate act of giving shape, a poem draws on and confirms an author's sense of agency and autonomy. In and of itself, that is, a poem constitutes a conscious speech act and as such a creative action that counters the experience of complete loss of control over one's fate and even one's body that characterises the experience of the concentrationary universe.<sup>276</sup>

The poems in the sections below will further substantiate this claim of Nader's and reveal the ways in which poetry could be of value in facilitating communication with both self and other. Before looking at these poems, let us briefly consider Grete Salus's 'Du oder ich?' (p.253) in which she creatively explores this dual role.<sup>277</sup> Here the poet-speaker problematises the complex relationship with the other, internal or external. There is deliberate ambiguity regarding the identity of this other, yet their unceasing presence suggests the 'Du' is either the poet's apostrophised self or an imaginary presence. The question in the title implies the former, though the persistent ambiguity intensifies the complexity and incongruity of the described relationship. Indeed, the poem begins and ends by addressing the other as 'Fremdling', despite the constant proximity described in the intervening stanzas.

This contradiction becomes evident in the first stanza: were it not for the third line, the presence of the 'Fremdling' would be entirely negative. The poet-speaker desires distance from the addressee, whose proximity seems increasingly destructive. The third line reveals however that the poet-speaker also draws a degree of comfort from the other's nearness. The 'schön' at the beginning of the line resonates acoustically with the first line, but does not echo it perfectly, reflecting the discord within the poet-speaker's own self, between the 'Du' and the 'Ich'.

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<sup>276</sup> Nader, p.127.

<sup>277</sup> London, Wiener Library (WL), Grete Salus: Poems, 1237-1. The archival note for this collection does not reveal the precise camp in which 'Du oder ich?' was composed; it could, therefore, originate in Auschwitz, Oederan or Theresienstadt. Those poems discussed in detail in this thesis are followed by a bracketed page reference which refers to the location of the full poem text in the Poetry Appendix.

The discord continues into the second stanza, emphasised by the alliteration: the other is 'still, stumm und doch wie schreit es'. The poet-speaker cannot identify the source of the shouting or screaming, despite asserting that the other is silent. This inability to differentiate between their own self and the addressed other again implies that the latter is a part of the poet-speaker, and the poem a means to externalise the intrapsychic struggle. This struggle persists in the third stanza, intensified by the short lines, brief phrases (or phrases interrupted by enjambment) and imploring imperatives. The final line contains the same verb as the two imperatives, this time conjugated, and is elongated by the two pauses, imitating the prolonged gaze of the other.

The final stanza then begins with unanswered questions. The poet-speaker declares the emptiness and staleness of their existence, the lack of joy and rest. A full stop seemingly ends this declaration, but the following word, though beginning a new line and sentence, is a conjunction: the poet-speaker links their current, desolate state to the constant, silent presence of the stranger. The poem reveals and thereby preserves this problematic presence, but also allows Salus to externally process this challenging relationship. Unlike in other poems, the issue is the nearness, not the distance, of the other. Laub and Auerhahn write of the 'internal fragmentation' in many survivors, proposing that the 'essence of Holocaust trauma is the breakdown of the communicative dyad in the internal, representational world of the victim'.<sup>278</sup> Here in Salus's poem we can see that this communicative dyad is under threat, but not yet destroyed completely. The poem's irregular form reflects the fragility and uncertainty of the poet-speaker's identity and the strain within the dyad, yet its existence also reveals the extant possibility of communication and, moreover, preserves it. As Jaiser puts it: 'Über die Lyrik konstituiert sich ein Ich, das sich, obwohl es zerstört wird, als lebendiges erfahren kann'.<sup>279</sup>

The poems discussed in the sections below resemble 'Du oder ich?' in that they all function, in Nader's words, as 'rhetorical strategies for defending individuality, identity, and relationships [...] through imaginative acts of connectedness'.<sup>280</sup> Irrespective of the object

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<sup>278</sup> Laub and Auerhahn, p.387, p.380.

<sup>279</sup> Jaiser, 'Benennen und Bewahren', p.96.

<sup>280</sup> Nader, p.93.

of this connection, or the fragility of it, this empathic link represented by the poem – what Nader calls a ‘trust in intersubjective communication’ – helps to protect the poet from complete psychic fragmentation, as we will now explore.<sup>281</sup>

### The anonymous other

The previous chapter mentioned poems that were addressed or dedicated to friends and acquaintances within the camps. Some addressees are named specifically whereas other poems are less precise and could be referring to one particular person or a number of inmates. The generality of Orli Reichert’s ‘Kameradin, wenn du traurig bist’ (p.253), for example, would enable it to encourage many fellow prisoners in Ravensbrück.<sup>282</sup> The direct, second-person singular address and the repetition of ‘Kameradin’ at the beginning of each of the five stanzas strengthens the empathic connection between the poet-speaker and her addressee(s). Moreover, whilst the rhyme scheme is a very regular *abab*, the poet-speaker disrupts the poetic metre to emphasise the solidarity extended to the comrade. For example, the final line of the third stanza contains three more syllables than the final lines of the preceding stanzas. This disregard for the previous metric regularity and the line’s resulting expansion reflects the desired incorporation of the individual – whose individuality is nonetheless still emphasised by the frequency of second-person singular pronouns – into a larger group.

In poems such as this, the primary purpose is typically to encourage the addressee by confirming and strengthening an empathic connection. The other is usually known or is at least connected in some way to the poet-speaker. In Reichert’s poem, the emphasis in the final two stanzas on fighting and freedom intimates that the intended addressee is a fellow political prisoner.<sup>283</sup> Some poets, however, choose to address a more distant inmate, and here their poems function as symbolic ties, embodying feelings of solidarity that might not

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<sup>281</sup> Nader, p.103.

<sup>282</sup> AKGR, 25/347. Also printed (as author unknown) in *Mitten in tiefer Nacht*, ed. by Elling, p.88.

<sup>283</sup> Orli (Aurelia) Reichert (later, Orli Wald) was arrested for her political resistance activities – namely, smuggling educational pamphlets into Germany – in June 1936 and charged with high treason. After four years in Ziegenhain prison she was transferred to Ravensbrück in 1940, and then to Auschwitz in March 1942. She survived the January 1945 death march to Ravensbrück and its subcamp Malchow, which she escaped from in April 1945.

readily exist outside of the form of the poem. This makes such poems all the more valuable as means of communication with an otherwise distant and different other.

Alfred Kittner's 'Einem Gefährten' (December 1942), for example, addresses the eponymous fellow prisoner (p.254).<sup>284</sup> Like Paul Celan and Nelly Sachs, Kittner was a German-speaking Jewish poet from Czernowitz in the Bukovina, a region now divided between Ukraine and Romania. The Soviet Army occupied the region in 1940 and 1941 before the Romanian army and German troops came back in 1941 and set up several smaller camps in Transnistria, part of what is now Ukraine. Kittner, along with other Czernowitz Jews, were forced to undertake long marches to and between these camps, and his poem 'Einem Gefährten', which we will now discuss, seems to depict one such march.

The title's use of the indirect article implies this address could be directed at any number of people; the word choice 'Gefährte', however, creates a link between the poet-speaker and the subject which the poem endeavours to substantiate. The initial stanzas delineate the relation between the two as the anonymous man is directly addressed. Here the pronoun usage sets the man apart from the group to which the poet-speaker belongs, and this sense of isolation is reinforced by the observation that the man is standing alone after his wife and children have been shot. He is subsumed into the larger group only by an outer force: the subject of a passive clause, he is driven along with the other inmates. The final line of the first stanza begins to transform this forced closeness into a solidary bond: the titular 'Gefährte' becomes the more specific 'Leidgenosse'. Kittner depicts the suffering the man has hitherto experienced as an isolating force – 'du bist allein geblieben' – as that which connects him to the other inmates.

The poet-speaker strengthens the bond with the man in the second stanza by asking him a question and thereby inviting him to enter into a dialogue. This empathic act is made more empowering by the use of five second-person singular pronouns in the four-line stanza: the poet-speaker validates the man by establishing a conversation – albeit imaginary – with him and reaffirming his individuality. Though we do not hear a response, the third stanza implies that one has been given, or indeed, that the understanding between the two men is such that a response is not required. The mid-line caesura in the first line draws attention

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<sup>284</sup> Kittner, *Schattenschrift*, pp.40-41.

to this important turning-point: 'Ich verstehe dich: wir leben weiter'. For the first time, the poet uses the first-person singular pronoun. Up to this point, the 'Ich' has naturally been implicated by the connection to others – it is obviously a part of 'wir' and likewise the 'Du' cannot exist apart from it – but it now becomes explicit.

Sofsky's assertion cited at the beginning of this chapter, that the 'mass made the other person faceless; it robbed the individual of the possibility to relate to another person, and thus also to himself or herself' is here subverted by and through the poem.<sup>285</sup> In the one line, Kittner reveals a self-awareness that is made possible through his empathic relation to another person, confirming Laub and Auerhahn's assessment of the dual importance of empathy.<sup>286</sup> By extending an empathic response to the suffering of another, the poet-speaker fights against the prevailing mindset, against the 'deadly assault' on the other, and reveals a 'faith in the possibility of communication'.<sup>287</sup> In doing so, he is able to acknowledge his own identity, apart from the masses.

Here, for the first time, his empathy towards the man is made unambiguous. He is connected to the man through his choice of verb and syntax: the man is both the grammatical and empathic object. The colon imposes a caesura which emphasises both phrases in the line and reflects the transition that has occurred. The self and other become united in the subject of the affirmation that follows: 'wir leben weiter'. This is a different 'wir' from the first stanza. Here, the man has become an integral part of the implicated community through the empathy extended by another, rather than through external compulsion (i.e. being forced by the perpetrators). Indeed, the colon suggests the link between the two (grammatically) simple phrases: it is the empathy that enables the 'wir' (or assimilates the man into this community) and thereby allows the two to carry on living.<sup>288</sup>

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<sup>285</sup> Sofsky, p.156.

<sup>286</sup> Laub and Auerhahn, pp.379-380.

<sup>287</sup> Laub, p.50.

<sup>288</sup> An inability to communicate with others is noted in many testimonial accounts to be a characteristic of the *Muselmann*, representing the giving up of hope and attempts at survival. Gitta Sereny, an inmate of Treblinka, writes, for example: 'They [*Muselmänner*] were people with whom there was no common ground, no possibility of communication' (Sereny, *Into That Darkness: An Examination of Conscience* (New York: Random House, 1983), p.313).



Having established this vital connection, the poet is able to acknowledge that their continued life will not protect them from the hardships of their existence: 'wir leben weiter' is followed by a comma, not a full stop. The following line recognises that the pain they will face may cause them to wish to die hourly, a frank observation made all the more striking by the sibilance: 'Mögen stündlich wir vor Schmerz auch sterben'. The preceding comma, however, makes clear that the poet-speaker is asserting the dominance of life, not death. The unusual word order which separates subject from verb causes 'wir' to be stressed and thereby implies once more the significance of this community in (symbolically or literally) overcoming death. The following line continues the sentence with the coordinating conjunction 'und', further strengthening the link between the enacted community and the assertion of life. 'Wir' is once again the active subject, and though it is towards decay that they move, the agency is theirs and they will be 'mitunter sogar heiter'.

The reappearance of 'du' in the following stanza then serves to validate the individuality of the man whilst reasserting his connection to a larger group. Though he may stagger along groaning, it is 'in unserer Mitte'; his future sighing or joking will be 'mit uns im gleichen Wanderschritte'. The earlier symmetry which linked the man to his deceased family – 'Dein Blut mit dem Blut der Deinen' – is displaced by a parallelism which roots the man in the community of inmates with whom he will '[m]anchmal seufzen, manchmal Späße machen'.

The pain and suffering mentioned in the third stanza having been overcome – or, at least, endured – due to the inmates' persistent and assertive solidarity, the poet-speaker assumes a broader perspective in the final stanza. The individual is replaced by the archetype. Whether the assertion that the poet-speaker has never seen another ask for death is true or not is less important than the act of asserting it. It reveals a defiance and strength that he has either witnessed or desires to enact. The specific details of individual suffering (in this case, the murder of one man's family) give way to the more general 'hartes Schicksal'. This generalising statement is, I would argue, only possible now that the poet has expounded the means by which such endurance may exist. He is able to distance himself to such an extent only because of his rootedness within what Laub and Auerhahn call an 'empathic dyad'.<sup>289</sup>

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<sup>289</sup> Laub and Auerhahn, p.379.

The degree of emotional protection afforded by this dyad becomes most evident in the final – and arguably most shocking – two lines of the poem. The contrast in register between ‘Köter’ and ‘Leibern’ suggests the poet-speaker’s difficulty in viewing, assimilating and describing this image. The ambiguity as to the identity of these bodies – who are they? Are they alive or dead? – makes the lines even more unsettling: the reader knows only that they are young. The negating particle reveals here, significantly, that the perspective of the poet-speaker is not that of the addressee. The metre is disrupted by the comma after the first word, ‘Ach’, forcing the reader to halt, just as the poet-speaker is presumably also halted (if only internally, emotionally) by the sight. Moreover, the comma separates the exclamation from the grammatical subject, ‘du’, mirroring the man’s physical separation from the disturbing sight and subsequent protection from the anguish such a sight would cause. The community, represented by the poet-speaker, witnesses that which the individual would not be able to bear alone. The dogs and young bodies are behind the man and remain unseen by him. Here there are allusions to the myth of Orpheus and his two-time loss of Eurydice, though contrary to Orpheus, Kittner’s eponymous figure does not look back and is thus spared further, unbearable suffering.

In this way, the poem represents the necessary repression of trauma in order to survive. Having described the absorption of the man, physically and symbolically, into the community of inmates, the poet’s final image symbolically reveals the power of this community (and by association, the poem) to absorb and bear the suffering of the other. It (that is, the community, or even, here, the protective, poetic voice) aids the new comrade to survive by protecting him from knowledge that would be too great to bear. This protection is mirrored in the poem’s form: its very regular metre, rhyme, and stanza structure suggest a stability and permanence which contrasts with the devastation witnessed.

Grete Salus’s ‘Nach Auschwitz...’ (pp.254-255), written during her imprisonment at KZ Oederan (between October 1944 and 14<sup>th</sup> April 1945) also illustrates how the written word can enact a sense of solidarity between the group and the second-person other.<sup>290</sup> Salus

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<sup>290</sup> WL, 1237-2. The text’s title is interesting for its creation of a temporal (and thereby causal) link to the author’s experiences in Auschwitz. Though we cannot be completely sure it was chosen by Salus, there is no indication that the titles of the poems in this collection were inserted by someone else. As such, it implies, contrary to interpretations of Adorno’s well-known dictum, that the experience of

was a Jewish inmate who had spent many years studying and performing as a dancer prior to her arrest. She was firstly imprisoned at Theresienstadt from 1942 until 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1944 when she and her husband were transported to Auschwitz. Her husband was killed immediately after his arrival there, whereas Grete was transported to Oederan, a satellite camp of KZ Flossenbürg, with five hundred other women. During her time here, she wrote several poems, including 'Nach Auschwitz...'. The document's paratext (the origin of which is unknown) describes it as a 'mimische und tänzerische Studie' performed in the camp. Whilst it is not described here as a poem, the text's short lines and arrangement in stanza-like segments make it an interesting counterpart to 'Einem Gefährten', with the addressee undergoing a similar journey from self-absorbed isolation to solidary belonging. In the text, this journey is prompted by imperatives (for example, 'Hebe Dein Antlitz, öffne die Augen') and the personification of the suffering of the masses, which becomes the active agent in incorporating the addressee into the community of inmates: 'Es greift nach Dir, hebt Dich empor / zieht Dich zu sich hinüber'. By imagining the performance of such a text through mime and dance, however, one has a clear physical representation of the way in which the poetic form could be used symbolically to remove distance and enact a connection with the other. The presence of this other within the poem functions, in Laub's terms, as a 'good object', that 'enables and safeguards the communicative process of symbolisation, the dialogue with the internal "thou" that names, enhances meaning and creates narrative'.<sup>291</sup> This is a crucial step in impeding trauma, which, 'by abolishing the good object, precipitously (or gradually) shuts this process down'.<sup>292</sup>

## The observed other

Other poems also take a distant inmate as their focus, but, unlike those above, do not address this inmate directly. Such poems seemingly reinforce a sense of distance rather than connection, with the third-person voice and the lack of identifying details implying a detachment on the part of the poet-speaker. Through examining a small selection of these

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Auschwitz can be understood and overcome (in however small a measure) through the written word.

<sup>291</sup> Laub, p.50.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid.

texts, however, I hope to demonstrate that, despite appearances, the detached observation of a fellow inmate can still be a means to validate and enact a connection with the observed.

Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz wrote 'Ein Pole' (pp.255-256) during his five-year imprisonment in Dachau.<sup>293</sup> The poem's metre, rhyme scheme and stanza structure is, like most of Kupfer-Koberwitz's poetry, highly regular, and this regularity extends to the content. The poet-speaker is observing the death of a fellow inmate, and the first, third and fifth stanzas follow the same pattern: he poses a question about the dying man which is only partially answered, or not at all, in the following lines. The second, fourth and sixth stanzas are identical (except for a small modification in the second line), and their positioning suggests they may in some way answer, or attempt to answer, the poet-speaker's previous questions. I will return shortly to the content of this repeated stanza, but firstly let us consider the questions.

The odd-numbered stanzas all begin with the same question, as the poet-speaker attempts to ascertain what has occurred. It soon becomes clear that of all the details of the event, the poet-speaker is most interested in the identity of the dying man. As the stanzas progress, we learn about the man's physical condition and his decreasing vitality: in the first stanza he cries out 'laut und gräßlich', in the third he is swaying, and in the fifth he is lying down, barely moving, before he finally dies. The only conclusion the poet-speaker draws about the man's identity is that he is 'ein Halbverhungertes'.

In the alternating stanzas, the poetic gaze moves from the man, 'er', to the other inmates, 'sie'. In the first two lines the picture is one of concerned interest in the man's identity, similar to that of the poet-speaker. The 'doch' at the beginning of the third line signals a change, however, as the identity of the dying man is revealed. The subsequent shrug of the shoulders and the direct speech reveal the meaninglessness of the man's death. Indeed, the repetition of the stanza at the various stages of the poem reveals what Moll terms a 'reflexartige Empfindung' which makes 'keinen Unterschied zwischen dem Mißhandelten, dem halb Verhungerten und dem Toten'.<sup>294</sup> Whether this meaninglessness is because the

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<sup>293</sup> Kupfer-Koberwitz, *Kette der Tage*, p.29.

<sup>294</sup> Moll, p.201.

man is of a different nationality to the group of inmates described – and therefore less likely to be closely acquainted to them – or whether it is because he is specifically Polish remains unclear from the three words of direct speech. They do however reveal the existence of a hierarchy within the camp: here, this may be one enforced by the guards, or one created by the inmates themselves, for whom certain deaths had become insignificant.

Despite this apparent minimising of the Pole's death, I would, however, counter Moll's assertion that the poem contains 'nur Gleichgültigkeit' and propose instead that through the writing of the poem Kupfer-Koberwitz enacts an otherwise non-existent connection to the man.<sup>295</sup> In contrast to the poems mentioned above where another inmate is directly addressed, the pronoun usage here acknowledges the fragile nature of the empathic link, yet simultaneously strengthens it. Significantly, the poet-speaker is not part of the group of inmates who belittle the man's death. His use of the third-person pronoun throughout suggests not only a distance from the Pole but also from those who have no value for the Pole's life. This narrative perspective which might ordinarily imply distance, not connection, is here used to validate the other and reveal underlying empathy. Moreover, the title implies the unwillingness of the poet-speaker to echo the other inmates' appraisal of the man's identity: he identifies the man by his nationality but omits the 'nur'. By being the object of Kupfer-Koberwitz's gaze, the man is further validated, albeit implicitly.

Whilst the poem may therefore reveal how inmates distanced themselves from the death of other inmates, it also allows the poet to challenge such a barrier. As Jaiser writes, such a poem 'verweist auf die zerstörte Menschheit und beklagt den Tod der Nächsten'.<sup>296</sup> In pointing to the fragmentation of humanity, the poem simultaneously seeks to slow this fragmentation through the formation of an empathic link, albeit a weak one. That is, the poem not only records the destruction of humanity but at the same time represents 'durch seine Existenz als Text ein Ich, das auf sein Recht, Mensch zu sein, beharrt und das der Katastrophe einen Schrei nach Mit-Menschlichkeit abgerungen hat, damit er in der Zukunft widerhallen und wenigstens dann gehört werden kann'.<sup>297</sup>

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<sup>295</sup> Moll, p.200. Moll later writes: 'In „Ein Pole“ fehlt jede tendenziell persönliche Kommentierung und damit auch jeder Versuch, dem biologischen Tod des Polen eine Deutung abzuringen' (p.201).

<sup>296</sup> Jaiser, 'Benennen und Bewahren', p.96.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid.

Nader describes a similar process in another poem by Kupfer-Koberwitz, 'Erinnerung' (July 1944), in which an old Jewish man whose wife has been murdered is psychologically abused by the guards.<sup>298</sup> Here the poet-speaker takes a more active stand against the abuse. This stand is still primarily contained within the poem itself – the poet did not in reality make the likely fatal decision to defend the man against his attackers – and thus reveals the importance of the poem in symbolically fighting against the inmates' powerlessness and establishing empathic links (here, again, with an inmate below him in the camp hierarchy). The narrative presents the poet-speaker as acting as a shield between the victim and the perpetrators, and one can also interpret the poem as a shield of sorts, enabling the poet-speaker to extend compassion to the victim when he is denied any form of empathic response from the guards. Moreover, by reporting the external suffering he witnesses and identifying empathically with the man, Nader proposes that the poet-speaker comes to 'own the horror'.<sup>299</sup>

One final example of the poet-speaker identifying empathically with observed inmates is found in Ferdinand Röhild's 'Ein Morgen' (Spring 1942) (p.256).<sup>300</sup> Observing the morning roll-call, the poet-speaker carefully, over six quatrains, describes the suffering of those inmates involved: 'Ein langsames Sterben in fruchtloser Müh', / Wie Lammer in Geierkralle'. This is followed by the first use of the first-person singular pronoun (all previous pronouns are in the third person): 'Ich dacht' an ihn und dachte an sie; / Denn ich liebte in einem sie alle'. The meaning of this remains ambiguous as the poet-speaker returns to his focus on the inmates and their physical suffering. It is only in the final stanzas of the poem that the poet-speaker reveals his own privileged position and the anguish caused by witnessing the suffering of his fellow inmates:

Wie zog es das Herz mir zusammen!  
  
 Ich war im Warmen und leidlich satt –  
 Und die vielen frieren und darben!  
 Wozu das Schicksal verschont mich hat,  
 Daß ich lebe, wo Bessere starben?  
  
 Und es brennt in mir als ein zehrender Schwur [...]

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<sup>298</sup> For Nader's analysis, see Nader, pp.128-31.

<sup>299</sup> Nader, p.137.

<sup>300</sup> Ferdinand Röhild, *Kunst hinter Stacheldraht*, p.160.

Throughout the poem, the collective terms the poet-speaker uses to refer to the inmates convey their widespread powerlessness, but his pronoun use sets himself apart from this grouping. This might represent the poet's relative prestige within Buchenwald. Arrested in March 1935, Römhild was a Communist and political economist. He was brought to Buchenwald in 1939 and, after three years of working as a clerk in the inmate infirmary, was made private secretary to two SS doctors, Waldemar Hoven and Gerhard Schiedlausky, in 1943. The above-cited poem was written before this promotion, in spring 1942, yet at a time when Römhild's occupation within the camp would have afforded him relative security from what he calls the 'Geierkralle'. Had the poet maintained the use of the third-person throughout, his pronoun choice could have been attributed to a desire to mentally distance himself from the suffering he witnessed, thereby providing a measure of psychological protection and assurance. However, the inclusion of his own intense emotional response to the suffering – including his feelings of guilt at his own relative security – reveals that he is far from at ease with this physical separation and seeks to address and lessen it through the poem – and not only implicitly through the act of bearing witness to the suffering of others. Thus, the insertion of his own feelings at the ends of stanzas five and seven seeks to create an empathic bond between the observed and the observer. Likewise, the poem's final stanza attempts to posit a value of some kind to the poet-speaker's act of witnessing, revealing his desire to in some way help those he helplessly observes, to 'own the horror' as Kupfer-Koberwitz seeks to do in 'Erinnerung'. Both of these poems, along with 'Ein Pole' and others which bear witness to physical and emotional abuse, seek to remove the boundaries separating the poet-speaker from the suffering of the other and thereby defy the imposed isolation within the camp. As such, they play as important a role in establishing empathy as those in the previous section, despite the lack of direct address.

### The deceased other

The connection described above may be extended, through poetry, not only to one's fellow inmates but also to the deceased. Indeed, this is the case for the majority of poems addressed to someone else, confirming that poetry not only reflected existing discourses but crucially created new ones. Jaiser has frequently emphasised poetry's important

function to bear witness.<sup>301</sup> Inmates felt compelled to testify of the prevalence of death within the camps and poetry provided a means for this. As Franz Hackel writes in the second section of his poem 'K.L. Buchenwald' (dated Autumn 1941), 'wer am Morgen noch da war - / Ist am Abend vielleicht schon / Vergessen, gewesen'.<sup>302</sup>

The need to fight against the anonymity of the dead compelled many inmates to write poems of remembrance, even for those whom they did not know when alive, as they sought to honour the deceased in a setting where respect for the dead was almost entirely absent.<sup>303</sup> Gösta Durchham, for example, dedicates one of his poems to an 'unbekannten Häftling'.<sup>304</sup> Though the anonymity of the inmate is stressed throughout (with adjectives such as 'unbekannt', 'namenlos' and 'ruhmlos'), this is simultaneously countered by the direct second-person address – though he is nameless, he is not ignored – and the re-signification of his individual fate as essential to the progression of humanity. This culminates in the final stanza with the assertion: 'Nein, du bist nicht umsonst gestorben / und setzt man dir auch keinen Stein, / es wird die Welt der neuen Menschen, / dein unvergänglich Denkmal sein'. A circularity is evident here. Just as the man's death will help to establish a new world, so this world will be a memorial to him. This will be eternal, thereby granting a degree of permanence to his transient existence.

Significantly therefore, poems dedicated to the dead do not simply function as static elegies or epitaphs. In invoking the deceased, they restore a connection to that person which is sustained implicitly through the poem's permanence and also, at times, explicitly. For example, Anna Lessner's poem 'Viele Menschen gehen in der Welt' (p.257), written in 1941 in Ravensbrück, presents death not as a destructive force on her connection to others, but as one which is overcome by re-birth.<sup>305</sup> Lessner focuses on close personal relationships, both before and after entering the camp. Despite the disparity between these two periods,

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<sup>301</sup> See, for example: Jaiser, *Poetische Zeugnisse*, p.20, pp.224-225.

<sup>302</sup> AKGB, 9-95-21.

<sup>303</sup> Heidi Aschenberg writes of the use of poetry to honour the deceased, in place of prayer or silence: 'Es ist ein Versuch, den Freunden in der Stunde ihres Sterbens mit Versen [...] das Leben in der zivilen Welt und die Zugehörigkeit zu dieser Welt aufscheinen zu lassen. Ihre Würde soll unter den unwürdigsten Umständen geschützt werden'. Aschenberg, 'Sprachterror und Sprachbewahrung im Konzentrationslager', in *Poetik des Überlebens: Kulturproduktion im Konzentrationslager*, ed. by Anne-Berénike Rothstein (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), pp.49-67 (p.61).

<sup>304</sup> Durchham, *Ich hasse nicht*, pp.18-19.

<sup>305</sup> AKGR, V 909 F1.



the repetition of 'bleiben' in the second stanza expresses the poet's desire to establish continuity between them. The world continues as normal outside, and those who have been lost 'in der dunklen Runde' inside the camp are said to 'Bleiben immer in mein Ich geboren. / Alle gingen, keiner ging verloren!' The rhyming of 'born' and 'lost' emphasises this re-signification: death no longer means loss, but instead a constant discovery of new life in those closest to the deceased. The poem's final four lines intensify the connection with others, with death and life again being re-construed. Here, the natural imagery intimately implicates the poet-speaker. The physical decomposition that accompanies death – losing one's identity and being subsumed into the mass of the 'Erdgewühle' – is transformed into a positive assimilation into the life of the poet-speaker. The image of decay becomes one of hope and community, with 'eingebettet' and 'verkettet' suggesting safety and permanence. The image of being connected like links in a chain is a common one in camp poetry, and the poem's depiction of this chain causes it (the poem) to also function as one such link. Death is not to be equated with loss and cannot disturb the poet-speaker's lasting and steadfast connection with the deceased. Indeed, through Lessner's poem, it merely intensifies this connection.

Many poets present a similar continuity between life and death, blurring or removing the fixed boundary between the living and the dead. Thus, Heinrich Steinitz poses the following question in one of his sonnets from Buchenwald: 'Sind wir noch Menschen, sind wir Tote schon, / In denen träg noch die Gedanken kreisen?'<sup>306</sup> Discrete categories disappear as the inmates struggle to identify ways in which they differ from those already deceased. Consequently, another poet from Buchenwald describes the inmates as 'halbtot – halblebendig'.<sup>307</sup> This blurring of boundaries causes many poets to use the inclusive first-person plural pronoun, establishing what Nader describes as an 'enduring unity between the narrator and the dead "other"'.<sup>308</sup>

This connection between the living and the dead is frequently further animated through the personification of the latter, or prosopopoeia. The appearance of this trope in post-war (English-language) Holocaust poetry has been described by Susan Gubar as an 'enabling

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<sup>306</sup> Steinitz, *Noch mehr*, p.7.

<sup>307</sup> AKGB, 9.48-58 (49).

<sup>308</sup> Nader, p.124.

device', allowing poets to find language for the horror and to speak 'as, for, with, and about the casualties in verse'.<sup>309</sup> In her 2001 article, Gubar emphasises prosopopoeia's uniqueness in this corpus of post-war Holocaust poetry:

Such a shocking reanimation of the dead cannot be equated with the traditional elegiac attempt to bring a particularly cherished person back into living *memory*, to assert the dead person's immortality, or to envision some union with the dead in a place elsewhere. [...] But prosopopoeia allows the authors who manipulate it to summon the posthumous voice, to conceive of subjectivity enduring beyond the concentration camp, and thereby to suggest that the anguish of the Shoah does not, and will not, dissipate.<sup>310</sup>

In contrast to this, I propose that 'the traditional elegiac attempt' does occur in camp poetry: poets do frequently seek to remember a loved one and posit some form of union with that person through prosopopoeia. That is not to say that the other functions mentioned are not applicable here, but rather that speaking *with* the deceased is especially important for poems from the camps, where empathic links and one's own identity were most fragile.<sup>311</sup> Gubar's subsequent observation that 'poems composed in the cadences of the dead and dying emanate an unnerving, invented proximity' may be applied both to poems from and about the camps.<sup>312</sup> Whereas in the latter group, the emphasis may be on a proximity between the deceased and the reader, I propose that for camp poems the proximity between the deceased and the speaker is of greatest importance. In other words, Jaiser's assertion of the 'kommunikative Absicht' of these poems extends to the deceased as well as the living.<sup>313</sup> This supports Jaiser's subsequent comment that the dead, '[a]ls einzige der Personen aus der Nicht-Lagerwelt', often form 'eine neue Familie für die Deportierten', and the conversation undertaken with them through poetry may create 'eine vielleicht noch intimere Beziehung zu ihnen als die abwesende leibliche Familie'.<sup>314</sup>

Franz Hackel's fourteen-stanza poem, 'Die Ballade vom Konzentrationslager Buchenwald' (pp.257-258), illustrates this kind of intimate relationship well.<sup>315</sup> This intimacy is due not

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<sup>309</sup> Susan Gubar, 'Prosopopoeia and Holocaust Poetry in English: Sylvia Plath and Her Contemporaries', *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, 14 (2001), 191-215 (p.191).

<sup>310</sup> Gubar, 'Prosopopoeia and Holocaust Poetry in English', p.192.

<sup>311</sup> I would also propose that prosopopoeia achieves other functions not explicitly mentioned by Gubar, such as endowing the dead with an agency of which they were deprived when alive. I discuss this briefly within this section, but the emphasis here is primarily on the agency with which the living are invested through the writing of poetry and the subsequent removing of boundaries.

<sup>312</sup> Gubar, 'Prosopopoeia and Holocaust Poetry in English', p.193.

<sup>313</sup> Jaiser, 'Benennen und Bewahren', p.88.

<sup>314</sup> *Ibid.*, *Poetische Zeugnisse*, p.97.

<sup>315</sup> AKGB, 9-95-21. Also printed in *Kunst hinter Stacheldraht*, pp.168-170.

only to similarities in vitality and strength, but also to an imagined solidarity between the two groups of inmates, seen most clearly in the eighth stanza:

Wir gehen nicht allein;  
Es gehen Tote mit;  
Und schleppend, bleiern schwer  
Ist unser aller Schritt.

After the declaration that the dead accompany them, the final two lines cement the sense of unity: the 'Und' following on from the description of the 'Tote', along with the 'unser aller', depicts the dead walking alongside the living, just as slowly, and with an equally heavy, leaden step. Just as in Steinitz's sonnet, there follows an equation between the groups, expressed here in the most laconic language: 'Und wir sind sie... Und unser Tag / Ist nah dem Tod...' This equivalence of the dead and the living endows the dead with the little strength and agency the living still possess. In the ninth stanza, the dead are said to surround the living and 'schicken ihre Sterbeschrei / Hinaus in eine taube Welt / Von diesem Berg von Tyrannei'. Though the world is deaf to their cries, the dead are given a voice which is able to break out of the confinements of the camp. Moreover, there appears to be a permanence to this voice: though these are dead people, rather than the dying, they are still sending out their 'Sterbeschrei'. Their active, vocal response to their suffering will persist, though they are no longer alive and though they may not yet be heard.

Other poets confer a much greater agency on the dead. They are not simply presented as being mirror images of the living but instead are strengthened and rejuvenated through death, becoming capable of all that they could not achieve during their lives. This strength benefits the living, too, through the imagined connection between the two groups. An anonymous poem from Ravensbrück, dated 10<sup>th</sup> January 1945, illustrates this (pp.258-259).<sup>316</sup> The poem's first three stanzas are mostly regular, five lines long and each beginning with the statement 'Sie ist nicht mehr'. The shortness of the lines – many consist solely of a noun and adjective or noun and verb (e.g. 'Ein dumpfer Schrei', 'Das Auge bricht') – conveys the sense of loss the poet feels and her inability to embellish the death of the unnamed 'sie'. The poet is despondent, and with the rhyming of 'Mut' and 'Glut' questions if courage is possible when faced with the metonymic 'Schornstein' and its blaze.

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<sup>316</sup> AKGR, V 926 F1.

After the three initial stanzas, however, a rhyming couplet indicates a change in both form and tone. Following the deaths of ten others, 'Es wächst das Flammenmeer'. Though the woman has been engulfed by this sea of flames, the final seven-line stanza reinterprets this loss. The fire's power is rejuvenating, rather than destructive, and 'Sie ist nicht mehr' becomes 'Sie ist um uns her / ein lieber Geist'. This spirit surrounds and follows them, wanting to fight, and in turn inviting and inciting the inmates to fight, too. The notion of being surrounded by the woman's spirit seems to foster a new sense of solidarity and assurance in the poet-speaker: the first-person plural pronoun is used for the first time in the final stanza, and the verb 'sein', which predominated earlier in the poem and suggested a resignation to current circumstances, is replaced by the more active, forceful verbs of 'verfolgen', 'reizen' and 'danken'. The poet-speaker ends by thanking 'Du lieber Geist'. The belief that the woman's spirit is nearby, acting as a positive force to help the inmates fight, allows the poet to move away from the distanced 'sie' to the more direct address of the second person 'Du'. This 'enabling, imaginative act', as Nader puts it, 'allows the speaker temporarily to overcome the ultimate difference of death through the dialogic structure of apostrophe'.<sup>317</sup> That is, the poem both represents and facilitates this journey from the acknowledgment of loss to its reinterpretation, and the recognition of presence as well as absence, connection as well as distance.

### The inanimate other

The above examples have all illustrated how poetry could remove relational boundaries and enact empathic links, strong or weak, to other inmates. For some, however, poetry provided the means to create connections not to other people but to objects. Referring back to the importance of poetry for self-preservation, discussed above, I propose that in protecting one's sense of self, the identity of the object of communication is less important than the empathic nature of the communication with that object. In this way, poems which apostrophise inanimate objects may be as successful as those addressing a friend in protecting the internal other. Indeed, the use of apostrophe, particularly the lifting of objects, as Nader puts it, 'out of the limitations of the camp environment, endowing them

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<sup>317</sup> Nader, p.125.

with moral and emotional responsiveness', occurs frequently in camp poetry.<sup>318</sup>

Correspondingly, Nader interprets the apostrophe in Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz's 'Gestreiftes Kleid' (February 1944) as an act of 'projective identification' whereby the 'empathic extension and moral elevation of objects is the expansion and elevation of the self'.<sup>319</sup> He subsequently cites Jonathan Culler and Northrop Frye, who propose an equation between apostrophe and poetry itself, that lyric is not 'heard but overheard' and that, in essence, the lyric poet 'pretends to be talking to himself or someone else'.<sup>320</sup> This, too, supports the assertion that camp poetry fights against the breakdown of empathy and internal and external communication. The poet is not only implicated in the poem, as the initiator of the dialogue, but is subsequently shielded within the established communicative dyad.

To return briefly to Kupfer-Koberwitz's 'Gestreiftes Kleid', in which the poet directly addresses his camp uniform, Nader proposes that Kupfer-Koberwitz makes 'a psychically and morally useful "other" out of a humiliating and de-individualising object'.<sup>321</sup> He examines the ways in which Kupfer-Koberwitz re-signifies the humiliating nature of the uniform, turning it into an 'Ehrenkleid'.<sup>322</sup> In the poems examined below, there are further examples of objects being endowed with a significance they lacked. Most significantly, these poems all enact a connection to a specific object which might normally have little worth. Laub and Auerhahn note that, for survivors, when 'connectedness to people feels too dangerous, inanimate objects may take their place', and I propose that this is especially true in the camp environment, where connectedness to others was most under threat.<sup>323</sup>

Let us firstly consider Kittner's 'Danklied des Verbannten' (6<sup>th</sup> February 1943), which describes a number of everyday objects from the camp environment and the ways in which

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<sup>318</sup> Nader, p.90.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid., p.91; Kupfer-Koberwitz, 'Gestreiftes Kleid' (AKGD, 3336/1-06-3-7). Also published in *Mein Schatten in Dachau*, ed. by Heiser, pp.62-63.

<sup>320</sup> Nader, p.92; Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature* (London: Routledge, 2002), p.193; Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p.249. Frye and Culler are here drawing on John Stuart Mill's nineteenth-century essay, 'Thoughts on Poetry and Its Varieties', in which Mill wrote that 'Eloquence is *heard*, poetry is *overheard*' and that, interestingly, 'the peculiarity of poetry appears to us to lie in the poet's utter unconsciousness of a listener', which differs somewhat from Nader's argument here, and, indeed, my own. (John Stuart Mill, 'Thoughts on Poetry and Its Varieties', *The Crayon*, 7 (1860), 93-97 (p.95).)

<sup>321</sup> For Nader's analysis of the poem, see Nader, pp.85-93.

<sup>322</sup> AKGD, 3336/1-06-3-7.

<sup>323</sup> Laub and Auerhahn, p.385.

they distract or encourage him (pp.259-260).<sup>324</sup> Whilst the objects described are all familiar ones, known by Kittner in his former life, I propose that such a poem has a purpose beyond escapism. Though there are instances of mental detachment from the poet-speaker's current situation – the sight and smell of firewood may, for example, prompt summer dreams and memories of forests – the poem seeks primarily to enact connections. The objects described, though only 'kleine[n] Erdendinge', are now valued beyond their everyday worth. Beauty is found in a frayed washing line, which the poet-speaker carefully protects by wrapping in his underclothes. This most banal of items becomes 'ein blitzendes Fanal'.

The dynamism of this imagery continues into the following stanza where the poet is gripped 'mit plötzlicher Gewalt'. In this poem, the force described is an overwhelmingly positive one, that of beauty and joy. The language of suffering (for 'Gewalt', within the context of camp poetry, is ordinarily used extremely negatively) is here transformed. This transformation continues with the description of the objects themselves: a cooking pot is anthropomorphised and given the plump form of a servant. The progression from admiration to anthropomorphism is taken a step further in the final two stanzas. Here the poet-speaker directly addresses the objects and calls them 'schlichte Spielgenossen'. This empathic link with the objects is significant because for an exile, far from home, they enact a connection to that which is now distant. It is also valuable in and of itself. Through the poem, Kittner creates what Nader calls 'a matrix of address or responsiveness in an environment designed to destroy even the most basic empathic response'.<sup>325</sup> 'Danklied des Verbannten' depicts both address and, crucially, responsiveness. The items themselves are very often the active subjects, guiding, healing, strengthening. Where such comfort cannot be expected from fellow humans, the poet-speaker seeks and finds it elsewhere and safeguards this connection within the poem. Many other poems function similarly as safeguards. Armin Freudmann's 'Lagermorgen', though using humour to make light of the poet-speaker's treatment within a satellite camp of Gross-Rosen, also implies the value bestowed upon the simplest of objects.<sup>326</sup> Upon losing a spoon, the narrator exclaims: 'Löffel! Lebe wohl, geliebter! / Letztes Stückchen Eigentum!' Here the humour both

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<sup>324</sup> Kittner, *Schattenschrift*, pp.49-50.

<sup>325</sup> Nader, p.91.

<sup>326</sup> Freudmann, *So sang zu mir*. Ebook.

conceals and makes starker the narrator's reality: the spoon was indeed his last remaining possession and, as such, was extremely dear to him.

Returning to Laub and Auerhahn's proposal that objects may take the place of people when connection to the latter group feels too dangerous, the use of apostrophe in camp poetry suggests that forming connections to objects may not only replace but also facilitate interpersonal links. Another of Freudmann's poems from KZ Kittlitztreben, 'O, Beeren' (pp.260-261), initially appears as an ode to nature, but the sight of the berries then enables the poet-speaker to create links – semantic, temporal, emotional – to more challenging aspects of his current existence.<sup>327</sup> Addressing the berries directly, the poet-speaker draws hope from their existence and appearance. Each stanza describes their colour in a different way, reflecting the different ways in which the poet-speaker uses them to re-forge his conception of the world. Though they remind him of his hunger, they are also 'hoffnungsrot' and the 'Hoffnung unser Trost' until they can return later and pick and eat them. In the final stanza their colour is described as 'flammendrot', like the flag which urges him to fight. The poem ends with the conviction that the world to which the berries belong is beautiful and must belong to the inmates, too. As well as reconciling the poet-speaker to the world around him, the berries also allow him to enact a connection with 'die, die mir so teuer ist' by, for example, reminding him of the woman's lips he used to kiss and the way she also loved berries. In this way, they act both as a speaking partner and as an intermediary, providing the means for the poet to form and imagine empathic links which the camp has put under threat.

Nature undertakes a similar role in another of Freudmann's poems, 'Frühling 1945'.<sup>328</sup> Composed whilst on a forced march between KZ Kittlitztreben and Buchenwald, the poet-speaker addresses flowers he sees and asks them to greet his loved one. Picturing her as a flower also, he imagines a connection between them, for which the flowers function once more as a symbolic intermediary. Similarly, Maria Grollmuß's 'Der Heidestrauß' (p.261) focuses on a sprig of heather – how it came to be found and sent in a letter to the poet – in order to strengthen the connection between the poet and her sister, to whom the poem is

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<sup>327</sup> Freudmann, *So sang zu mir*. Ebook.

<sup>328</sup> Ibid.

addressed.<sup>329</sup> Grollmuß, born in Leipzig in 1896, was a Catholic Sorbian journalist, teacher and member of the socialist resistance. Arrested in 1934 and stripped of her doctorate, she was sentenced to six years imprisonment and then deported to Ravensbrück in 1941 where she was assigned to a particularly arduous *Arbeitskommando*. In the camp she was known as a 'lebendes Lexikon' because of the many languages she spoke, and she passed on these skills to fellow inmates by illegally organising language classes.<sup>330</sup> She died in the camp in August 1944 after an unsuccessful operation on a cancerous tumour.<sup>331</sup> Her poem 'Der Heidestrauß', composed in August 1941, was sent to Cäcilia Grollmuß in two letters, and thereby connected the two sisters physically as well as metaphorically.

The poem begins by declaring the love between the two women yet acknowledges also that their hearts were 'nicht mehr eins'. Following the narration of her sister's nocturnal wanderings, her encounter with the anonymous soldier, and the plucking of the heather, the poet-speaker declares that 'Liebe wieder sich zu Liebe fand'. Thus, whilst the poet's sister is the focus for most of the poem, it is the heather which prompts the narration of this 'Episode aus Deinem Leben'. It represents 'Gruß, Blume, Mahnung aus dem teuren Land', and, like the poem and the letter that contained it, provides a physical link between the two sisters. Perhaps more significantly though, its physical presence enables the poet-speaker to strengthen the significant, but previously weakened, link to her sister by imagining and narrating the latter's discovery of this flower. As Kathrin Mess writes in her analysis of Yvonne Useldinger's Ravensbrück diary, nature 'bildete das Verbindungsglied zwischen der Autorin, der Lagerrealität und einem Leben jenseits des Stacheldrahts'.<sup>332</sup> In this regard, the inanimate object is highly valuable in preserving the inmate's sense of identity by reanimating a close personal relationship; moreover, the poem, like those described above, is equally valuable for its safeguarding of this empathic connection.

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<sup>329</sup> AKGR, Slg CJ/5-51.

<sup>330</sup> Anna Stiegler, in a report: AKGR, RA I/ 7-2-20.

<sup>331</sup> For more biographical information, see Jaiser, *Poetische Zeugnisse*, pp.345-346.

<sup>332</sup> Mess, p.274. For further analysis of the significance of nature in concentration camp narratives, see Mess, pp.273-279. Similarly, Jaiser has discussed the significance of the natural surroundings of Ravensbrück to camp poets (*Poetische Zeugnisse*, pp.117-128).



## The divine other

An interesting example of another poem addressing an inanimate other is Karl Adolf Gross's 'Hymnus auf die Bibel' (pp.261-264), which leads us on to the discussion of religious motifs in camp poetry.<sup>333</sup> Gross was imprisoned in Dachau between September 1939 until the camp's liberation on 29<sup>th</sup> April 1945. His seventeen-stanza long poem laments the priest's loss of a Bible: after concerted efforts to have one sent to him in Dachau, the SS guard who showed him the parcel then refused to give it to him. The poem does not explicitly discuss the details behind Gross's feelings of powerlessness; instead, the majority is devoted to an exaltation of the Bible and God, and is described by Moll as 'eine verblose Litanei über sieben Strophen, die nur der Verherrlichung der Bibel, ihres Gottes und seiner Religion gilt'.<sup>334</sup> The poem is interesting for a number of reasons. Regarding the section on inanimate others, it posits an extremely strong relationship between the poet-speaker and the focus of the poem, the Bible, with the first seven stanzas developing what Laub and Auerhahn would term an empathic dyad. Phrases such as 'Komm wieder, liebe Bibel', 'Wie muß ich euch entbehren', and 'So möcht' ich wohl mit Tränen / Des Danks und heißem Sehnen / Öffnen das Bibelwort' convey an intimacy which transcends Gross's reality in the camp; indeed, the details of his physical existence and suffering there are never mentioned. The fifth stanza compounds the sense of this close personal relationship, the poet-speaker likening his response to the Bible to that of a far-off son who trembles whilst reading his mother's words in a letter: 'Die Silben will er küssen, / Die Buchstaben, sie müssen / Die Liebe steigern, die genießt'.

Just like a letter, the Bible is valued not solely for its own merit, but because of its link to the one who wrote it. Moll's analysis of the poem overlooks this key detail at times, presenting the Bible as the key agent and skipping over the many references to the Bible's revelation of God which recur throughout the poem. The first direct address of the Bible, for example, is followed by a description of it as 'Der Gottesweisheit Fibel'. Similarly, in the third stanza, the Bible is a means to discover 'Wie es dereinst gewesen, / Da ER zur Erde kam' and everything, 'was ER auf sich nahm'. Moll's description of the two agents in these earlier stanzas as the poet-speaker and the Bible gives a somewhat misleading impression

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<sup>333</sup> Gross, *Sterne in der Nacht*, pp.66-70. The story behind the poem can be found in Moll, p.165.

<sup>334</sup> Moll, p.166.

of the poem's focus, then. Indeed, even in what Moll terms the verbless litany that follows, in which the poet-speaker steps more into the background, the Bible cannot be seen as the sole agent but remains, amongst others, 'Des Sohnes Atems in the Zeit!', 'Des Heilands Händedruck', and 'Stimme des guten Hirten'. Like the objects in Kittner's 'Danklied des Verbannten', described in the previous section, the Bible is both an object of address and an active, responsive subject; it also functions as the key 'Verbindungslied', to return to Mess's term, between man and God, between the poet-speaker and a reality external to the camps, like many of the other objects in the poems in the previous section. Embodying the connection between the poet-speaker (and his physical existence) and God (and his divine existence), the Bible is of great value to the poet and its loss is therefore particularly painful. The poem, capturing this intimate relationship between subject and object (and, by extension, between poet-speaker and God), is subsequently also of great value. Moreover, in the absence of the Bible's physical presence, the poem itself seeks to carefully re-enact its value and functions, and takes the Bible's place as a temporary mediator between the poet-speaker and the divine.

This role of the poem is enhanced through particular formal choices. The regularity of the poem's structure – the consistency of its rhyme and metre, for example – reflects the poet-speaker's belief in the steadfastness of the realm the Bible depicts and its transcendence of his current upheaval. Similarly, the poem's circularity – beginning and ending with the same appeal – conveys both the strength of the poet-speaker's feeling as well as his certainty in the perpetuity of God's Word and God Himself.

Moll's proposal, then, that the first direct appeal to God comes in the fifteenth of seventeen stanzas is not inaccurate, but is also misleading in its phrasing as it implies the poet-speaker has marginalised God up until that point.<sup>335</sup> References to God, both direct and indirect, are found throughout the poem; if anything, it is the Bible which assumes secondary importance for its value is not inherent but stems from the One it reveals. Indeed, camp poems which seek to enact or strengthen a connection to (both the Christian and Jewish) God are far from unusual. Moll, for example, estimates that almost a fifth of the poems in his study are 'religiöse christliche Texte (nicht Gebete)', the third largest

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<sup>335</sup> Moll, p.165.

thematic category.<sup>336</sup> Whilst attitudes towards the nature and extent of a divine being's involvement in events in the camps vary, poems often adopt a prayer-like form. Gross's 'In Dir!' (p.264), for example, was, like 'Hymnus auf die Bibel', composed in the camp infirmary in 1943, and it is one of over one hundred poems composed during this period of illness.<sup>337</sup> Were one not aware of the poem's origins, one would once more have no reason to suspect that it was written in Dachau. The poet-speaker's gaze remains fixed on God throughout; once again, no attention is given to his physical surroundings. Moreover, the poem seeks not only to exalt God, with descriptions of his wisdom, holiness and beauty; it explores how the poet-speaker is himself implicated in and by God's divine nature. The beginning of each stanza thus sets the tone for the poem as a whole: 'In Dir, Herr, / Bin ich ganz vollkommen' and 'In Dir, Herr, bin ich ganz geheiligt'. The poet-speaker is intimately connected to and sustained by God. Whilst the declarations of His greatness are numerous, so too are the assertions of the poet-speaker's personal experience of this. The final stanza in particular presents the poet as being intimately connected to God, sharing His holiness, light and pleasure. The simple chiasmus in the final line, echoing Song of Solomon 6.3, reinforces this sense of an intimate relationship: 'Denn Du bist mein und ich Dein'.

For Gross, then, this focus on the strong empathic bond with God overrides his current circumstances, anchoring him in a secure interpersonal relationship which transcends time and place. The poem's prayer-like form necessarily and explicitly enacts the presence of an Other, but even those poems which reproach God for His absence and lack of intervention create a speaking partner through their pronoun usage. In Heinrich Steinitz's 'Wo bist Du, Gott?' (p.264), for example, the poet-speaker explores the absence of God from his current situation and His failure to provide a satisfactory explanation for events in the camp.<sup>338</sup> Though the tone ranges from despondent to accusatory, the poem nevertheless provides a space for the inmate-speaker to address God and initiate dialogue. The syntax subtly subverts the meaning of the poet's words: though the speaker may assert the absence or

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<sup>336</sup> Moll, pp.59-60. It should be noted that the first and second categories ('Darstellung der Lager- und Gefängnissituation, beschreibend, reflektierend' and 'Liebesgedichte, Idyllik, Gedichte rein geistiger Themen, allgemeine Reflexionen' respectively) are considerably more general, which may explain why they are so large. Moll estimates that approximately 4% of the poems are Jewish religious texts, but this proportion would be greater were his study not limited to German-language works.

<sup>337</sup> Gross, *Sterne in der Nacht*, p.15.

<sup>338</sup> Steinitz, p.7. This poem is discussed in more detail in Chapter Four.

moral failure of God through his questioning, the poem opens a channel of communication and allows self-expression in a period of extreme uncertainty. That is, whilst it may not reverse the poet's crisis of faith, the poem is able to partially reverse some of the negative effects of this crisis (loss of a speaking partner and loss of prayer as a medium for communication, for example). To return to Laub and Auerhahn's work on the importance of communication, cited above, such a poem can be said to prevent not only the complete annihilation of the object (however unlikely, the possibility of communication with God is implied through the use of interrogatives) but also that of self.<sup>339</sup>

### The other outside the camp

The connection to the other, enacted by poetry, can extend beyond the boundaries of the camp, not only to the spiritual realm but also to life (including one's former self) and loved ones outside. This connection is temporal, as well as spatial and interpersonal: the poems are imaginative acts that unite the poet not only with distant people and places but also with distant time periods, whether past or future. Nader comments on the effects of incarceration on time: it 'undoes the past, prevents [...] access to the present, and alienates the inmates from their future'.<sup>340</sup> Crucially, therefore, poems fight against this powerlessness and alienation, (re)connecting poets to all three temporal dimensions, and the people and places that are part of these. As Alfred Kittner writes in his poem, 'Altes Haus': 'Mich trugen Reime in ein Land / Das ich aus alten Träumen kannte'.<sup>341</sup>

While such poems may be what Moll classes as 'Illusionslyrik' – that is, 'die zeitweilig völlige Loslösung von der eigenen materiellen Realität' – their significance goes beyond a passive escapism, enabling both 'communion' and 'communication', as Joost Meerloo put it.<sup>342</sup> Nader argues that in 'emergency poetry' in general and in poetry from the camps in particular, such 'a connection to a "self" outside or beyond the terrible circumstances of

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<sup>339</sup> Laub and Auerhahn, p.380.

<sup>340</sup> Nader, p.103.

<sup>341</sup> Kittner, *Schattenschrift*, pp.56-57. For an in-depth discussion of this poem, see Chapter Four.

<sup>342</sup> Moll, p.158, p.260; Joost A. M. Meerloo, 'The Universal Language of Rhythm', in *Poetry Therapy*, ed. by Jack Leedy (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1969), pp.52-66 (p.53).

the camps' is crucial.<sup>343</sup> Maja Suderland supports this argument, proposing that the remembering of one's 'abwesendes Selbst' could be an existential act, 'weil diese Erinnerung Bestandteil der eigenen Existenz war und zum „unveräußerlichen Gut“ des sie tragenden Individuums gehörte'.<sup>344</sup> As well as strengthening the poet's individual identity, this connection to one's self outside the camp is also crucial because it gives a transience to their current circumstances. The poet is, if only in a temporary and illusory way, in charge of time. Often this control results in the poem focussing primarily on the past or the future, and ignoring or minimising the inmates' present circumstances. As Anita Unterholzner wrote, 'bedeutete das Wiederaufleben schöner Erlebnisse durch die Niederschrift von Erinnerungen für viele Häftlinge eine Möglichkeit, sich von der Gegenwart des Lagers abzuschotten, ohne den Überlebenskampf aufzugeben'.<sup>345</sup>

In terms of connection to an other, the poems create links to the poet's self in the past and the future, and to loved ones in the present, all currently beyond reach. The prevalence of poems which extend connections beyond the camp suggests the value of maintaining external empathic links for the poet's own identity and mental stability. Out of the many poems seeking to sustain connections with loved ones, a large number are epistolary and often entitled 'An...'. As inmates were either entirely unable to write home (because of their prisoner category, for example) or had all letters censored (either by themselves, to avoid punishment, or by the camp authorities), poems provided a means to communicate openly, even if their authors never expected them to be read.

Emil Alphons Rheinhardt wrote one such poem in November 1944 during his imprisonment in Dachau. Rheinhardt, a prolific Austrian author and expressionist poet whose companions included Thomas Mann, Joseph Roth and Lion Feuchtwanger, was arrested in France in April 1943 for his participation in resistance activities. He was deported to Dachau in July 1944 and died there in February 1945, at the age of 55, from typhus. An account of the final few months of his life can be found in the diary he kept during his imprisonment and also in that of Nico Rost, a Dutch journalist and translator with whom Rheinhardt became

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<sup>343</sup> Nader, pp.10-11.

<sup>344</sup> Suderland, *Territorien des Selbst*, p.126, citing Jaiser, *Poetische Zeugnisse*, p.240.

<sup>345</sup> Anita Unterholzner, 'Schreiben in Konzentrationslagern: Zur Entstehung von Erinnerung', *Bayerische Blätter für Volkskunde: Neue Folge*, 1.2 (1999), 237-256 (p.242). For an analysis of those poems which transform, rather than ignore, the present circumstances, see Chapter Three.

friends.<sup>346</sup> Rost commented shortly after Rheinhardt's arrival in Dachau that 'es [ihm] sehr schwer fallen wird, sich hier anzupassen, denn er scheint dem Lagerleben ganz und gar nicht gewachsen zu sein'.<sup>347</sup>

This difficulty in adapting to camp life can be seen in a number of Rheinhardt's poems, many of which focus on dreams and the role these played in distracting him from 'die ganze Lagerwirklichkeit'.<sup>348</sup> Nine stanzas long, 'Freundin, die mein Herz so innig kennt' (pp.264-265) is by far the longest of Rheinhardt's Dachau poems.<sup>349</sup> It was written on 27<sup>th</sup> November 1944, whilst Rheinhardt was recovering from typhus in the infirmary. The subsequent journal entry reveals that the poem was written for the birthday of Erica de Behr, Rheinhardt's long-time secretary and partner.

Three days earlier, Rheinhardt had written despairingly of his condition and his imminent return to his block. He ended his journal entry with a short two-stanza poem, asking God to send him a letter, or some other form of communication, as he had been unable to receive one from anyone else for a long time.<sup>350</sup> This need for empathic contact seems to have resulted in Rheinhardt initiating communication in the form of a poem. Whilst the focus is primarily on the past – his former life with Erica and their past happiness – he uses an extended metaphor to weave in elements of his present situation and look to the future. In his previous poem, he had written of his attempts to find refuge in the past:

Grau grau hängt der November  
In die Welt der grauen Blöcke hinein.  
Schließ die Augen, wispert "Remember"  
Und ich flüchte ins Gesternreich hinein.  
Aber „Auf Gehts“ und verstoßen  
Aus Ehdem und Morgen sogar  
Treib ich wieder im Umrisslosen  
Grauen grauen Häftlingsjahr.<sup>351</sup>

Lamenting here his unsuccessful efforts to escape the present, Rheinhardt adopts a different strategy in his subsequent poem. The extended metaphor of a boat carrying gifts

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<sup>346</sup> Rheinhardt, „*Meine Gefängnisse*“; Nico Rost, *Goethe in Dachau: Literatur und Wirklichkeit*, trans. by Edith Rost-Blumberg (Berlin: Volk und Welt, 1948).

<sup>347</sup> Rost, p.43.

<sup>348</sup> Rheinhardt, p.198.

<sup>349</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.188-189.

<sup>350</sup> *Ibid.*, p.188.

<sup>351</sup> *Ibid.*

to his loved one initially presents an idyllic scene, not out of place in a love poem, and suggests the poet is once again seeking refuge in his past:

Schick ich meine Barke mit Geschenken  
Segelhell ins liebesblaue Element.

Nicht viel Neues kommt zu dir in meiner Fracht.  
Ich belade sie aus unserem Vergangenen:  
Römische Tage und südliche Sommernacht  
(Was fände ich sonst im Elend des Gefangenen!)

The following three stanzas continue this idyllic depiction of the boat's contents: the poet fills the vessel with vibrant, 'üppigen', natural elements that contrast sharply with the repetition of the colour grey in his previous poem. With neologisms – a profusion of compound nouns and adjectives – Rheinhardt conveys the richness of nature and, by association, his love for the addressee. Similarly, the repetition of 'love' in compound nouns ('Liebesboot', 'Liebesnot', 'Liebesgut aus Liebe') seeks to compound the poet's connection with de Behr. In the fifth and sixth stanzas he reiterates their past closeness – and its renewed tenderness – and depicts an image of reciprocal protection: he sends home '[a]lles Alte' so that his lover might protect it from 'der Häftlingszeit', and in turn it will protect them.

The final four stanzas of the poem then signal a change in temporal perspective, however. The plants and flowers he sends are not only those from their past relationship but also from his current circumstances. Through his extended metaphor he unites past and present: 'So nimm auch das traurige Blüten in Deine Hand / Dornen aus Dachau und die Compiègner Linde'. Whilst the disparity is clear, even orally – between the hard alliterated (German) 'd' and the language of the country (France) from which he has been taken – the poem enables a description of the poet-speaker's circumstances, rather than simply an escape from them. The re-remembering of the strong empathic link to the addressee anchors him to the past, yet also allows acknowledgement of the present. Indeed, the following stanza involves as meticulous a description of the plants 'aus dem Marterkeller' and 'Kerkerhöfen' as those from his 'Glücksterasse'. Significantly, both sets of plants will be planted in his 'Liebesgarten'.

The penultimate stanza then moves to consider the future. The poet envisages a time in which he will once again walk through the garden with his love. This is one of the shortest stanzas, suggesting the difficulty in imagining an end to current circumstances, as do the oppositions within the poet's description. The humility, gentleness and stillness of the plants in the first line contrast with the urgency and hustle and bustle of the second. Similarly, the poet's imagined walk through the garden is 'heftig', and yet cannot stop the plants remaining in his gaze. Despite this incongruity however, the attempt at a measure of continuity between past, present and future is significant, and enabled by the poem and its enacted connection with de Behr. The regular alternate rhyme also reflects this attempt at continuity and consistency (whilst the irregular structure – the nine stanzas are of varying lengths, and the rhythm is also irregular – hints at the limitations of such an attempt).

A later poem of Rheinhardt's, 'Im Auf- und Ab der Käfigenge' (pp.265-266), written on 3<sup>rd</sup> February 1945, more explicitly reveals the continued importance of poetic connections to loved ones and the past.<sup>352</sup> Through anaphora, the repetition of 'Sie haben' at the beginning of successive sentences, the poet-speaker accumulates his losses. Everything has been taken away, including his sense of self. He has been deprived of his present, his future, and his individuality. These losses are encircled, however, by a means of escape. Though now part of a mass group, 'mit Trotteln und Dieben' (the register of 'Trotteln' reveals his contempt for this mass grouping), he does not end his sentence here, but continues it with 'Und dennoch'. The first stanza reveals the poet-speaker's refuge from loneliness and confinement, and he reiterates this in the final stanza: his past relationship to the poem's addressee and the world to which this relationship belonged.

Whilst his deprivations and losses are described concisely and somewhat repetitively, with the same simple grammatical structure, the description of his connection to the past departs from this rigidity, mirroring the freedom it imparts. The middle section has no adjectives to embellish the poet-speaker's losses, whereas the nouns detailing Rheinhardt's 'Weg aus der Einsamkeit' all have at least one, stressing the expanse of his past and its richness. Though this richness entailed both colour and sadness – 'Die ganze bunte traurige Länge / Der einmal Dein gewesenen Zeit' – even the latter seems positive here in contrast to the sparseness and lifelessness of his current existence. The final two lines encapsulate

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<sup>352</sup> Rheinhardt, p.231.



the significance of both the poem and the connection it enacts to the past. Though his individuality and identity are under threat, the poet-speaker remains 'so übertoll Ich' through seeking refuge in his (note the possessive adjective after the list of his losses) past. He regains agency and, for the first time, is the active subject of the sentence. Indeed, the penultimate line repeats the first-person pronoun and uses an adjective of abundance to further stress its confident, persistent, rich existence. I am still brimming with myself, the poet declares assuredly. Such a declaration might seem tautologous, were it not for the poem's origins. As it is, it is one of the most explicit poetic assertions of the significance of creating and sustaining connections to the world outside the camp.

Both of Rheinhardt's poems have shown that describing the persistence of former empathic connections affects not only the addressee – after all, very few such poems would ever reach them, or indeed, be expected to – but also, and arguably more significantly, the poet. Separated from loved ones, in a hostile and anonymising environment, re-enacting and rehearsing one's connection to a 'resonating other' was of great value.<sup>353</sup> It strengthened one's own sense of identity and provided a means to acknowledge the present and face the future. Whilst enacting connections within the camp also allowed this (as described in earlier sections), remembering through poetry the strength of existing connections seems to have permitted this more readily. Even very simple love poems may represent strategies for preserving one's own self, creating a continuum between the past and present, and thereby maintaining a connectedness to the present or future.

Fritz Löhner-Beda's 'Deingedenken' (p.266), as a final example, consists of four short stanzas – three tercets and a quatrain – and does not seem especially remarkable in its content or form.<sup>354</sup> Before his imprisonment in Buchenwald in 1938, Löhner-Beda was a well-known Jewish poet, satirist, songwriter and librettist in Vienna. He was particularly famous for his popular, often sentimental, songs (and also his work with Franz Léhar, who became Hitler's favourite composer) and Nader has discussed another of his poems, 'Wenn sich müd die Glieder senken', whose wording echoes this previous style.<sup>355</sup> Nader argues that '[t]rust, love, and innocence of the type portrayed in the poem are clearly a

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<sup>353</sup> Laub and Auerhahn, p.379.

<sup>354</sup> Fritz Löhner-Beda, *Kunst hinter Stacheldraht*, p.171.

<sup>355</sup> *Ibid.*, p.142; Nader, p.77, pp.83-85.

counterpoint to the anonymous, anti-relational atmosphere in the camps' and this is also the case for 'Deingedenken'.<sup>356</sup> This is clear from the very beginning: the title immediately establishes a connection with an other, and one which is emphasised by the neologism.

The first three stanzas, the tercets, all seek to lessen the distance, both physical and emotional, between husband and wife. Whilst Löhner-Beda does not ignore his current circumstances – the poem begins 'Was immer auch geschehe' and he writes of danger and suffering – his wording implicitly redefines them. In the second stanza, for example, he predicates his reunion with his wife not on his release from Buchenwald but on her 'coming home' to him. The unexpected subject and object of this clause – 'Daß du heimkehrtest bald zu mir!' – present the marital circumstances as entirely commonplace, as one in which a husband simply awaits his wife's return home.<sup>357</sup> This imagined reunion, opening up a connection to the future, is only achieved through the poetic reworking of Löhner-Beda's circumstances. When in the final stanza, the quatrain, he acknowledges the reality of these circumstances, and the present void caused by separation from his wife – 'Um mich ist bange Leere' – he is then able to once again transform this situation through an imagined connection, positing himself as physically close to his wife: 'in deinem jungen Blut!' Löhner-Beda does not completely remove himself from his imprisonment – the subjunctive reveals that he is aware of the role of his imagination in this marital reunion – yet he also strengthens the empathic connection by describing the part of him that is close to his wife as '[m]ein bessres Ich'. This lessens the severity of imprisonment and secures Löhner-Beda's own identity: the most significant part of him is part of his wife and therefore cannot be destroyed by his imprisonment. The insertion of this line into the regular structure of tercets and their regular rhyme scheme mimics Löhner-Beda's imagined union with his wife and emphasises this declaration of his identity. Though the title, 'Deingedenken', beginning with the second-person pronoun, emphasises the one who is the subject (and addressee) of the poet-speaker's remembering, it is clear, then, that these memories – which would never be read by the eponymous 'Du' – were of greatest significance for the identity of the 'Ich'.<sup>358</sup> This significance is also noted by Christoph auf

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<sup>356</sup> Nader, p.85.

<sup>357</sup> The way in which the poet regains agency here (i.e. by presenting his separation from his wife as voluntary, and not one he has been forced to undergo) and the ensuing side-lining of the perpetrators will be discussed further in Chapter Three.

<sup>358</sup> Löhner-Beda's family were deported to the death camp Maly Trostinec near Minsk in August 1942, where they were murdered upon arrival. Löhner-Beda was deported to Auschwitz-Monowitz

der Horst, in his detailed analysis of Löhner-Beda's 'Der Häftling'.<sup>359</sup> Horst notes the 'Defiguration' and subsequent 'Refiguration' of the poet-speaker's identity and posits the description of his family – his relationship with them and responsibility for them – as the key factor in this turnaround:

Was motiviert diese Entwicklung der narrativen Identität des sprechenden Ichs von „sonst bin ich nix“ hin zu „Ich fühl' es: Ich komm' aus der Hölle heraus!“? Es ist die in der dritten Strophe angeführte Beziehung zu einer dritten Person, zu einer Familie und zu einer sozialen Welt außerhalb des Lagers, und damit der Ipse-Anteil der narrativen Identität, die Selbstheit, die vom sprechenden Ich angesprochen wird. Es ist die Erinnerung an eingegangene Verpflichtungen, an der Ehefrau und den Kindern gegenüber gemachten Versprechen, die den merkmallösen und damit defigurierten Charakter („sonst bin ich nix“) der ersten Strophe refiguriert zu einer neuen Identität.<sup>360</sup>

Having observed how poetic connections to one's past self and to loved ones were of great value to many, one must, however, recognise that for some such links were less helpful. There was a need to stay rooted in the present, in one's current struggle for survival, and dreams of the past (or future) could provide a fatal distraction from this.<sup>361</sup> Ferdinand Röhmbild, for example, a political prisoner in Buchenwald, describes in 'Goldlack, du Frühlingsbote!' how the sight of a wallflower triggers memories of his past: 'Hauchst mir mit deinen Düften / Selige Träume ein'.<sup>362</sup> There follows the description of an idyllic scene, before the poet suddenly questions this romanticising of his past: 'Es gab ein Jetzt nur und noch kein Zurück / Lebendiges Leben und nicht starres Wollen [...] Genug! Es ist ein Bodensatz geblieben. [...] Ich sehe klarer nun'. Though in the final stanza Röhmbild returns to the wallflower and asks her to conjure memories '[w]ieder aus ihrer Gruft', he is aware of the danger of losing himself in these. Other poets also recognise this danger and stress the

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in October of that year and died there in December. For more biographical information about Löhner-Beda and his family, see: Barbara Denscher and Helmut Peschina, *Kein Land des Lächelns: Fritz Löhner-Beda, 1883-1942* (Salzburg: Residenz, 2002); Gunther Schwarberg, *Dein ist mein ganzes Herz: Die Geschichte von Fritz Löhner-Beda, der die schönsten Lieder der Welt schrieb, und warum Hitler ihn ermorden ließ* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2000).

<sup>359</sup> Christoph auf der Horst, 'Der Tod im Konzentrationslager und die Refiguration narrativer Identität in der Lagerlyrik', *Historical Social Research / Historische Sozialforschung*, 34 (2009), 174-187.

<sup>360</sup> Horst, p.184.

<sup>361</sup> See Pingel, p.178. Nico Rost, who kept an extensive diary in Dachau, also described his writing as 'ein Mittel [...], um meine Gedanken und meine Energie auf die Literatur zu konzentrieren – immer wieder, möglichst jeden Tag aufs neue – , um gerade dadurch nicht immer an Edith, an Tyl, oder an mich selbst zu denken [...]. Eine Art Selbstschutz also' (Rost, p.108).

<sup>362</sup> Ferdinand Röhmbild, *Kunst hinter Stacheldraht*, pp.140-141.

dream-like nature of poems that capture their past as if to prevent themselves from viewing them as reality.<sup>363</sup>

Having considered the connections poems enact to the past, we move now to those which envisage the future and one's future self. Such poems are numerous, revealing the psychological importance of making temporary one's suffering. Whilst some of these imagine the reunion of families and a return home, the dangers of such illusions – similar to those of flights into the past – limit their prevalence. More frequent are those with strong political overtones, which posit revenge and a new world order as the outcome to their suffering. Founded on a connection to a body of like-minded individuals, both within and without the camps, such poetic assertions serve to bolster a communal spirit of resistance. Unlike personal dreams of the future, these poems usually strengthen one's resolve to withstand the present imprisonment, rather than initiating a potentially dangerous retreat into oneself. Though there is not space here to detail the full breadth of political poems of revenge, it suffices to consider a couple of works – Fritz Löhner-Beda's 'Du magst dich drehen' and Anna Stiegler's 'Anklage und Versprechen' – which exemplify many of the strategies employed.<sup>364</sup>

The two aforementioned poems are alike in their regularity of metre, rhyme scheme and structure, and also very similar in tone. Unlike most of Löhner-Beda's other camp poems, 'Du magst dich drehen' (p.266) is highly vehement, setting forth a confident vision of a future that will be achieved through violent, radical upheaval. Here he recalls the past not to strengthen connections to his immediate family, but as a point of reference for the revolution to come: 'Wie damals, als mit Schwertern und mit Spießen / Landhungrige Völker zusammenstießen, / Römerpalaste vom Blute troffen, / Barbarenpferde am Tiber sofften...'. His use of repetition generally – 'Die Welt bekommt ein neues Gesicht!' follows each stanza – and anaphora in particular – the rhythmic reoccurrence of 'Es kommt' in the final stanza, for example – emphasises the inevitability of Löhner-Beda's assured version of the future.

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<sup>363</sup> See, for example: Steinitz, 'Träume', p.7; Kittner, 'Die Guten Boten', 'Geträumte Heimkehr', in *Schattenschrift*, pp.43-44.

<sup>364</sup> Löhner-Beda, *Kunst hinter Stacheldraht*, p.173; AKGR, 25/355 (also printed in Elling, p.112).

This repetition and rhythmic regularity also lends such a poem to memorisation and oral transmission. Moll writes that these works ‘verstärkte[n] den Willen zum Weiterleben in der Begrenztheit des zeitlichen Durchhaltens und machte einzelnen Insassen das Weiterleben erst möglich. Die unter diesen praktischen und psychischen Prämissen geschaffene Kunst – hauptsächlich Lieder und zum Vortrag geeignete Gedichte – reduziert sich in ihrem Anspruch weitgehend auf die beabsichtigte, unmittelbare Wirkung auf die Rezipienten’.<sup>365</sup> Such poems therefore had a twofold benefit, strengthening one’s individual sense of self both by imagining a future victory and also by reinforcing present solidarity through their transmission.

This is true, too, for Anna Stiegler’s ‘Anklage und Versprechen’ (p.267), written in September 1944 in Ravensbrück. Stiegler was a member of the SPD and had spent five years in prison before she was transferred to Ravensbrück in February 1940, where she remained until liberation.<sup>366</sup> The collective ‘wir’ imagines ‘ein neues Deutschland’ with complete assurance. The first stanza, like Löhner-Beda’s, reassures the listener that whatever events may occur, the final outcome is certain. The poet-speaker’s confident direct address of the perpetrators maintains this certainty: ‘es soll euch nicht gelingen, / uns schwach und verzagt zu sehen’. The subsequent change of addressee to the inmates’ deceased ‘Brüder’ and ‘Schwestern ohne Zahl’ strengthens the sense of solidarity amongst inmates through the enactment of an extensive community and also strengthens their resolve to avenge the deceased within this community. Moll argues that in poems such as these, ‘die explizit an den eigenen Kampfgeist und an die Zuversicht der Häftlinge appellieren’, the effect on the listener is of the greatest importance and there is no longer a need to differentiate between illusion and reality.<sup>367</sup> Thus, present difficulties, including divisions between inmates, are minimised and a picture of resilient solidarity – both now and in the future – is instead presented. Such a picture ‘kann nur die Aussichtslosigkeit von Gegenwehr verschleiern und soll die politische Selbstachtung der Insassen wahren und ihnen eine Zukunftshoffnung belassen’.<sup>368</sup>

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<sup>365</sup> Moll, p.261.

<sup>366</sup> For more biographical information, see Jaiser, *Poetische Zeugnisse*, pp.377-378.

<sup>367</sup> Moll, p.261.

<sup>368</sup> *Ibid.*, p.262.

Having discussed the way in which connections to loved ones and to the past or future could be of great value to many inmates, I will now consider one of the issues they faced in using poetry to capture their current circumstances. Löhner-Beda's description of his 'bessres Ich' in 'Deingedenken' supports Lawrence Langer's proposal that one's consciousness was 'split' into a 'normal' and a 'camp' self, and the following section will explore how poets were able to reconcile these two seemingly irreconcilable experiences of the world through the poetic removal of boundaries.<sup>369</sup>

### The extreme other

This section deals, then, not with the removal of boundaries between the self and other, but between the everyday and the extreme, between (in Langer's terms) one's normal self and one's camp self. The concentrationary universe was an environment of extremity, unavoidably implicating every facet of daily life. As Agamben proposed, even 'those submitted to the most extreme conditions [...] recall the incredible tendency of the limit situation to become habit', for in the camps 'the state of exception coincides perfectly with the rule and the extreme situation becomes the very paradigm of daily life'.<sup>370</sup> Michael Rothberg proposes that this 'inevitable overlap of ordinary and extraordinary experiences constitutes one of the most troubling legacies of genocide – and one of the most difficult problems for autobiographical writers'.<sup>371</sup> He expounds this proposal through an exploration of Ruth Klüger's memoir *weiter leben: Eine Jugend*, but there are many parallels to be drawn between this post-war negotiation of boundaries and that which occurred within camp poetry. In both, the world of the concentration camps is mapped 'as a borderland in which extremity and everydayness coexist'.<sup>372</sup>

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<sup>369</sup> Lawrence Langer studied interviews with survivors thirty years after the liberation of the camps to analyse the workings of what he called 'humiliated memory'. For more information see Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1991), pp.116-118.

<sup>370</sup> Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, p.49.

<sup>371</sup> Michael Rothberg, 'Between the Extreme and the Everyday: Ruth Klüger's Traumatic Realism', in *Extremities: Trauma, Testimony and Community*, ed. by Nancy K. Miller and Jason Tougaw (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), pp.55-70 (p.55).

<sup>372</sup> *Ibid.*

Below, I discuss some of the ways in which these two categories of experience are brought together within poetry. Unlike in the above sections, where boundaries with the other are removed or, at least, weakened, a more complex negotiation is here at work. This is what Rothberg terms 'traumatic realism': here, 'the extreme and the everyday are neither opposed, collapsed, nor transcended through a dialectical synthesis – instead, they are at once held together and kept forever apart'.<sup>373</sup> The discussion of the poems below aims to demonstrate how this occurs and to what effect. My argument is that whilst, as Rothberg proposes, there is no transcendence of extremity, its coexistence with the everyday within poetry enabled inmates to better cope with the unavoidable invasion of the extreme in their daily lives. Moreover, such poems reveal the unique way in which, in Agamben's terms, 'the state of exception' and 'the normal situation', normally discrete entities in space and time, 'illuminate each other [...] from the inside' through their complicity.<sup>374</sup>

Kittner's 'Traumferne' (p.267), written in September 1942 in the Transnistrian camp Steinbruch am Bug, may be compared to those poems discussed above which enact connections to the past.<sup>375</sup> The poem's title is ambiguous, as Moll notes: 'Der Begriff kann in einer unerträglich gewordenen Realität als Fluchtmöglichkeit, wie auch als Unmöglichkeit von Flucht aus der Wirklichkeit mittels Traum verstanden werden'.<sup>376</sup> Both interpretations can be supported at different points in the poem, which begins and ends with a somewhat idyllic description of Kittner's former life. The use of polyptoton – the repetition of 'dream' in the initial and final stanzas, as well as the title – suggests the desire or habit of distancing oneself from reality. From the second to the third stanzas, the poet-speaker moves almost seamlessly from one reality to another, just as he moves from one set of paths to another, from his memories of 'kurzem Wanderglück' to the 'Hungermarsch im Elend'.

Whilst this smooth transition and the poem's circularity – its ultimate return to the idyllic image of acacias nodding at the window – might suggest a desire to maintain the link to the poet-speaker's past existence, it is important to consider that which this image bookends. Indeed, the final stanza closely resembles the first, but with some key adjustments which

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<sup>373</sup> Rothberg, 'Between the Extreme and the Everyday', p.55. See also: Rothberg, *Traumatic Realism: The Demands of Holocaust Representation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

<sup>374</sup> Agamben, pp.49-50.

<sup>375</sup> Kittner, *Schattenschrift*, p.37.

<sup>376</sup> Moll, p.188.

hint at the effects of the intervening events. Whereas in the first stanza the poet minimises what has been left behind, perhaps as a self-preservation strategy, he now questions its worth in the face of experiences in the previous stanzas: 'Was wir zurückgelassen, ist nicht viel' is tweaked to become 'Was wir zurückgelassen, gilt nicht viel'. Dreams, books and games, once loved, are now meaningless. Moreover, despite the recurrence of the acacias in the final lines, the unusual word order – the displacement of the subject to later in the sentence and its separation from the verb – implies this view has been unavoidably marred. The subject cannot carry out this everyday action – the viewing of a tree – as he previously did. Indeed, it no longer has a place in his memories, but only in dreams.

Those initial idyllic objects and activities – books, games, views of nature, and pleasant walks – undoubtedly fit into the category of the everyday yet belong inseparably to Kittner's past. The description of his current existence would seem, on the other hand, to be inevitably classed as extremity. The predominant themes are death and extreme isolation; the poet-speaker writes of corpses, graves and unanswered calls. Of pertinence here, however, is the way in which these scenes of extremity are described and, in particular, the remarkable consistency in tone and language throughout. The corpses, for example, are said to 'schlummern' on the banks of the river, a description which would be in harmony with the earlier idyllic descriptions of nature were it not, of course, for the subject ('Leichen'), held back until the end of the line and clause. There is an obvious irony in the poet-speaker's statement that he, and others with him – there is again the inclusive 'wir' here – were allowed to reach their destination. The destination in question is the quarry – 'den man uns zur Wohnstatt gab'. 'Dürfen' and 'geben' both imply a generosity on the part of the perpetrators that obviously did not exist.

I propose, however, that the poet-speaker's word-choice aims not solely at irony. In describing extremity in terms that would suit a relaxed hike – one where 'Zugvögel rauschten über uns nach Süden' and the surroundings (here, crucially, a grave) become 'schneebedeckt[es]' – the poet negotiates the collision between two worlds: a 'Lebenswelt' and a 'kommunikationslosen Totenwelt, eine[r] Welt vollständiger Humanitätsabwesenheit', in Moll's terms.<sup>377</sup> Rothberg writes of Klüger's frequent description of barbed wire, which both 'holds together and separates life and death, the

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<sup>377</sup> Moll, p.190.



inside and the outside, the familiar and the radically foreign'.<sup>378</sup> Here, en route to another camp, there is no such tangible boundary. The poet-speaker must find another way to negotiate the invasion of the 'radically foreign' – long exhausting marches, piles of corpses and mass graves – into a landscape which had previously been the domain of the familiar. Whereas Rothberg notes Klüger's 'tracking of a homely object in an unhomely landscape', which he argues evokes the 'traumatic relationship' between the extreme and the everyday, Kittner here tracks unhomely objects in a homely landscape.<sup>379</sup> This allows him to explore the visible impingement of the 'Totenwelt' on his 'Lebenswelt' and provides a frame for imagining what Moll calls the 'über das Sichtbare hinausgehende Realität der erlebten Unmenschlichkeit'.<sup>380</sup>

Andrea Reiter writes of Fred Wander's (post-war) concentration camp report that 'by choosing an image of the everyday world [a forest] as the catalyst of his associations, Wander achieves the integration of the inexpressible, unthinkable experience into his own world'.<sup>381</sup> I propose that Kittner does not so much integrate the extreme into the everyday as he does acknowledge and record its invasion, the unpeaceful co-existence of the two. Indeed, the poem's disjunction between tone, language and content reveals the inability to reconcile the two worlds, and here, Rothberg would argue, is the traumatic nature of the experience. This trauma, he writes,

results not so much from a confusion of inside and outside, but rather from the narrator's location in the face of an unsurpassable coexistence of inside and outside, subject and world. This shared/divided place [...] is a place of trauma because its coincidence of opposites overwhelms the everyday structures of understanding, which nevertheless remain present.<sup>382</sup>

Constanze Jaiser also notes the presence of these oppositions in the Ravensbrück corpus she analyses, proposing that they are a dominant characteristic of these poems.<sup>383</sup> The poet-speaker's complex relationship with the oppositions in their surroundings is 'über eine

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<sup>378</sup> Rothberg, 'Between the Extreme and the Everyday', p.62.

<sup>379</sup> Ibid., p.61.

<sup>380</sup> Moll, p.191.

<sup>381</sup> Andrea Reiter, '„Brot war eine feste Insel in dem Wassersuppenmeer...“: Literary Imagination as a Means of Survival, as Reflected in Concentration-Camp Reports', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 25 (1989), 123-138 (p.132).

<sup>382</sup> Rothberg, 'Between the Extreme and the Everyday', pp.62-63.

<sup>383</sup> Jaiser, 'Benennen und Bewahren', p.88.

paradoxe Sprache [...] immer wieder neu ausgelotet'.<sup>384</sup> This language of paradox is certainly present in Kittner's poem. Whilst Jaiser's subsequent proposal that 'über die Gedichtform [...] Diskontinuitäten, Brüche zwischen Lagerwelt und Nicht-Lagerwelt, Vergangenheit, Gegenwart und (fraglicher) Zukunft überwunden werden [konnten]' may not always be possible – or indeed desired – the form of the poem certainly allows the relationship between the ordinary and the extreme to be explored and (re)negotiated.<sup>385</sup>

Emil Alphons Rheinhardt wrote a poem on Christmas morning 1944 which presents the difficulties inherent in narrating the borders between the extreme and the everyday (p.268).<sup>386</sup> As in Kittner's poem above, it is tone and register which reveal these tensions; unlike in 'Traumferne', however, these are largely inconsistent. Though occurring just once a year, the poem's subject matter, Christmas morning, fits into the category of the everyday. The punctuation of this familiar event by the unfamiliar disrupts its narration, however.<sup>387</sup> The resulting poem is one not just of different and discrete experiences, occurring side by side, but of 'complex borders and crisscrossing lines', as Nader puts it.<sup>388</sup>

An examination of the poem shows how these lines are drawn and re-drawn. Its initial focus on the radiant sunshine implies an uplifting – and familiar – description of a Christmas morning is to follow, yet this is quickly dispelled by the fragment on the following line: 'aber 10° unter Null'. In a similar fashion, the third line suggests a spiritual experience of Christmas Eve, before the enjambment into the fourth line reveals the reality of his experience. The subsequent lines detail what occurred during the night that made it 'unheilig'. Here, there are more marked contrasts, this time in register, as Rheinhardt describes the activities of 'der Kerl im zweiten Bett'. For example, he is said to have 'laut seinen Unflat gesprochen' and then, later, 'laut was vom Scheissen gesungen'. In response to his noise, another inmate is reported to have called out "'Den soll man ermorden!'" and, in the meantime, 'ist drüben einer unterm Bette krepirt'.

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<sup>384</sup> Jaiser, 'Benennen und Bewahren', p.92.

<sup>385</sup> Ibid., *Poetische Zeugnisse*, p.214.

<sup>386</sup> Rheinhardt, pp.199-200.

<sup>387</sup> The convergence of the everyday and the extreme at Christmas occurs also in Charlotte Delbo's *Auschwitz and After*, trans. by Rosette Lamont (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), p.166, and is discussed by Rothberg, pp.61-62.

<sup>388</sup> Nader, p.35.

The matter-of-fact tone reveals death's omnipresence and its effects. The boundary lines between extremity and the everyday blur; the two categories appear to overlap. No further words are given to the man who died under his bed, but instead the poet promptly moves on to describe the food he was given that morning. There is no temporal or spatial boundary between these two very different events; the proliferation of 'Und' in these lines implies a list of comparable events, yet those linked by the conjunction here (the death of a fellow prisoner, an earlier than usual mealtime, still being alive, receiving a Christmas present) would ordinarily be considered very different. The only linguistic obstacle to an entirely seamless transition is the register of the verb 'krepieren'. The poem has a number of such stumbling stones which disrupt a relatively high register or a moment of pathos. These are crucial, preventing what Eric Santner has called 'narrative fetishism': 'the construction and deployment of a narrative consciously or unconsciously designed to expunge the traces of the trauma or loss that called that narrative into being in the first place'.<sup>389</sup> The ensuing back-and-forth between solemnity and irreverence instead reveals the difficulty of narration (or, at least, narrative closure) in the face of extremity. The dilemma becomes deeper as borders repeatedly intersect and definitions of the extreme and the familiar become ever less discrete.

By contrast, in Rheinhardt's diary entry for the day, he makes no mention of that which he has described in the poem, instead focusing on the Christmas package he has received and his hopes for the future.<sup>390</sup> As has been shown, the experiences within the poem are narrated with a certain unease: he is unable to write about death in an elevated register or pious tone, when it is now but an everyday occurrence, yet is also unable to completely discard poetic language and form. The form of the poem, unlike the prose diary entry, nevertheless allows Rheinhardt to express this unease, to both bring together and keep separate the everyday and the extreme.

The poem's ending – a dedication to 'Ihr zwei lieben Frauen' and a prayer that they will soon be reunited – adds a final layer of complexity. Up until this point there has been little to suggest that the poem is addressed to loved ones: the poet-speaker has seemingly not

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<sup>389</sup> Eric Santner, 'History Beyond the Pleasure Principle: Some Thoughts on the Representation of Trauma', in *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the "Final Solution"*, ed. by Saul Friedländer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp.143-154 (p.144).

<sup>390</sup> Rheinhardt, p.200.

filtered his description of events for his audience (albeit one which might never read the poem in question). Once more, the everyday confronts the extreme, as a heartfelt epistolary poem serves as the container for solemnity and irreverence, the ordinary and the extraordinary.

As has been shown, the crisscrossing lines and complex borders in the above two poems relate frequently to the poet-speaker's treatment of death. This is unsurprising given its omnipresence within the camps. Its diverse treatment within poetry will be considered throughout this thesis, but here I will discuss the way in which this marker of extremity – death's unavoidable presence and prevalence – was frequently, through poetry, implicated in the everyday.

Above, I discussed the way in which tone may draw attention to the transition from the everyday to the extreme, whether by its sudden modification or the lack thereof. Regardless of the way in which death is described – for this, understandably, varies from poet to poet, camp to camp – it is rarely presented as a discrete category. In his analysis of another of Kittner's poems, 'Unterwegs', Nader comments on this blurring of the boundary line between 'not yet dead' and 'no longer alive'.<sup>391</sup> The poet-speaker, still alive, talks to his love, recently deceased, but Moll notes that:

Die Grenze zwischen Lebendem und Totem beginnt sich aufzulösen [...]. Wenig später im Gedicht setzt sich der Monologisierende, dem das antwortende Gegenüber fehlt, mit der sprachlosen Leiche gleich [...]. Damit existieren zwischen dem Lebend-sein und dem Tot-sein nur noch graduelle Unterschiede.<sup>392</sup>

That is to say, the distinction between the everyday and the extreme is minimised. Rather than a gulf between the two, there is a continuum. Life is implicated in death, and death in life. Heinrich Steinitz, quoted above in 'The deceased other', reveals this disappearance of discrete categories when he questions: 'Sind wir noch Menschen, sind wir Tote schon, / In denen träg noch die Gedanken kreisen?'<sup>393</sup> Traumatic texts such as these represent,

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<sup>391</sup> Nader, p.124; Kittner, *Schattenschrift*, pp.38-39.

<sup>392</sup> Moll, p.192.

<sup>393</sup> Steinitz, 'Wo bist Du, Gott?', p.7.

according to Cathy Caruth, 'the inextricability of the story of one's life from the story of a death, an impossible and necessary double telling'.<sup>394</sup>

This is embodied, literally, in a poem by Hasso Grabner, 'Essenausgabe' (pp.268-270), written in Buchenwald in February 1940.<sup>395</sup> Grabner was imprisoned in Buchenwald between September 1938 until June 1940 due to his involvement in the underground Communist resistance.<sup>396</sup> In 'Essenausgabe', the poet-speaker tells the story of three men in Buchenwald. The one, realising he is about to die, asks the other two men to close his eyes when he does, so that they can carry him about between them, pretend he is weak but still alive, and thereby receive an extra ration of food to prolong their own survival for as long as possible. The act described here, whilst indicative of the extremity of the camps, was not unique: the inmate-expression 'Leichenzüchter' is described in a publication from the Neuengamme memorial site as referring to 'die Häftlinge, die das Ableben ihres Kameraden von nebenan nicht sofort dem Blockältesten meldeten und dessen Verpflegung, besonders Brot, mitbezogen'.<sup>397</sup> That such an act had its own specific neologism is itself indicative of extremity's infiltration of the everyday.

To return to the poem's portrayal of a specific incident of this kind, one must note that 'Essenausgabe' presents a highly empathic act, as the dying man seeks to use his own death for the good of his fellow inmates. By recording this selfless act, the poem itself is also empathic. In this section, however, I wish to focus less on the connection the poem preserves with the other, and more on the way in which this story of extremity, of life and death, is presented. The narrative circularity – the poem begins and ends with the three men going to get food – reflects the circularity of their existence and their constant dependence on food. The fulfilment of the dying man's wish does not result in narrative

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<sup>394</sup> Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016), p.8.

<sup>395</sup> Grabner, pp.25-29. For further discussion of this poem, see Chapter Four.

<sup>396</sup> In June 1940, Grabner was transferred to the so-called *Strafdivision 999*, a unit of the *Wehrmacht* in which those who were supposedly physically, but not morally or politically, fit, were forced into military service. Grabner continued to write poems after his release from Buchenwald, many of which he published. For more biographical information on Grabner, see Kirsten and Kirsten, p.306.

<sup>397</sup> KZ-Gedenkstätte Neuengamme, *Verständigungsprobleme und Lagerausdrücke* <[http://media.offenes-archiv.de/zeit Spuren\\_thm\\_verstaendigungsprobleme.pdf](http://media.offenes-archiv.de/zeit Spuren_thm_verstaendigungsprobleme.pdf)> [accessed 22 August 2018] (p.12).

closure; instead, its futility is highlighted. The poem concludes with the same scene with which it began: after the man's death, everything appears to go on as it did previously.

Despite the selflessness of the dying man's wish, and the redemption it enacts, Grabner frequently presents the man's death and his decision in a very matter-of-fact, unsentimental tone.<sup>398</sup> Note, for example, the way in which the third man tells the other two that his life is coming to an end: 'Vor einigen vierzehn Tagen / hörten die zwei den dritten sagen: / „Ich werde sterben“, / und haben dazu genickt'. When the man acts out how he will carry his food bowl following his death, the poet-speaker ironically describes the scene as 'sein erstes Theaterspiel im Leben'.

Phrases such as these contrast in tone with others that convey the selflessness and significance of the man's actions, such as, 'Und als er so spricht, / steht in seinen Augen beinah ein Rausch, / in dem vergnügliche Lichter zucken'. This contrast suggests an uncertainty on the part of the narrator as to how he should interpret the story. The dualism in tone, switching back and forth between sincerity and awe, frankness and irony, reflects the effect of the inmates' daily existence on their perception of actions which would otherwise be undeniably heroic. Their current circumstances unavoidably temper and shape their thoughts and responses, both physically and emotionally. For example, their lack of response to the man's statement that he will soon die is both because 'hier war es schon ein Trösten, / nicht zu widersprechen, wenn einer weiß, / daß er in der Erlösten / Ruhe eingeht' and also because 'die Stimmbänder / brauchen auch ein wenig Nahrung, / und die hatten sie nicht'. Their acknowledgment of the chance the man is offering is inextricably bound up with the knowledge that even with his help they may themselves die soon, 'nur etwas später'.

This dualism, encompassing the many contradictions of thought and action inherent to their daily existence, is reflected well in the final sentence of the seventh stanza: 'Jetzt schien ihnen doch der Tod zu frühe / und ein allzu verzweifeltes Stück / der Tausch, / der ihnen hier empfohlen: / Tägliches Entsetzen gegen / Kohlrübenwasserbrühe'.

Notwithstanding the omnipresence of death within the camp, the third man's death still

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<sup>398</sup> For discussion of acts of redemption in Holocaust narratives, see: Lawrence Langer, *Admitting the Holocaust: Collected Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) and *Holocaust Testimonies*.

seems premature to the other two. Despite the chance he is offering them, it appears to be 'ein allzu verzweifertes Stück'. The presentation of the choice they must make is then described in the frankest of terms: daily horror in exchange for watery swede broth. The antithesis of the two options and the imbalance between them is striking. As in Klüger's text, it seems that the presence of 'a seemingly banal object within a context of extremity, rather than some absolute quality of the Extreme Event, poses the greatest challenge to understanding'.<sup>399</sup>

Grabner's choice to begin his poem with the story's end means that the reader already knows which of the two options the men chose. This choice succinctly reveals the primacy of food and hunger within the camp and the pragmatism needed to survive there. Moreover, it clearly symbolises the implication of extremity in the everyday: the two men have accepted the horror of carrying a corpse between them each day in order to receive an extra meagre portion of watery soup. The ability of the dead man to masquerade as one who is alive encapsulates, too, the blurring of the boundaries between life and death.

What, then, are the effects of presenting the continuum between life and death – one in which living and dying are seamless contiguous stages, often indistinguishable – within camp poetry? Significantly, minimising the distinction between the everyday and the extreme does not minimise the extreme. Instead, as Nader proposes, 'by treating their experiences as "normal" experiences, as discussable events that bear narration in rhyming poems, the poets here confront readers with the unreality of their concentrationary reality'.<sup>400</sup> Narrating the extreme does not therefore necessarily result in a repression of trauma, as critics such as Lawrence Langer have claimed.<sup>401</sup> Rather, the act of writing poetry entails, simultaneously, an acknowledgement of the trauma and a refusal 'to succumb entirely to the fragmentation of traumatic experience. Each poem finds a different "organising principle" that enables a narrative'.<sup>402</sup>

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<sup>399</sup> Rothberg, 'Between the Extreme and the Everyday', p.62.

<sup>400</sup> Nader, p.126.

<sup>401</sup> See, for example, Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies*.

<sup>402</sup> Nader, p.126.

Through poetry, this narrative may depict what Rothberg calls the 'crossroads of inside and outside' whilst highlighting, crucially, the insistence of the boundary between the two.<sup>403</sup> Camp poems reveal the implication of extremity in the everyday, yet for the most part the extreme remains 'a non-integrated presence' and therefore such poems do not signify the repression of trauma.<sup>404</sup> Instead, they highlight the 'contradictory quality of the extreme – the fact that it always exceeds language but still inhabits it', as encapsulated by Grabner's line: 'Tägliches Entsetzen gegen / Kohlrübenwasserbrühe'.<sup>405</sup>

'Traumatic realism' seems, then, to be as present in camp poetry as it is in post-war writing. Understanding its form and features may enable the corpus to be defended against accusations of narrative fetishism and closure. Just as in post-war poetry, these texts

seek to bring forth traces of trauma, to preserve and even expose the abyss between everyday reality and real extremity. [...] The abyss at the heart of trauma not only entails the exile of the real but also its insistence. Traumatic realism is marked by the survival of extremity into the everyday world and is dedicated to mapping the complex temporal and spatial patterns by which the absence of the real, a real absence, makes itself felt in the familiar plenitude of reality.<sup>406</sup>

In Lawrence Langer's study of survivor testimony, he proposes that the process of witnessing and narration seeks to 'transform the unfathomable into a comprehensible way of behaving given birth by the circumstances of the Holocaust'.<sup>407</sup> Whilst Rothberg's definition of 'traumatic realism' and my own study of camp poetry would suggest poets are not necessarily seeking to provide explanations for extreme experiences or behaviour, it seems the case nevertheless that, as Nader puts it, 'in the portrayal of actions, experiences, circumstances, and feelings, they [...] make [the unfathomable] part of human experience by including it in the range of topics poetry touches on'.<sup>408</sup> This collision of the extreme and the everyday is not resolved or explained by poems from the camps; they do however provide an important space in which the intersections of the unfathomable and the ordinary might be mapped and negotiated.

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<sup>403</sup> Rothberg, 'Between the Extreme and the Everyday', p.62.

<sup>404</sup> Ibid. Definitions of trauma vary widely, but my argument here is based on the work of theorists such as Cathy Caruth and Geoffrey H. Hartman. Caruth, for example, identifies trauma as 'an experience that is not fully assimilated as it occurs' (Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, p.5).

<sup>405</sup> Rothberg, 'Between the Extreme and the Everyday', p.62.

<sup>406</sup> Ibid., p.67.

<sup>407</sup> Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies*, p.117.

<sup>408</sup> Nader, p.117.



## The perpetrator other

I have hitherto explored the value of camp poetry in establishing or maintaining empathic links with a range of others, from the known to the unknown, the near to the distant, the alive to the deceased. The previous section then considered how camp poems negotiated a different kind of boundary, that between the 'normal' and the extreme. This chapter would not be complete, however, without considering one final category of others, the perpetrators, and the small number of poems which extend empathy, implicitly or explicitly, towards this most hostile of groups. It is firstly telling that such poems are the exception, not the rule.<sup>409</sup> The few that do exist, however – some of the most unsettling and unusual of the corpus – testify most strikingly and convincingly of the persistence to empathy within the camps and the ability of the poem to explore, develop and preserve it. These works, perhaps more than any other, confirm Hilde Domin's proposal concerning poetry's faith in humanity: 'Im Gedicht, noch im negativen Gedicht, ist ein letzter Glaube an den Menschen, an seine Anrufbarkeit'.<sup>410</sup>

Whilst a few writers display only fleeting empathy towards perpetrator figures – which may be interpreted as ironic or coerced – an equally small number dedicate the entire poem to the exploration of the empathic link.<sup>411</sup> 'Warum nicht so?' (p.270) is one such work. An anonymous poem from Buchenwald, it is one of a collection of mostly relatively short works which were suited to distribution amongst prisoners and which range from protests against the inmate brothel to poems suitable for the inmates' 'Sonntagsbriefe nach

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<sup>409</sup> This contrasts with retrospective testimony and other post-war works which explore much more frequently and explicitly the complexities of the inmate-perpetrator relationship. See, for example: Joanne Petitt, *Perpetrators in Holocaust Narratives. Encountering the Nazi Beast* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017); Bernhard Schlink, *Der Vorleser* (Zürich: Diogenes, 1995); Simon Wiesenthal, *Die Sonnenblume. Von Schuld und Vergebung* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1970).

<sup>410</sup> Hilde Domin, 'Anstelle einer Einleitung: Das Gedicht als Begegnung', in *Poesie und Therapie: Über die Heilkraft der Sprache. Poesietherapie, Bibliothherapie, Literarische Werkstätten*, ed. by Hilarion G. Petzold and Ilse Orth (Paderborn: Junfermann, 1985), pp.11-17 (p.13).

<sup>411</sup> On the former category, see, for example, the anonymous 'Prolog in Dachau' (1943) (AKGD, 6201). This four-page rhyming description of the 'Präzifix' screw factory is strikingly positive – the factory is frequently referred to as 'das grosse Wunder' – and is likely therefore to be intended ironically or to have been commissioned by the SS. Favourable descriptions of those in authority are therefore more difficult to appraise.

Hause'.<sup>412</sup> 'Warum nicht so?' is the last of eight short poems on the theme of the *Kapo*.<sup>413</sup> The preceding seven poems having derided the inmate who abuses his power and mistreats his fellow prisoners, this simple eight-line piece concludes the group by presenting a more hopeful, empathic possibility for prisoner-*Kapo* relationships. The poem's generality, along with its brevity and regular rhythm and rhyme, make it particularly suited for transmission amongst inmates. The likelihood of oral transmission would in turn confirm the argument that the search for empathy, even between those usually detached, was widespread (if often fruitless) and that poetry provided a means to voice and support this search.

Heinrich Steinitz's 'Tischlerwerkstatt' (p.271), on the other hand, presents a much more specific and explicit portrayal of an empathic link with his overseer and the complexities inherent therein.<sup>414</sup> Like all the poems in Steinitz's published collection, 'Tischlerwerkstatt' takes the form of a sonnet, a structure which allows the poet-speaker to explore the facets of his complex relationship with the master carpenter. Externally, as the first stanza reveals, the relationship is a typical one: the 'Meister' has exacting standards and uses physical force when these are not met. There are, however, hints that this relationship is not entirely conventional: it is love for his trade which prompts the man's intervention and the poet-speaker adopts his perspective – 'Oft muß der Meister mich zur Seite schieben' – to imply the necessity of such an intervention. The title of 'Meister' is also somewhat ambiguous here, conveying the superiority of the man over the poet-speaker, but a superiority that may be due to his expertise as well as (or rather than) the exercise of his power.

The initial 'Doch' of the subsequent stanza signals a more explicit change. The end-stopped lines of the first stanza, suggesting tension and urgency, disappear and are replaced by a single, complex sentence that implies a calmer, slower pace as it meanders over the lines.

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<sup>412</sup> AKGB, 9-95-33-43. This collection of poems is discussed more in Chapter One and Chapter Three.

<sup>413</sup> For more on the role of the *Kapo*, see Chapter Three. It is important to note here the difficulty in categorising the *Kapo*. Whilst he can by no means be categorised unproblematically as a perpetrator, I have included this poem in this section as the other *Kapos* described in this anonymous set have behaviour that imitates that of the perpetrators. For more exploration of the complexity of the *Kapo*-inmate relationship, see Wachsmann, pp.512-527.

<sup>414</sup> Steinitz, p.10. Like the above poem, the particular identity of the 'Meister' remains somewhat ambiguous. Whether prisoner-functionary or guard, it is clear, however, particularly from the sonnet's final couplet, that his relationship with the poet is initially the kind to be expected between guard and inmate.

The rhyme scheme, identical to the first stanza, intimates such a change is not necessarily outwardly perceptible, however. The described relationship is now more one of reciprocity than hierarchy, and there is a rare, explicit example of the value of words, of poetry, as the poet-speaker declares their ability to comfort.

The final stanza is a more abstract declaration of the merits of human behaviour and, more specifically, empathy. The proliferation of first-person plural pronouns in this stanza (five, compared with none in the first and just one in the second) mirrors this focus. In particular, the pronouns in the first two lines are emphasised by the pronounced caesurae they follow. The stanza's context within the poem, the use of 'beide', and the content of the final couplet all suggest that the pronouns do not refer (or do not only refer) to humanity in general, but to the poet-speaker's empathic connection with the 'Meister'. It is this connection which is the foundation for the poem's general appraisal of humanity and the persistence and strength of friendship. The final couplet compounds the gravity of this assertion: despite the proliferation and intensity of hate – mirrored here through its repetition – it pales before compassion.

In the following chapter I consider the numerous poems which seek to erect boundaries between self and perpetrator. The origins and content of Steinitz's poem, however, make it a striking and compelling exponent of empathy and its ability to transcend even the most formidable boundary. It stands in sharp contrast to works such as Armin Freudmann's 'Mein Meister und ich', which depicts a wholly destructive overseer-inmate relationship in which the poet-speaker is always mindful of the infinite difference and distance between himself and the perpetrators, and proves that whilst empathy was by no means omnipresent, it could be omnipotent in the most unfavourable of circumstances.<sup>415</sup> Indeed, Freudmann also depicts the potential complexities of the perpetrator-inmate relationship in another of his poems, 'Die Ambulanz', written in KZ Kittlitztreben.<sup>416</sup> Freudmann's fifteen-stanza long poem describes the anxieties of the poet-speaker as he waits to have three boils examined. Imagining the worst ('Schon fühle ich das Messer. / Nun kommt der Todesstreich'), the poet-speaker is astounded to hear the medic pronounce, 'Mein Freund, du bist erledigt', and send him on his way. Consequently, the poem ends with the following

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<sup>415</sup> Freudmann, *So sang zu mir*. Ebook.

<sup>416</sup> *Ibid.*

dedication: 'Der Sanitäter, dem dieses Gedicht in Dankbarkeit und Freundschaft gewidmet ist, heißt Josef Mann'. Whilst there is no explicit indication as to whether Mann was a prisoner-functionary or member of the SS, Freudmann's anxieties suggest he expected to receive poor treatment. Indeed, the final two lines' description of the medic – 'Wie weh tatst du mir wieder, / Du böser, guter Mann' – conveys the poet's uncertainty as to how to perceive him. Having been treated kindly, he is nonetheless perturbed by the man's behaviour and unsure as to how to interpret it; it is the medic's kindness which causes him discomfort, not his physical injury. Dedicating the poem to him appears, then, to be a concrete way to express his gratitude in the midst of this initial unease.<sup>417</sup>

The final example in this section will reveal how poems could enact empathy through their physical presence, as well as their content. An exhibition at the Neuengamme memorial site displays a collection of picture collages and texts from an album that was given to Werner Kahn, the head of the SS-owned Neuengamme brick factory, on 20<sup>th</sup> October 1944.<sup>418</sup> The album was produced for Kahn's 33<sup>rd</sup> birthday by two inmates who worked in the factory offices, Helmut Bickel, who wrote the short, descriptive poems, and František Šetina, an architect who produced the drawings and assembled the texts and photos. The following description of the album comes from the memorial site exhibition:

Sie fertigten das Album nicht als Auftragsarbeit an, sondern aus eigenem Antrieb. Kahn schützte Helmut Bickel und František Šetina durch die Beschäftigung als Funktionshäftlinge, eine Stellung, die ihre Überlebenschancen im Vergleich zu den körperlich schwer arbeitenden Häftlingen erhöhte.

In dem Album wird der technische Ablauf der Klinkerproduktion unter Verwendung zahlreicher Fotografien dargestellt. Die Kühle der schwarz-weißen Sachaufnahmen milderte Šetina, indem er Landschaft oder Architektur der Umgebung zeichnerisch in Farbe ergänzte. So entstand für Werner Kahn eine eher anheimelnde Darstellung des Arbeitsorts Klinkerwerk, in der nichts auf das Konzentrationslager hindeutet.<sup>419</sup>

Kahn was a civilian, employed to run the factory because of his profession as a brickwork engineer, and therefore cannot be neatly slotted into the category of perpetrator. Nevertheless, the expected relationship between himself and the inmate workers would

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<sup>417</sup> The citation from the introduction to Freudmann's poetry collection in Chapter One reveals the full extent of the effects of the medic's kindness: the poet shares his poetry with the medic and a friendship develops which results in a less arduous *Arbeitskommando* for Freudmann.

<sup>418</sup> *Die Klinkerherstellung im neuen Werk* (display board), (KZ-Gedenkstätte Neuengamme, Hamburg) (viewed 23 January 2014).

<sup>419</sup> Ibid.

not have been one of empathy and compassion. That the poems (and album) reveal the existence of these testifies to their persistence in the face of hostility and personal risk. The album itself demonstrates how poetry, in its simplest form, could incarnate, as well as record, empathy.

In this way, it is representative of all the poems explored in this chapter, namely their faith in being able to 'call upon' the humanity of others, as Domin put it.<sup>420</sup> Jaiser writes how the form of the camp poem 'bewahrt die Sehnsucht nach Rettung und hilft, den inneren Zustand einer tödlichen Erstarrung sowohl zu benennen als auch zu überwinden, indem die rufende Suche nach einem Gegenüber nicht aufgegeben wird'.<sup>421</sup> This chapter has explored in detail the forms this 'rufende Suche' took in camp poetry, establishing an original and comprehensive typology of others, whilst also examining more closely the ways in which such a search was able to overcome the numbness Jaiser mentions by sheltering and giving voice to the poet's self, the internal other. One can consequently conclude that empathy was not only possible in the camps but also that it played a significant role in preserving one's sense of self and thereby one's will to survive. As both creators and conduits of empathy, camp poems subsequently played a highly significant role in these two vital facets of self-preservation. In the next chapter, I will explore those texts which enabled self-preservation through different means, by establishing distance rather than connection.

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<sup>420</sup> Domin, 'Anstelle einer Einleitung', p.13.

<sup>421</sup> Jaiser, *Poetische Zeugnisse*, p.213.

## Chapter Three

### Distance / Establishing Boundaries

The previous chapter ended by asserting Hilde Domin's proposal concerning poetry's faith in humanity.<sup>422</sup> It followed an exploration of some of the many ways in which inmates used poetry to 'call upon' the other and enact a connection with them. In the same work, Domin also claims that writing a poem is both 'Monolog *und* Aufhebung des Monologs'.<sup>423</sup> That is, whilst the poet may seek to establish connection, a degree of separation – the monologue – persists:

Die benannte Erfahrung tritt dem Menschen gegenüber als etwas Objektives und wird auf eine neue Weise vollzogen: als sein Eigenstes, das aber doch auch andern widerfährt, ihn mit der Menschheit verbindet, statt ihn auszusondern. Er ist einbezogen und mitgemeint. Das erregt und befreit zugleich.<sup>424</sup>

This complex relationship – the ways in which poetry both connects and distances – will be further explored in this chapter. How were inmates able to enact distance, as well as closeness, through their poems, and why did they choose to do so?

Once again, I take as my starting point several quotations from the fields of psychology, sociology and literature, which assert the need for detachment, for preserving an identity apart from the one imposed by the camp environment. In his discussion of poetic representations of torture, Andrés Nader proposes distancing mechanisms are essential in order to 'retain perspective'.<sup>425</sup> Citing Laub and Podell's article on art and trauma, he argues that representing "the essence of trauma from the inside, exclusively from the perspective of the victim" might create "an empty space, a 'black hole' [...] with no outer reference-point from which to view it and take refuge". This could lead to insurmountable disorientation and paralysis'.<sup>426</sup> Similarly, Constanze Jaiser argues that 'zu viel Emotion, ob Hass oder Verzweiflung, geradezu tödlich sein konnte', and that a certain measure of

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<sup>422</sup> Domin, 'Anstelle einer Einleitung', p.13.

<sup>423</sup> Ibid., p.11.

<sup>424</sup> Ibid., *Wozu Lyrik heute: Dichtung und Leser in der gesteuerten Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1993), p.28.

<sup>425</sup> Nader, p.134.

<sup>426</sup> Ibid., citing Dori Laub and Daniel Podell, 'Art and Trauma', *The International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 76 (1995), 991-1005 (p.1002).

detachment was therefore necessary when describing one's circumstances.<sup>427</sup> In the words of an anonymous poet from Theresienstadt:

Sehet den Dingen nicht ins Gesicht,  
Das ertragt ihr nicht.  
[...]  
Ihr könnt euch stückweise Vergessen kaufen,  
Es gibt ja so viele Mittel, sich zu betäuben,  
[...]  
Und man kann tausend verschiedene Verrücktheiten treiben,  
Damit man nicht den Verstand verliert.  
Denn wenn ihr das Antlitz der Dinge saht,  
Es würde euch in die Knie zwingen.<sup>428</sup>

Whilst there appears to be unanimity over the value of establishing distance, then, the means by which this occurred – the particular distancing mechanisms – within camp poetry, have not been thoroughly explored. In this chapter I will therefore present a much-needed methodical investigation of the ways in which inmates used poetry to erect boundaries and create distance. The first section will look at ways in which distance was created between poet-speaker and perpetrator, either through avoidance (and subsequently assigning agency to another) or confrontation. The second will consider some of the ways in which poems could be used to erect boundaries between the poet-speaker and particular inmate groups, such as *Kapos*, *Musulmänner* and the deceased, in order to preserve one's individual identity and aid one's survival. Finally, the third section explores how inmates distanced themselves from their daily reality, using strategies such as illusion formation, silence and humour. The resulting picture is one of a diverse and creative range of distancing mechanisms which enabled camp poems to subtly but significantly protect their authors' wellbeing.

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<sup>427</sup> Jaiser, 'Benennen und Bewahren', p.94.

<sup>428</sup> 'Sehet den Dingen nicht ins Gesicht', in *Welch Wort in die Kälte gerufen*, ed. by Seydel, p.329.

## Distance from the perpetrators

The previous chapter ended with a discussion of the ways in which inmates enacted empathic links with perpetrator figures through their poems. Such works are rare; much more common, unsurprisingly, are those poems which sought to distance the poet-speaker from those in power, and it is these poems which this chapter begins by discussing. These poems can, broadly, be categorised into those which create distance through avoidance – and through thereby depriving the perpetrators of agency – and those which create it through confrontation.

### Avoidance

To illustrate some of the ways in which the poems in this group avoid referring to the perpetrators directly, or at all, I will examine a selection of works from three inmates: Gösta Durchham, Franz Hackel, and Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz. These poets have been chosen as many of their works mention perpetrator figures and deal with these in varying ways. For many other inmates, the perpetrators are treated so marginally, or ignored to such an extent, that it would be difficult to discuss their role in the poems, a fact which is in itself significant, confirming how poetry could marginalise or completely exclude figures who were an unavoidable and central part of their daily reality.

Gösta Durchham's poem, 'Der Winkel' (p.275), written in Buchenwald at some point in the years 1939-1942, achieves this distance by redistributing power: the inmates are presented as active agents and the perpetrators are deliberately side-lined.<sup>429</sup> The poet takes a symbol of the inmates' oppression – the coloured triangle they are forced to wear 'zur Schande' – and construes it as a badge of honour. The inmates take ownership of the triangle – 'Wir tragen *unsre* Winkel' (emphasis mine) – and are said to have exchanged everything life offered them in order to wear it. It is the inmates who are the active subjects here. What they have lost is depicted as having been voluntarily sacrificed, rather than taken against their will. There is just one point at which they are the grammatical (indirect) object – 'Man gab sie uns zur Schande' – but this brief placement of the perpetrators as the active agents is weakened by the imprecise, elliptical 'man'. Moreover, this is quickly reversed in the

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<sup>429</sup> Durchham, pp.7-8. The triangle in question here is specifically a red one, worn by political prisoners (including Durchham).



following clause with a defiant 'doch' and the assertion of their pride in wearing the triangle. The sibilant alliteration between 'Schande' and 'stolz' draws attention to this reversal and the inmates' confident defiance.

The fourth stanza then endows the triangle with a meaning beyond shame and oppression. Here, the alliteration of /f/ and /w/ underlines the confidence and pride of the inmates in wearing what has become not only a 'Symbol' but also 'Heiligtum'. This concluding word of the poem sets the inmates' struggle in a new light, one that is not only emblematic but also sacred. The earlier description of the triangles as being formed 'aus rotem heißen Blut, / geopfert für die Menschheit / und für ihr höchstes Gut' is compounded in the poem's final line: the triangle exists because of sacrifice and will directly contribute to the defeat of bondage, tyranny and adversity. Such an elevation of a symbol of shame reveals the significance of the poem in resisting the daily disempowering events and circumstances faced by the inmates. Crucially, this act of resistance is made more powerful by a very deliberate minimising of the perpetrators' power. In this poem, if not in reality, the inmates are the agents.

The perpetrators are also side-lined in Durchham's 'Steinbruchkaleidoskop' (pp.275-280), a ten-page, ten-sectioned poem, which, as the title suggests, presents kaleidoscopic images that reflect views of the quarry from different perspectives.<sup>430</sup> The different sections are separated by dashes and line breaks but connected through the unity of place (the quarry), the consistent use of rhyming couplets, and the repetition of phrases and, sometimes, whole stanzas. Though the poet-speaker adopts different perspectives, the poem focuses predominantly on specific interactions between individual inmates and their overseers.<sup>431</sup> First of interest is his adopting of the passive voice. In the first section of the poem, for example, he describes the inmates' arduous daily routine in the following way: 'Seit den frühen Morgenstunden / wird gerackert und geschunden'. The perpetrators' actions are described, but are not attributed to anyone, thereby depriving them of agency. This use of the passive and its elision of the agent will be discussed more below.

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<sup>430</sup> Durchham, pp.43-53.

<sup>431</sup> The depicted interactions include those between *Kapo* and inmate and are therefore also relevant to the section below on 'Distance from the *Kapo*'.

A more persistent feature of 'Steinbruchkaleidoskop' is the adoption of the voice of the perpetrators – whether in direct speech or an interior monologue – such as in the below cited section:

Links, zwei, drei! Links, zwei, drei!  
Zieht, ihr Hunde! Links, zwei, drei!  
Vorwärts, Schweine! Links, zwei, drei!  
Lustig ist die Kumpanei!  
Schufte ihr, spißt eure Ohren!  
Vorwärts, vorwärts mit den Loren!  
Was, du Drecksack, kannst nicht mit?  
In den Arsch hast einen Tritt!  
Siehst du, wie es geht, du Schwein?  
Haut man nicht, dann schläft ihr ein!  
Dali, dali, he du Schnecke,  
schneller, sonst liegst du im Drecke!  
Links, zwei, drei! Links, zwei, drei!  
Zieht, ihr Hunde! Links, zwei, drei!  
Vorwärts, Schweine! Links, zwei, drei!

Indeed, relating the direct speech of the perpetrators is a feature of many other camp poems. Nader, for example, commenting upon a poem by Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz, notes:

The torturers enter the poem exclusively through their own words and actions – they exist only in the form of verbal and emotional abuse and in quotes. Their presence is limited to their own insulting language and they remain a “foreign” body, an intrusive external presence. [...] The perfidy of the torturers is revealed in their own speech rather than through a narrative account of the abuse.<sup>432</sup>

This argument has a certain validity. Heidi Aschenberg, for example, has written of the frequent use of direct speech in testimonial accounts of the camps in order to convey reality more directly.<sup>433</sup> Thus, the perpetrators' colloquial, pejorative description cited above from 'Steinbruchkaleidoskop' clearly depicts their mentality yet keeps the perpetrators themselves on the outskirts of the poem: we hear their voices but we do not see them. They remain unnamed, and whilst their words are heard and their actions seen, they are never explicitly assigned as the agents. The reader can of course easily make the link to attribute the actions and thoughts to the perpetrators, but the poem presents these, strictly speaking, anonymously. Furthermore, by negating the need for further narration or explicit analysis on the part of the poet-speaker, this mimetic reporting of direct speech helps to protect the poet-speaker from consciously engaging with the perpetrator

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<sup>432</sup> Nader, p.139.

<sup>433</sup> Aschenberg, 'Sprachterror und Sprachbewahrung im Konzentrationslager', p.56.

mentality. It lends an immediacy to the content from which the poet-speaker is nevertheless shielded. In line with this, the first-person pronoun is conspicuously absent from Durchham's poem, protecting the poet-speaker from close contact with the described events.

Here, however, I would expand upon Nader's proposal that the 'perfidy of the torturers is revealed in their own speech rather than through a narrative account of the abuse'.<sup>434</sup> Whilst this is the case for the particular poem he is referring to, many other camp poems which use the perpetrators' speech would require a more nuanced statement. For example, though the linguistic choices in Durchham's poem – terms such as 'Jammerlappen' and 'Hund', for example – can be assumed to be those of the perpetrators rather than inventions of the poet-speaker, they have nevertheless been mediated in order to conform to the poem's formal structure. In this case, and many others, they have been subjected to the poem's strict rhyme scheme and metre. Whilst Nader underlines the distance created through using the perpetrator's own speech, I propose that one must be aware that this is often a speech which has been moulded and adapted by the poet-speaker. Though closer engagement with the perpetrators' words might seem contrary to efforts to establish distance from them, I argue that mediation of this kind furthers the degree of separation: the poet-speaker assumes control of the perpetrators' language and amends it to fit into his own, specific portrayal of their speech, one which is governed by the rules and formal structure of their poem as a whole. In this way, the perpetrators remain confined to their speech, denied of a physical presence in the poem, whilst the poet-speaker gains a measure of control over their words which was lacking in reality.

This strategy is also employed in Kupfer-Koberwitz's 'Laufschritt' (pp.280-281), which consists of six six-line stanzas, interspersed with the following four-line refrain:

„Ich brech dir die Knochen, schlag krumm dich und wund! –  
Laufschritt ! –  
Laufschritt !! – –  
Laufschritt !!! – – – du Hund ! –“<sup>435</sup>

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<sup>434</sup> Nader, p.139.

<sup>435</sup> AKGD, 3336/1-06-3-7.

The stanzas describe the inmates who are tasked with loading and pushing heavy wheelbarrows, and gradually focus on one particular inmate, an eighty-year-old man who is ultimately killed by the gruelling work. The dialogue plays an important role here. The stanzas are narrated in the third-person; the poet-speaker is a passive observer, not a participant. The figures described are types, rather than specific individuals: the only nouns used are 'die Capos', 'der SS-Mann', and 'der Greis', and for the most part there are only pronouns. This detached narrative perspective – that of a third-person omniscient narrator, set apart from those whose suffering he is recording – is assumed by many camp poets (and almost always by Kupfer-Koberwitz), further extending the distance necessitated by the choice to convert experiences into writing. In her discussion of Yvonne Useldinger's Ravensbrück diary, Kathrin Mess likens such a stance to that of a spectator in a theatre:

Ein Zuschauer hat im Gegensatz zu einem Schauspieler eine passive Funktion im Theatergeschehen. Die Rollen des Beobachters und der Agierenden sind hier klar verteilt. Der Zuschauer kann im Normalfall in den Ablauf nicht eingreifen und sollte es auch nicht. Die Handlungen hinter der Bühne bleiben ihm verborgen.<sup>436</sup>

Though Mess bases her argument primarily on diary entries generally, and those of Useldinger specifically (which, whilst containing a small number of poems are predominantly prose), I propose that it also applies to many camp poems.<sup>437</sup> This distanced perspective can also be seen in 'Laufschritt' in the way in which the poet-speaker narrates many of the events with the non-referential pronoun 'es', and presents them as occurring to unnamed characters:

Den Schubkarren schiebt wer jung und wer alt,  
wer zart ist und wer ein Athleth [sic]; -  
der Knüppel regiert, die Terror-Gewalt  
und es stirbt wer um Gnade fleht. –  
Es schreit der SS-Mann, sein Stiefel tritt,  
dazu gibt gemeinen Fluch er uns mit:

Having achieved this detachment, the poet-speaker then uses the dialogue to both establish himself at a moral remove from the perpetrators and make the general more specific. As the poet-speaker's gaze focuses in on the old man, the dialogue, though merely repeated, becomes more shocking. The reader knows now that the words are directed at the most vulnerable amongst the inmates, but the poet-speaker is partly protected from

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<sup>436</sup> Mess, pp.268-269.

<sup>437</sup> This distancing mechanism will be discussed further below, in the section on creating distance from inmates.

the full reality of this by the detached narration and the mimetic reporting of dialogue. When the old man dies in the final stanza, the dialogue changes, reflecting the disappointment of the SS officer:

„Steh auf du Schwein, sonst schleif ich dich mit ! –  
Ich brech dir die Knochen, schlag krumm dich und wund ! – “  
Dann sagt er enttäuscht: “Schon verreckt ist  
Der Hund . – “

The adjective ‘enttäuscht’ is the sole narratorial commentary on the speech and actions of the officer. Even here, it is primarily descriptive, rather than analytic. The poet-speaker merely describes the tone of the man and allows this to speak for itself. This way of directly reporting the thoughts and speech of the perpetrators allows the narrator to implicitly critique them whilst once more protecting him from explicit engagement with these actions. This occurs also through irony.<sup>438</sup> Durchham writes, for example: ‘Krach, ein Schuß – ein Todesschrei. - / Lustig ist die Hitlerei!’ This description reveals and maintains the moral gulf between the poet-speaker and those who would describe such events as ‘lustig’. Paradoxically, through reflecting the mindset of the perpetrator here, the narrator puts himself, as Nader writes, ‘in a position of moral superiority that almost excludes the perpetrators from [his] field of vision, or, at least, from [his] discursive field’.<sup>439</sup> This position of moral superiority is also enabled by the detachment of the poet-speaker’s perspective. Above, Mess described the emotional distance such a perspective created, but it also allows the poet-speaker, set back from the action, to assume a position of superiority as omniscient narrator.

The perpetrators are side-lined to an even greater extent in Franz Hackel’s ‘Buchenwald’ (pp.281-282), written in 1941.<sup>440</sup> Once more the poet-speaker uses direct speech – ‘Sofort die Leichenträger an das Tor!’ – making the description more immediate, but the voice is anonymised to an even greater extent than in the poems mentioned above. The speech is never attributed to a person and is entirely cut off from its source; instead, the poet-speaker focuses on the mechanical device that transmits it – ‘Im Mikrofon lärmt eine Stimme grell’ – and the people who hear it – ‘Zwölftausend Männern bellt der Ruf ins Ohr’.

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<sup>438</sup> The use of irony and other forms of humour will be discussed more fully in the final section of this chapter.

<sup>439</sup> Nader, p.139.

<sup>440</sup> AKGB, 9-95-21. Also printed in *Kunst hinter Stacheldraht*, p.157.

Similarly, in Hackel's earlier poem 'In der Zelle' (December 1938), the perpetrators are not mentioned at all until the final two lines of the poem, when once again an anonymous voice is described: 'Eine Stimme in die Zelle schlug: / Scheisskübel 'raus und Wasserkrug!'<sup>441</sup> In the third and final section of 'Buchenwald', the perpetrators are mentioned only once, and again indirectly, as the elided agents of a passive construction: 'Beim Appell werden Nummern verlesen'. As disembodied voices and elided agents, the perpetrators are disempowered in a way that reflects the disempowerment and anonymity of the inmates, which is the poem's subject. Moll notes a similar strategy in another work from Buchenwald, where the perpetrators are only referred to as 'jene':

Die Täter, Quäler und Folterer werden nicht genannt; das wäre zu real. Die Nennung der Täter als tendentiell [sic] unreal bleibende „jene“ behauptet die Überlegenheit der Opfer. Diese ermöglicht es ihnen, die Täter so gering zu schätzen, daß man es nicht mehr nötig hat, sie bei ihren Namen oder Funktionen gegenüber den Opfern zu nennen. Die ihrer Selbstidentifizierung beraubten Häftlinge stellen sich dar als die, welche ihren direkten Schindern deren Identifikation rauben mittels provozierender Nicht-Nennung. Das Machtverhältnis wird für einen Moment umgekehrt.<sup>442</sup>

In Hackel's poem, where agency exists, it is the property of nature far more than the perpetrators. Indeed, the first section of the poem focuses solely on the surrounding forest and its barrenness. Here nature (fog, wind, snow) is presented as powerful, as the active agent. Though the poet-speaker distances himself from the perpetrators, the poem is not a shield from the daily horrors of camp life. The prevalence of death is not concealed:

Und wer am Morgen noch da war –  
Ist am Abend vielleicht schon  
Vergessen, gewesen.

Von diesem heißt es:  
Ging über den Rost;  
Von jenem:  
Im Steinbruch erschossen.

Though this description is elliptical, thereby protecting the poet-speaker from the full reality and great precarity of his existence, I propose that this acknowledgement of death's omnipresence is made possible by the previous disempowerment of the perpetrators. Having presented nature, and Death itself, as the inmates' adversaries, the poet-speaker is

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<sup>441</sup> AKGB, 9-95-21. (Also printed in Schneider, p.151.)

<sup>442</sup> Moll, p.147.

more easily able to convey other, horrific aspects of camp life without this becoming, as Moll put it, 'zu real'.

In another of Hackel's poems, 'Wer geht weiter' (pp.282-283), the perpetrators assume a greater presence initially.<sup>443</sup> The use of confrontational titles such as those in the first line of the first and third stanzas will be discussed in the section below, but here I am interested in the way in which the poem progresses. Having explicitly named the perpetrators, the poet-speaker adopts a much more abstract approach. The struggle is now between freedom, and lies, meanness and violence. This abstraction carefully distances the poet-speaker from reality and the specific details of those perpetrating his suffering. Moll comments on the similar value of using 'Freiheit' as a personal and collective ideal in another camp poem, though his proposal that this results in one's actual fears and pain turning into 'Belanglosigkeit' is arguably somewhat ambitious.<sup>444</sup>

Though in the second stanza of 'Wer geht weiter' there is a first-person – and therefore more direct – account of the abuse the poet-speaker has suffered, the gaze here is never directly on the perpetrators. For example, it is the cold which harms him in Dachau, in Sachsenhausen an imprecise 'man', and in Buchenwald a shot in the back and a heavy boot. This description again resembles one in the poem mentioned above, analysed by Moll. He cites the following couplet from the Czech theatre collective, 'Bohemia': 'Wir haben kennengelernt, wie Frost und Sonne brennen, / Wie Not, Schläge, Blut und Hunger schmecken'.<sup>445</sup> Moll proposes that this description is comical due to the 'krassen Mißverhältnis distanzierter Darstellung und unmittelbar erlebter, banalster Wirklichkeit'.<sup>446</sup> Once more I take issue with Moll's choice of terms, namely his interpretation of the disparity between representation and reality as 'komisch':

Mit der kühlen Nennung wird die Empfindung geweckt, sich über sich selbst und seine Erfahrungen hinwegsetzen zu können. Die extrem disparate Vorstellung, eine nicht distanzierbare physische Wirklichkeit quasi von außen betrachten und ästhetisieren zu können, obwohl die Betrachtenden als Insassen in dieses Geschehen voll eingebunden sind, macht die komische Wirkung aus.<sup>447</sup>

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<sup>443</sup> AKGB, 9-95-21.

<sup>444</sup> Moll, pp.147-148.

<sup>445</sup> Bartel, p.453.

<sup>446</sup> Moll, pp.146-147.

<sup>447</sup> Ibid., p.147.

Where Moll oddly categorises the couplet as 'Komik', I propose instead that the poet-speaker's narrative stance reveals the necessity of carefully and temporarily distancing oneself from one's circumstances in order to avoid being entirely overwhelmed by them. Whilst there may be a striking incongruence between the impassive narration and the inmates' painful daily reality, this results less in a comic effect and more in appreciation of camp poetry's important role in revealing and enacting self-preservation strategies. This is true also for the poet-speaker's description of his circumstances in the second stanza of Hackel's 'Wer geht weiter'.

It is also interesting to note that in Hackel's poem, the actions of the perpetrators, when described at all, are separated from their person. Indeed, there is almost a fragmentation of the perpetrator identity, in a way that mirrors that of the inmates in other poems: the poet-speaker may describe the voice, the deeds, the physical characteristics (and even, as here in the first and third stanzas, a name for the perpetrators) but these are never brought together and subsequently result in an image that is far less threatening than its reality. Even the somewhat combative title of 'Hitlers Schergen, Himmlers Mördern' is less potent than it might initially appear. Grouping them in this way again strips them of individuality; they are described in terms of their subservience to two figures who, whilst undeniably extremely powerful and dangerous, are nevertheless at a physical distance from the inmates in the camps. Moreover, they do not physically attack the poet-speaker: he falls because he is threatened by them, thereby almost pre-empting an attack, and this in a small way also restores agency to the speaker.

To consider, finally, Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz's treatment of the perpetrators, he too employs many of the avoidance strategies described above to create distance. In the fifteen-stanza long 'Israel' (pp.283-284), for example, in which Kupfer-Koberwitz laments the plight of the Jews, the perpetrators remain on the periphery.<sup>448</sup> For the majority of the poem, it is the Jews who are the active agents. When the perpetrators are mentioned, they are undefined figures: 'Man hat sie hingemeuchelt, / als den Sündenbock für der Deutschen Schmach, / man hat sie ungezählt / getötet und gequält', for example. When in the final section Kupfer-Koberwitz devotes a stanza to the actions of the perpetrators, he maintains vague third-person pronouns, causing the subjects to be defined by their crimes rather than

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<sup>448</sup> AKGD, 3336/1-06-3-7.



by a name. The only title given to the perpetrators here – ‘Christen’ – becomes contemptuous due to the previous and subsequent description of their actions, and the poet-speaker also reveals his contempt by stripping the perpetrators of all other self-assigned titles.

In ‘Sieben Türme’ (pp.284-285), the perpetrators again take a marginal role, being referred to directly only a couple of times.<sup>449</sup> Instead, it is the eponymous towers which assume a much more powerful role, perpetuating the inmates’ misery; similarly, it is the machine guns, not those who wield them, which are responsible for the inmates’ submission. Though the final line describes a guard shooting an inmate dead, even here the power relations are complex. However deplorable the guard’s actions, they satisfy the inmate’s desire to end his life and as such the inmate has exploited the camp hierarchy and undermined the autonomy of the guards. In ‘Sieben Türme’, the camp itself appears more threatening than the perpetrators, and this endowing of inanimate objects with agency is a common theme within the corpus. Notably, there are two inanimate forces which assume the agency of the perpetrators more commonly than any others: hunger and death. I will now briefly explore a selection of poems in which these two forces are personified and presented as the most powerful force with which the inmates must contend.

### *Hunger*

In many camp poems, hunger is more than the absence of sufficient food. Camp poets present hunger as a ravenous presence, an all-consuming creature that devours body, mind and soul. In Kupfer-Koberwitz’s ‘Hunger’, for example, he writes that ‘Hunger frißt uns Gedärm und Gedanken’ and later, ‘der Hunger fraß ihre Seelen’.<sup>450</sup> The language of hunger provides a frame within which poets could interpret their experiences. Often, this takes place in a fairy-tale-like setting, with imaginary opponents, once more distancing the poet from the reality of their circumstances and their oppressors. As Nader argues:

The fantastic setting makes it possible for the poem to avoid calling the perpetrators by their name: SS guards, Nazis, camp guards. That kind of factuality would threaten the fantastic vision – fantastic in the sense of its unrealistic coordinates, fantastic in terms of the speaker’s own sense of invincibility – by exposing the futile banality of evil against which the individual inmate is rendered powerless.<sup>451</sup>

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<sup>449</sup> AKGD, 3336/1-06-3-7.

<sup>450</sup> Kupfer-Koberwitz, *Kette der Tage*, pp.19-22.

<sup>451</sup> Nader, p.82.

Fritz Löhner-Beda's 'Kindermärchen' (p.285), for example, is an expressionist, apocalyptic poem which imagines a fantastic monster (a dragon with a huge mouth, teeth like a tiger, and hooves like a horse) wreaking havoc because of his insatiable appetite.<sup>452</sup> As in a fairy tale, the monster is ultimately defeated, yet crucially this comes about by way of its own behaviour. The 'doch' in the penultimate line introduces the key moment in which the story turns around, as the poet-speaker posits an end to their suffering and the tyranny of the perpetrator. The monster's downfall is its own excessive consumption, rather than an external force. Portraying it as self-destructive in this way reveals the poet's assessment of the perpetrators' behavior and also posits a future in which their defeat is certain (for it will come from within), as certain as a fairy tale's happy ending.

The greed and metaphorical hunger of the perpetrators is also frequently transferred onto inanimate objects in the camps, as in Gösta Durchham's 'Steinbruchkaleidoskop' (pp.275-280).<sup>453</sup> The sixth and final sections are almost identical and describe the machine which the inmates must constantly 'feed' with stones for it to break.<sup>454</sup> The extremely regular metre and rhyme create a strong rhythm which mimics that of the crushing machine. The frequent alliteration and repetition of words also replicate the sound of the machine and the inmates' relentless work respectively:

Es rattert der Brecher tagaus und tagein,  
er rattert und rattert und bricht das Gestein,  
zermalmt es zu Schotter und Stunde auf Stund'  
frißt Schaufel auf Schaufel sein gieriger Mund.

The final rhyming couplet underlines the insatiable hunger of the machine: not satisfied with simply devouring stones, it will ultimately consume the inmates themselves: 'Sie wissen, er frißt nur, doch satt wird er nie, / erst frißt er die Steine und dann frißt er sie'. This section is repeated unchanged at the very end of the kaleidoscope. Crucially, however, it now follows the description of an inmate who works so tirelessly that the machine cannot keep up with him, its appetite finally being sated. The section is then followed by a new six-line stanza. This new stanza echoes the sounds of the machine found earlier in the poem –

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<sup>452</sup> Fritz Löhner-Beda, *Kunst hinter Stacheldraht*, p.171.

<sup>453</sup> Durchham, pp.43-53.

<sup>454</sup> The abovementioned volume contains a section of 'Erläuterungen' in which Durchham explains certain terms used in his poetry. For 'Steinbruchkaleidoskop', he explains: 'Die Arbeit am Brecher war eine der schwersten im Steinbruch, wo ein Verschnaufen beinahe unmöglich war' (p.63).

‘Klick – klack, Hammerschlag, / klick – klack, Jammertag’ – but also provides a glimpse of hope that the day of misery and the rule of the machine (and by metonymic extension, the perpetrators) will come to an end, for ‘morgen ist die Schicksalswende’. Similarly to Löhner-Beda’s tale, with its portrayal of the metaphorical monster’s hunger, Durchham uses his poem to both distance himself from the perpetrators and posit an end to their destructive behaviour.

### *Death*

Just as with hunger, death is frequently personified. Of the forces and objects granted agency within the corpus of camp poetry, death is anthropomorphised most frequently of all. Of course, the omnipresence of death within the camps means that the ways of representing it in poetry are extremely diverse. In this short section I aim to show that death is frequently presented as the only, or the most powerful, agent within the camps, thereby excluding the perpetrators from the inmates’ field of vision.

Camp poets present death as a figure which not only steals life, but which has an autonomous existence: amongst other activities, it sings (‘Das Land stimmt seine Geige / Und mit ihm singt der Tod’), travels (‘der Tod fährt mit dem Transport’), and grins (‘Es grinst der schwarze Tod vom Wächtertum’), revealing its constant, lurking presence.<sup>455</sup> The triple repetition of ‘Tod’ in Kupfer-Koberwitz’s ‘Die Sonne’ underlines its ubiquity: ‘der Tod schleicht mit, der Tod, er naht, / der Tod, er sitzt im Stacheldraht’.<sup>456</sup>

The personification of death also reveals the horror of life in the camps. In Fritz Löhner-Beda’s ‘Sonett auf das Revier im KZ-Buchenwald’ (p.285), for example, encountering death in his feverish dance – ‘Zeitweilig schlägt der Tod die Kastagnetten’ – is presented as preferable to the inmates to remaining alive: ‘Da liegen Fiebernde, von Schmerz zersägt, / Und zittern angstgepeitscht, gesund zu werden!’<sup>457</sup> A similarly surprising presentation of death as a desired figure is found in Georg von Boris’s ‘Hunger’ (p.286).<sup>458</sup> The expected order is entirely subverted here. The inmates are described as crying out for death to take

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<sup>455</sup> AKGD, Georg von Boris, ‘Mein ist die Rache, redet Gott’, 23.486; Kupfer-Koberwitz, ‘Transport’, in *Kette der Tage*, pp.33-34; AKGB, Franz Hackel, ‘Buchenwald’ (1941), 9-95-21.

<sup>456</sup> AKGD, 3336/1-06-3-7.

<sup>457</sup> Löhner-Beda, *Kunst hinter Stacheldraht*, p.152, 154.

<sup>458</sup> AKGD, 23.486.

them, yet in response he calmly asks them to wait and lets them live, the pathos of the poem's first lines now strikingly replaced by the bathos of 'Warte noch' and 'Der Tod lässt uns leben, / Das ist es eben'. Contrast is also found between the short, almost staccato lines, which reveal the stark desperation of the inmates, and the ordered rhyme scheme. 'Das können wir nicht fassen' tells of the inability to comprehend death's tardiness and stands out from the clipped lines preceding it in terms of both content (the attempt to reason and understand, as opposed to dialogue and action) and length. The terseness of lines eight and nine strengthens the sense of puzzlement: death's actions are described but cannot be elaborated upon or explained. Whilst the poet-speaker goes to great lengths, then, to convey the illogical, inexplicable workings of death and the inmate's complex and surprising relationship to it, the exclusion of the perpetrators from his portrayal minimises their power, presenting death's authority as occurring independently of their decisions and actions.

Indeed, I propose that although none of the poems described in this section minimises the horror of the inmates' daily existence or conceals the omnipresence of suffering and death, they all similarly seek to curtail the role of the perpetrators within this. As demonstrated, the means by which this occurs vary: references to the SS may be vague or indirect – through use of the passive voice, elliptical references, and the avoidance of nouns – or completely absent – through the empowering and personification of inanimate objects and other forces, real or imaginary. The high number of poems seeking to side-line or exclude the perpetrators from their line of vision implies the necessity of, and value in, distancing oneself from those in power. Analysing the ghetto poetry of Abraham Sutzkever, Ruth R. Wisse argues that 'in their reluctance to name the enemy, [Sutzkever's] poems are also special acts of aggression, annihilating the foe by denying him existence', and I have shown that such an argument is also relevant to many camp poems.<sup>459</sup>

### Confrontation

Whilst most poets distance themselves from the perpetrators through avoidance, minimising their poetic space and thereby their power, a few inmates used poetry as a

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<sup>459</sup> Ruth R. Wisse, 'Introduction: The Ghetto Poems of Abraham Sutzkever by Ruth R. Wisse', in *Burnt Pearls: Ghetto Poems of Abraham Sutzkever*, by Abraham Sutzkever, trans. by Seymour Mayne (Oakville, Ontario: Mosaic Press, 1981), pp.9-20 (p.14).

means to express their feelings towards their oppressors in a way that would have been impossible – or fatal – in reality. Naturally this made the already dangerous act of writing a poem even more hazardous, for the consequences of discovery would have been even graver. Notwithstanding this risk, some poets chose to refer to or directly address the guards using highly antagonistic language. In this section I will explore the works of a few poets who made this choice and make the original argument that despite the confrontational tone of such poems, they did in fact help to create distance between poet and perpetrator.

Many of the poems which employ invective are written by political prisoners with the aim of stirring up or sustaining a spirit of resistance. Fedor Krutik, a Russian Communist prisoner, for example, writes in his Buchenwald poem, 'Höre, Welt!' (24<sup>th</sup> August 1944): 'Wie Wölfe in finsterner Nacht... / Schlich sich die sadistische faschistische Horde heran'.<sup>460</sup> The poem was originally written in his native Russian, but was translated within the camp, intimating its intended role to bolster the spirits of the poet's fellow inmates.<sup>461</sup> I propose that a number of poetic choices create distance here, and these will be discussed further with regard to the poems examined below: referring to the guards in the third person, the use of metaphor ('wolves in a dark night'), and choosing terms which morally elevate the poet-speaker (and fellow inmates) above the perpetrators.

Let us firstly consider Maria Günzl's 'Ravensbrück' (1940), in which the poet-speaker uses terms such as 'Höllennrotte' and 'Schurken' to describe the guards (pp.286-287).<sup>462</sup> Arrested for her role in the Czech Social Democrat Party, Günzl was deported to Ravensbrück from Lichtenburg concentration camp in May 1939. She was released in 1942 but arrested once more on 1<sup>st</sup> December 1944 due to her resuming political activities. After being put on trial, tortured and sentenced to death, Günzl only escaped execution through the advancement of Russian tanks and the overrunning of the prison building.<sup>463</sup> In her poem, 'Ravensbrück', Günzl tempers the strong terms and is able to remain at a distance from her oppressors by using third-person pronouns and concentrating primarily on the inmates and their

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<sup>460</sup> Krutik, *Kunst hinter Stacheldraht*, p.174.

<sup>461</sup> This poem was mentioned briefly in Chapter One; a brief discussion of the translation of poems within the camps is also found here, revealing the value attached to poetry which transcended national and linguistic differences.

<sup>462</sup> Maria Günzl, *Mitten in tiefer Nacht*, ed. by Elling, pp.94-95.

<sup>463</sup> For more biographical information, see Jaiser, *Poetische Zeugnisse*, p.347.

experiences. Indeed, whilst the terms used for the perpetrators may be strong, they also result in a superficial, almost caricature-like portrayal, which contrasts with the more detailed portrayal of the inmates and their process of grieving. In this way, the SS are de-individualised, thereby reversing the existing power structures in the camp and ensuring distance remains between inmate-speaker and perpetrator.

Similarly, though the poem reveals that a spirit of resistance exists amongst the women, it is portrayed as being a quiet, confident determination to survive the camp and maintain hope, rather than one which would result in direct confrontation with the oppressors. The poet-speaker writes, for example: 'Leise kehrt Hoffnung zurück / in die gequälten Frauenherzen. [...] Züge und Gebärden / der Leidenden sich verhärten! / Mit geballten Fäusten stehen sie jetzt: Zählappell!' Where resistance is described in physical or vocal terms, it remains metaphorical and at a remove from the women. Whilst they remain silent, for example, 'Es schreit das Blut zum Himmel'. Similarly, it is their 'finstre Blicke' which 'schießen wie Blitze auf ihre Peiniger nieder'. The poem enacts a form of resistance, whilst still distancing – and thereby protecting – the women from their oppressors. This distance is hinted at too by the 'nieder' in the above quotation, suggesting they have a superiority which sets them above the perpetrators.

Other poets refer to the perpetrators much more directly, but I propose that here, too, the poet-speakers maintain a necessary measure of distance. Bruno Apitz's ten-stanza 'Krematorium Buchenwald' (p.288), for example, directly addresses the guards using an extremely threatening tone and envisages a day in which they will be judged for their actions.<sup>464</sup> Despite the confrontational tone here, I argue that the poet-speaker creates distance by dismantling his current reality and focusing on the future. This occurs from the beginning of the poem, where the repetition of 'doch' signals that a new, inverted reality is imminent.<sup>465</sup> Using the extended metaphor of fire, Apitz constructs a future in which the present 'mörderische Lohe' will betray the perpetrators. That which they currently utilise will ultimately be their downfall.<sup>466</sup> At present the embers rise in the inmates' 'dumpfes

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<sup>464</sup> Apitz, *Kunst hinter Stacheldraht*, pp.177-178.

<sup>465</sup> As discussed in Chapter One, imagining this future turnaround is arguably of greater importance for inmates with strong political (in this case, Communist) convictions like Apitz. Indeed, the poems I analyse in this section are all written by inmates with such beliefs.

<sup>466</sup> That which the perpetrators have created becoming their own downfall is an image used in other poems such as Ruth Klüger's 'Der Kamin', in which the furnace promises to consume those who built

Schweigen'; these sparks, which fly 'in Nacht und Schweigen' are described, however, as 'verräterisch[en]'. Where now it is the evidence of the perpetrators' murderous deeds which is hidden, and the inmates who are silent, the day will come when the perpetrators must hide.

The poem is significant, then, for giving access to a future which the poet can control, one in which the present reality can be subverted. The direct address using the informal second-person plural 'ihr' (rather than the polite 'Sie', which would be required in the camp), rather than suggesting equivalence or closeness, is the result of the camp hierarchy being inverted within the poem: it is the inmates who will assume superiority. Moreover, this is within the context of an imagined future, one in which the current, significant threat of the crematorium's fire is transformed into a metaphorical weapon which will avenge the inmates. This careful and clever subversion of existing power structures allows the poet to show contempt for the perpetrators and imagine a future in which justice will take place. The real becomes metaphor, the present becomes future, the powerful become powerless. This has the twofold effect of strengthening the inmates in their present reality, whilst also distancing them from it, and from the perpetrators who protract it.

Let us now consider several poems by Gösta Durchham, which adopt a similarly confrontational tone to 'Krematorium Buchenwald'. Above, I discussed those works in which Durchham maintained distance from the perpetrators by excluding them from his gaze. In 'Steinträger', however, he is far less detached: the poet-speaker imagines physically and verbally attacking guards at the quarry, before acknowledging his current (but, importantly, temporary) powerlessness.<sup>467</sup> Similarly, in 'Transportabler Galgen' (p.289), Durchham moves from consideration of his current powerlessness to future revenge.<sup>468</sup> The brisk rhythm, along with the repetition of positive words such as 'fröhlich', 'Begier', 'Pläsier' and 'lustig', contributes to a jaunty tone which is at odds with the content and reveals the inhumanity of the perpetrators. The focus switches back and forth between the gallows and their victims, and the executioners. When in the penultimate stanza the poet-speaker

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it (Klüger, *weiter leben. Eine Jugend* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2012), pp.124-125). It also echoes the downfall of the monster in Löhner-Beda's 'Kindermärchen', described above, where it is destroyed by its own greed.

<sup>467</sup> Durchham, pp.11-13.

<sup>468</sup> *Ibid.*, p.17.

returns his gaze to the executioners, they are addressed ironically as 'Volk der Denker'. This deliberate contrast between the rhyming 'Henker' and 'Denker', well-known since Karl Kraus' usage at the beginning of the century, makes fun of the perpetrators and the pinnacle of their cultural innovation, the rolling gallows. The derisive tone continues into the final stanza with the title 'großer Henker'. When the explicit threat comes at the very end of the poem, then, the power structures have already been reversed. It is now the poet-speaker who is elevated above the perpetrators and taking pleasure in the suffering of others. Both this moral superiority gained through derision of the perpetrators' actions and the jaunty, almost playful tone maintain a distance between the poet-speaker and his oppressors.

In 'Einem deutschen Polizisten' (pp.289-290), the degree of confrontation is intensified yet again, with Durchham specifically naming a perpetrator ('Kriminalkommissar Schott') in the poem's subtitle.<sup>469</sup> The poem illustrates very well the way in which poetry enabled inmates to confront a perpetrator figure whilst simultaneously establishing a detached relationship with that figure which afforded a degree of emotional protection. In the 'Erläuterungen' at the back of his published collection, Durchham describes Schott as 'einer jener Männer, die in der politischen Abteilung des KZ Buchenwald die Verhöre führten'.<sup>470</sup> He then goes on to describe how their relationship began:

Im Laufe meiner Einvernahme, im September 1939, sagte er zu mir, ich sei der größte Lump, der ihm während seiner sechzehnjährigen Dienstzeit als Kriminalbeamter untergekommen wäre. Eine Begründung seiner Behauptung unterließ er. Nach dieser Eröffnung drückte er auf einen Taster, worauf ein Scharführer erschien, der sich im Zimmer zu schaffen machte. In seiner Anwesenheit gab er mir dann eine Ohrfeige. Hierauf entfernte sich der Scharführer wieder und ich wurde von Schott aus dem Zimmer geschickt. Diese Ohrfeige empfand ich als die größte Schmach, die mir im Lager angetan wurde.

That Durchham decided to capture his moment of greatest humiliation in the camp in a poem is of great interest here. His (post-war) prose account of the same incident is much briefer, suggesting the significant and specific role of the poem in recording his emotions and responding to the actions of the police officer. In analysing a poem by Alfred Kittner,

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<sup>469</sup> Durchham, pp.21-22. Given Durchham's attempts to protect his poetry, described in Chapter One, one must consider that this subtitle might have been added only in the published collection, when it carried no risk, or else was likely encoded in some way in the camp.

<sup>470</sup> Ibid., p.59.



'Fünfundzwanzig', which also describes an incident of abuse, Nader comments on the way in which the form of the poem permits such a direct address of the perpetrators:

The "aestheticized", alliterative and rhyming account of the whipping constitutes at the same time a *prise de parole* that reveals the inmate's power to distance himself from the situation and speak of it in controlled verses. The "I" confronts the suffering directly but not without mediation. The form of the poem seems to provide the structure to defy the brutal force of the perpetrators, whose power is depicted as limited, contingent.<sup>471</sup>

Describing the shameful incident within a very regular structure – three eight-lined stanzas with a regular rhythm and rhyme – enables the poet-speaker, like Kittner, to confront his suffering from a distance. Moreover, it enables him to subvert the humiliating circumstances in several ways. The repetition of the rhyming 'nicht' and 'Gesicht' in the second stanza echoes their use in the first, but this second time the negative particle applies to a mistake on the part of the perpetrator, rather than a weakness of the poet-speaker. The 'Gesicht' is still that of the first-person speaker, but here he is being struck by 'dein Deutschland', rather than by the officer's fist. The alliteration in this final line of the second stanza, and the first instance of enjambment, draw particular attention to this claim. The poet-speaker is here attributing a much greater significance to his humiliation than in his prose account. He uses the poem to make sense of the incident, portraying himself as the victim not of a callous individual but of an entire nation.

Having established the symbolism inherent in his abuse, the poet-speaker uses the final stanza to set himself apart from Germany, Germans, and, by extension, the humiliation of his abuse. This most shameful transgression of boundaries is reported by the poet-speaker in a way which enables him to negotiate personal boundaries anew, setting himself apart from Germany with a cleft now 'unüberbrückbar'. The assertion of his separate, Austrian identity also occurs in the prose account, but far more subtly, through Durchham's linguistic choices (e.g. 'Einvernahme' as opposed to 'Verhör'), once more suggesting the additional, necessary protection and confidence afforded by the poem's form. Importantly, the poem reveals that the physical attack has destroyed not a sense of self, but any remnant of 'deutschem Fühlen' within the poet-speaker, implying the attacker is harming his own nation rather than the victim of his attack. This contrasts with other descriptions of physical abuse from the camps, thereby suggesting the significance of the poem in fighting

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<sup>471</sup> Nader, p.150; Kittner, *Schattenschrift*, pp.44-45.

against the loss of self such abuse might easily prompt. Jean Améry's famous discussion of torture, for example, presents the first blow as destroying the victim's trust in the world and annihilating the victim's own self.<sup>472</sup> Here, however, the poet-speaker uses the first blow to strengthen his individual identity and separate himself from the attacker.

Moreover, he portrays the actions of the perpetrator in such a way as to present them as working to his own advantage. That is, their dogged assertion of his Austrian identity serves his purpose of now separating himself from Germany and its people: though sharing the same language, he belongs to a markedly different nation and culture. This strategy – presenting the perpetrators as responding to, rather than ignoring, one's desires – echoes the ending of Kupfer-Koberwitz's 'Sieben Türme', described above, and also Alfred Kittner's 'Fünfundzwanzig', in which the poet-speaker orders the guard to hit him and the guard 'obeys' as it were. Nader describes this as 'an imaginative act of taking control over the humiliating situation. The victim tells the perpetrator what to do, puts himself in the position of initiator of the "exchange"'.<sup>473</sup>

Both Durchham and Kittner also use the poem to minimise their physical suffering, thereby making it more tolerable. Kittner writes that the wounds are easier to bear when the inmates insult (albeit quietly) those inflicting them: 'Wir tragen es leichter, wenn wir still den Namen / Des Schurken fluchen, der uns so verhöhnt'. Durchham writes that the physical suffering inflicted by the police officer was minimal, thereby depriving him of any superiority gained by such abuse:

Was du getan, das tun sie alle.  
Mein Gott, was liegt denn auch daran?  
Ohrfeigen, die erträgt bald einer,  
was ist das schon für einen Mann?

It also implies that the shame of the incident is not due to physical suffering, but moral disgrace, thereby further elevating the poet-speaker above the level of his oppressor. Similarly, in the first stanza, the poet-speaker writes:

Nur eines konnt' ich: dich verachten,

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<sup>472</sup> Jean Améry: 'Mit dem ersten Schlag aber bricht dieses Weltvertrauen zusammen. [...] Er ist an mir und vernichtet mich damit. Es ist wie eine Vergewaltigung' (Améry, *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne*, p.52).

<sup>473</sup> Nader, p.150.

da ich doch wußte, was du bist:  
ein Feigling und ein Scherge Hitlers,  
Herr Schott, ein deutscher Polizist.

The power of the perpetrator is minimised by revealing his cowardice; he is worth nothing more than contempt. Through the poem, the poet-speaker also regains the power to name (and to insult), again subverting the power structures and setting the perpetrators on an inferior level. Similarly, his address, 'ihr Deutsche', in the final stanza, groups his oppressors uniformly together under an umbrella term. This imposition of a de-individualising category reflects the situation in the camps, except, once more, the poem subverts it.

Unlike in Kittner's poem, however, and Durchham's previous poem, the poet-speaker does not envisage taking revenge upon his oppressors. He presents them as inferior, not to enable him to imagine their future downfall but simply to broaden the chasm that separates them. It thereby illustrates the importance of establishing a distance – metaphorically, through poetry – between one's self and one's oppressors. This distance will persist beyond the camps – 'denn niemals werde ich vergessen / den Schlag' – and is implicitly tied up with the poet-speaker's own survival, persisting as long as he lives. Nader writes that, 'In the face of the current state of powerlessness, [Kittner's poem] is a fantasy that takes stock of the situation and promises to subvert it'.<sup>474</sup> In this section I have shown how a number of camp poets – all political prisoners – use subversion to both confront and create distance from their oppressors, and how this often (though as 'Einem deutschen Polizisten' has shown, not always) involves envisaging a future act of justice. As the section below will now show, distancing mechanisms of this kind are not limited to the inmate-perpetrator relationship.

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<sup>474</sup> Nader, p.151.

## Distance from inmates

In this second section, I consider how self-preservation – both emotional and physical – necessarily entailed a measure of distancing, not just from perpetrator figures but also from particular inmate groups. In her study of the significance of culture in the camps, Maja Suderland writes that attempts to preserve one's social identity resulted in 'Gefühlen und Handlungen der Zugehörigkeit, aber auch der Abgrenzung, die als zwei Seiten der selben Sache zu sehen sind: Das eine bedeutet zugleich auch das andere'.<sup>475</sup> Distance, she claims, is as essential as connection for maintaining individuality, identity and agency:

Zugehörigkeit und Abgrenzung waren im KZ für die Inhaftierten deshalb so bedeutsam, weil sie dem erkennbaren Bestreben der SS, die gigantische soziale Masse der Häftlinge bis auf ganz wenige, grobe Unterscheidungen völlig zu nivellieren und zu dehumanisieren, gleichermaßen etwas entgegensetzen konnten. [...] Nur der Rückgriff auf gemeinsame Kultur und Zugehörigkeit, damit aber zugleich auf Unterscheidung und soziale Differenz, war stark genug, diesen „Geruch des Todes“ [Bauman] zu überdecken und „unriechbar“ zu machen.<sup>476</sup>

If establishing distance was about preserving one's self amidst the mass of inmates, how did poetry facilitate this? The previous chapter noted the diverse ways in which camp poems reflected and enacted solidarity and shared experience. Given that, as Suderland argues, connection and detachment cannot exist independently of each other, such acts of solidarity necessarily entail separation (whether deliberate or not) from another group. The particular group singled out as a counterpoint to that of the poet-speaker determines whether the distancing preserves (or creates) a sense of moral superiority – as the poems in the following subsection, 'Preserving identity', reveal – or simply (though just as importantly) enables self-preservation – like those poems discussed below in 'Survival'.

## Preserving identity

In her study of Ravensbrück camp poetry, Jaiser writes that the corpus lacks poems containing

Anklagen oder Analysen hinsichtlich des SS-Personals und des Naziregimes. [...] Nicht oder kaum benannt werden auch soziale Aspekte, sei es in bezug auf Unstimmigkeiten und Spannungen zwischen den einzelnen Frauen oder den nationalen, politischen, religiösen

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<sup>475</sup> Suderland, *Territorien des Selbst*, p.136.

<sup>476</sup> *Ibid.*, p.136, p.138.

Gruppierungen, sei es im Hinblick auf die sehr unterschiedlichen Lagerrealitäten der einzelnen Häftlingsgruppen.<sup>477</sup>

Whilst I agree that other themes are more prevalent within camp poetry than those Jaiser mentions above, there is certainly not an absence of poems – both within my larger corpus and the poems from Ravensbrück – which accuse the perpetrators, as shown in the section above. Moreover, there are a number of poems which focus on the tensions between particular individuals and groups and these will be the focus of this section. Interestingly, however, in line with Jaiser's appraisal, the Ravensbrück poets seem to be more concerned with enacting solidarity than explicitly delineating particular groups, and so the poems discussed below in this section on 'Preserving identity' come from camps other than Ravensbrück.

#### *Distance from the 'Kapo'*

The first group I will examine here is prisoner functionaries, or *Kapos*. Having discussed above many of the strategies by which inmates distanced themselves from the perpetrators, I will now show how many of these are often utilised in the poetic treatment of the *Kapo*. The figure of the *Kapo* occupies a grey area, difficult to categorise neatly as either inmate or perpetrator.<sup>478</sup> Interestingly, more poems centre on *Kapos*, and denouncing their behaviour, than on the guards. This implies the greater physical danger in explicit criticism of the SS, as well as the increased mental risks in letting one's guard down and confronting the oppressor. It suggests, too, the greater need to distance oneself, emotionally and morally, from those who also bear the title of *Häftling* yet whose behaviour is closer to that of the guards, and to thereby maintain one's own distinct sense of identity. Whilst there are many poems which mention and criticise the actions of this particular prisoner group, I will concentrate here on ones devoted entirely to such a task and explore how they achieve this.<sup>479</sup>

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<sup>477</sup> Jaiser, *Poetische Zeugnisse*, p.94.

<sup>478</sup> For detailed discussion of the complexity of the role of *Kapo*, see: Kogon, *Der SS-Staat*; Karin Orth, 'Gab es eine Lagergesellschaft? "Kriminelle" und politische Häftlinge im Konzentrationslager', in *Darstellungen und Quellen zur Geschichte von Auschwitz*, ed. by Norbert Frei, Sybille Steinbacher and Bernd C. Wagner, 4 vols (Munich: Saur, 2000), IV, pp.109-134.

<sup>479</sup> Other poems solely about the figure of the *Kapo* include Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz's 'Der Block' (*Kette der Tage*, pp.12-13) and K. A. Gross' 'Der Capo' (*Sterne in der Nacht*, pp.206-207).

A collection of anonymous poems from Buchenwald contains six which focus on the figure of the *Kapo*.<sup>480</sup> I discussed the sixth of these poems in the previous chapter, as it praises the *Kapo* who behaves honourably. The other five short poems are highly critical in tone, using terms such as 'Rindvieh', 'Lager-Affen', and 'Gangster' to convey their disapproval of, and separate themselves from, the behaviour of the *Kapo*. These five poems, along with Gösta Durchham's 'Einem Kapo' and Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz's 'Der Capo', vary in their length and specificity, yet resemble each other in the following two ways: all seek to establish a clear breach between themselves (including, often, the particular prisoner group with which they identify) and the *Kapo*, and the majority envisage future revenge.

Regarding the first similarity, some poems confidently posit the gulf as unquestionable, whereas others reveal the thought process of the poet-speaker, displaying his consternation as he witnesses the behaviour of his fellow prisoner and struggles to make sense of it. Kupfer-Koberwitz's 'Der Capo' (p.290), for example, begins by describing the right of the *Kapo* ('Recht' is repeated three times in the first stanza) to do whatever he pleases, then asks at the beginning of the second stanza, 'Ist das ein Häftling?'.<sup>481</sup>

The piling up of questions in the second stanza reveals the poet-speaker's incredulity at what he has just described. The final two stanzas take the form of direct speech, as the poet-speaker reassures an anonymous inmate, also struggling to make sense of the *Kapo*'s behaviour. The final stanza is identical to the first and this repetition of the *Kapo*'s power, now in speech, suggests a resignation on the part of the poet-speaker. Whether addressing a specific individual, or simply talking to himself, the poet-speaker seems to have listened to his instruction 'Sei still, Kamerad, das ist unsre Schmach', and externalises his earlier assessment of the *Kapo*. This progression has been enabled by his questioning – 'Ist das ein Häftling?' – which sets up the boundary between himself and the *Kapo*, and his oral answer in the following stanza: 'der gestern Kam'rad war, der gestern noch litt, / schwingt heute den Knüppel und schlägt uns und tritt!' His pronouncement establishes a boundary between past and present, between his former connection to the *Kapo* and the current hostile relationship. Having established this distance, the poet-speaker is more able to recount the behaviour of his fellow inmate.

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<sup>480</sup> AKGB, 9-95-33-43. These poems were also mentioned in Chapter One.

<sup>481</sup> Kupfer-Koberwitz, *Kette der Tage*, p.30.

In the Buchenwald collection, this divide is presented as unequivocal, perhaps due to the differing audiences: whilst Kupfer-Koberwitz's poem appears to be more a means of working through his own personal struggle, the anonymous collection seems more suited to wider distribution, not least because of their brevity, polemical tone, and pronoun usage. Some of the strong terms used to describe the *Kapo* were cited above, but in these poems the predominant means of denigration is by aligning this group of inmates with the perpetrators. Thus, the poet-speaker in 'Den Blockältesten in Stammbuch' (pp.290-291) asks: 'Denn wo ist der Unterschied / Zwischen diesen Blockvandalen / Und dem SS-Mordgeblüt?' and later refers to 'Die SS- und Block-Tyrannen'. Similarly, in 'Auch ein Kapo' (p.291), the only noun used to refer to the specific inmate in question is the pejorative 'SS-Lakai'. The sole poem to actually acknowledge the identity of the *Kapo* as inmate is the four-line 'Zur Beherzigung':

Du bist Häftling und nicht Folterknecht!  
 Das beachte trotz der Kapobinde,  
 Auf dass man nicht, wenn die Hähne kräh'n,  
 Deinen Leichnam in der Gosse finde!

Here, the confrontational, threatening tone seems to allow the poet-speaker enough authority – and thereby enough distance from the *Kapo* – to acknowledge him as a fellow inmate. Rather than this unsettling or corrupting the poet-speaker's own identity, it sets out a certain way of behaving to which the *Kapo* must return, if he wants to keep his life.

The idea of the inmate needing to adhere to a certain code of conduct – one which the *Kapo* frequently breaches – is common. The poems considered in this section are all written by political prisoners and often emphasise the honour in belonging to this category, an honour which distinguishes but also constrains. The Buchenwald collection contains an additional poem, inserted in between the poems condemning the behaviour of the *Kapo* and the final one praising the upright *Kapo*. It is addressed 'An die "Politischen"' (p.291), and its four lines urge them to behave in a way befitting their category, not lowering themselves to the level of the criminal:

Dein Winkel verpflichtet, begreife das!  
 Drum werde uns nicht noch frecher  
 Als jene Sorte von Gangster-Format:  
 Der Schandfleck des Lagers: Verbrecher!

Similarly, three of the poems with a specific addressee make clear that the *Kapo* in question is a political prisoner. *Kapos* were mainly drawn from the group of criminal inmates and so the choice to stress the political identity of the inmate, one shared with the poet-speaker, enables this identity to then be deconstructed. Though both *Kapo* and poet may wear a red triangle, only the latter merits this symbol; for the former, it is misleading and meaningless.

Gösta Durchham's 'Einem Kapo' (p.291) also makes this distinction explicit.<sup>482</sup> The boundaries in the poem are very clearly drawn. Having acknowledged the shared identity in the first two lines, the poet-speaker then uses the remainder of the poem to explicate the ways in which the *Kapo's* behaviour differs from that of a political prisoner. The poet-speaker again assumes a position of moral superiority in order to separate himself from the *Kapo* and thereby protect both his individual and collective political identity. Though the behaviour of the *Kapo* threatens to besmirch this identity, the poem allows the inmate-poet to re-assign roles and identities and thereby set at a distance the one who has 'das Bild von Anti-Faschist / Verzerrt, verpönt und verschandelt'.<sup>483</sup>

The anonymous poem, 'Nachruf für einen Kapo' (pp.291-292), undertakes a similar strategy to Durchham's poem above, setting out the official (and desired) political identity of the *Kapo* before dismantling it. There is, as above, an image of the *Kapo's* lamentable deeds sullyng the honourable identity of the political prisoner: 'Du hast des Häftlings Ehrenkleid / Besudelt und verdreht'. It is the precise nature of the poem which enables the poet-speaker here to distance himself even further from this sullyng: as a 'Nachruf', it should provide a final, solemn record of the praiseworthy acts and attributes of the deceased. Instead, the tone is derisive and irreverent to the very last word. The poet-speaker, having the final word on the deceased's life, is able to record his crimes and pronounce his own contempt. Moreover, the final couplet – in particular, the final line and its ellipses – suggests that the *Kapo's* death may not simply have been desired by his fellow inmates, but perhaps also advanced. As a whole, the poem thereby creates a picture of the poet-speaker (and his fellow political prisoners) as morally and physically superior to the *Kapo*.

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<sup>482</sup> Durchham, p.20.

<sup>483</sup> 'Lager-Affen', AKGB, 9-95-33-43.



Writing the *Kapo's* epitaph empowers the poet, giving him the final word. In a similar way, as mentioned above, the majority of the anonymous Buchenwald poems (four out of six, not including the enigmatic epitaph) envisage, or threaten, future revenge for the *Kapo's* crimes. Most of these poems begin by describing the current power structure, before describing a future in which this is reversed, and the *Kapo* finds himself subordinate to those he currently subjugates. Conceiving an end to one's current suffering is, as discussed earlier, a common feature of camp poetry, helping to bolster the poet-speaker's determination to resist and survive. Imagining revenge on those responsible for one's suffering has also been mentioned with regard to the guards, above. That it is proportionally more common in the *Kapo* poems reveals once more the significance of distancing oneself, morally, from those inmates whose behaviour aligned them more with the guards than with their fellow prisoners.

#### *Distance from morally inferior inmates*

By distancing themselves from the figure of the *Kapo* in this way, poets took control of the categorisation of inmates, defining a particular identity for themselves and for those who differed from them. Their assertion of moral superiority can also be seen in the anonymous collection of poems from Buchenwald, found under the heading 'Der Kampf gegen das Häftlings—Bordell', which overtly endorses the segregation of the prostitutes in the camp brothel.<sup>484</sup> The poems' content suggests they were written to be distributed amongst inmates in order to increase opposition to the opening of a camp brothel in July 1943. They undertake various strategies to discourage fellow inmates from frequenting it: several depict wives, faithfully waiting at home, whilst their weak husbands betray them. Another starts by describing the closeness and unity between a group of prisoners, which is then, as the SS had planned all along, destroyed by the brothel.

Whilst the arguments employed vary, then, it is interesting that the prostitutes are consistently portrayed negatively, despite being fellow inmates, exploited by the SS. Terms to refer to them include 'schamlose Freudenhaus-Säue', 'Flammen' and 'Hurenzimt', and

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<sup>484</sup> AKGB, 9-95-33-43. For more information on camp brothels, see Brigitte Halbmayr, 'Arbeitskommando „Sonderbau“. Zur Bedeutung und Funktion von Bordellen im KZ', *Dachauer Hefte*, 21 (2005), 217-236.

'Hurensau' and 'SS-Dirnen'.<sup>485</sup> In contrast, the poet-speaker and his audience (those included in the first-person plural pronoun employed in these poems) are presented as being morally superior to the women: 'Für das Jauchenfass der Huren / Sind wir aber.. uns zu Schade!'<sup>486</sup> Even if this is simply to deter the audience from frequenting the brothel, it is interesting that the poet chooses this strategy, rather than, for example, depicting the women as exploited and abused. Elevating the moral status of the addressed inmates above that of other groups seems to be of greater significance here.

The anonymous Buchenwald author of 'Vergesse nie!' (23<sup>rd</sup> February 1945) distances himself in a similar way from many of his fellow inmates (pp.292-294).<sup>487</sup> A third-person pronoun is used consistently and the tone is often pejorative, resulting in the poet-speaker adopting the role of a superior, somewhat distant observer, similar to Mess's portrayal of the theatre spectator mentioned earlier. Having briefly mentioned 'die Kinder – Greise – Männer und Weiber' who lose their lives 'in Massen – Massen – Massen', the poet breaks down those who are yet to die into different groups, such as 'Verirrte', 'Idioten' and 'Ächzende'. This separation of inmates into defined yet faceless groups resembles their categorisation by camp authorities. Crucially, however, it is the poet who now has control over which categories are used and who, through the poem, may assign different (if not entirely positive) categories from those of the perpetrators. This restores a degree of agency to the poet: through his spectator's perspective he gains a position of power which frees him from normally unavoidable elements of camp life such as de-individualisation. He is set apart from those he is categorising and can group them as he wills. This aligns with Nader's proposal in his introduction, where he argues that 'few of them [camp poems] present themselves as intimate expression. Often they operate at a level of generality or within a structure that creates a distance between the speaker and the feelings or actions described. The "I" [...] tends to be rather elusive in this particular set of poems [...]'.<sup>488</sup> Though the poems in the previous chapter in particular challenged Nader's proposal about generality and the elusive 'I', his argument has greater validity for the poems in this

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<sup>485</sup> '...Und Deine Mutter, Deine Braut?', 'Auch ein „Erfolg“ des Bordells', 'Etwas Über den Geschmack', AKGB, 9-95-33-43.

<sup>486</sup> 'Etwas Über den Geschmack', AKGB, 9-95-33-43.

<sup>487</sup> AKGB, 9-95-48-59 (49).

<sup>488</sup> Nader, p.10.

chapter. Indeed, as Kathrin Mess argues, a careful detachment from certain individuals was necessary in order to preserve one's own identity:

Die Autorin konnte sich darüber auch vergewissern, dass sie nicht nur Teil einer Masse von Menschen ist, sondern eine individuelle Persönlichkeit. Die Verortung des Ich an den Rand des Geschehens ermöglichte die Sondierung eigener Gefühle und eigenen Leidens als Wahrnehmung fremden Leidens. Diese Abspaltung, die extreme Situationen normalerweise hervorrufen, ist eine Schutzfunktion des menschlichen Organismus.<sup>489</sup>

The final poem to be considered in this section, which also illustrates Mess's proposal above, is Franz Weber's 'An meine „schwachen Amtsbrüder“' (pp.294-295), written in Dachau in July 1942, and also adopting a derogatory tone towards fellow inmates.<sup>490</sup> The poem, consisting of seven quatrains, begins by describing the poet's previous life: the way in which he lived for himself but viewed from afar the addressed 'Amtsbrüder' with trust and devotion, considering them to be 'Menschen von besondrer Art'.<sup>491</sup> The subsequent five stanzas describe the poet's disillusionment as he learns, once they are imprisoned together, of the clergymen's greed and weakness.

The poem is prefaced by a reference to Schiller's *Wallensteins Tod*: '„Ich kann ihn nicht entschuldigen, weh' mir, daß ich's nicht kann“'. Weber then identifies this citation as Max Piccolomini talking to Wallenstein about his father, Octavio. In fact, the citation has been altered from the original, where Schiller's Max Piccolomini directly addresses his father: 'Ich kann dich nicht entschuldigen, ich kann's nicht'.<sup>492</sup> The reasons for this alteration, whether accidental (not having the playscript to hand and misremembering it) or deliberate, are unclear. Regardless of the reason, the use of the citation is interesting. It gives greater weight to Weber's resentment, likening it to one captured by a classic German text. The importance of holding onto one's cultural or literary heritage within the camps has been discussed in Chapter One and is mentioned again in the 'Preserving language and culture' section below. Without going into detail here, I would underline the significance, in terms of preserving one's identity, of drawing on a cultural heritage which connects the poet to life, and his former life, outside the camp.

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<sup>489</sup> Mess, p.271.

<sup>490</sup> AKGD, 42.163.

<sup>491</sup> Though inferences can be drawn from the text, I have no extratextual information about Weber's own identity, profession, and specific relationship to the clergy before imprisonment.

<sup>492</sup> Friedrich Schiller, *Wallenstein: Ein Trauerspiel. II. Wallensteins Tod*, ed. by Karl Breul (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), ii. 6. 1204.

The poem itself further emphasises the importance of bolstering one's identity and establishing a distance from those who threaten it. The poet, having previously been aware of his own weakness and selfishness, had drawn comfort from his belief of the superiority, flawlessness even, of his 'Amtsbrüder'.<sup>493</sup> Now, confronted with the weakness of these same men – with the fact that they are just like him, weak and greedy – the poet-speaker finds the reality too much to bear and must distance himself from it, protecting his illusions in some way. The poet-speaker's inability to comprehend the behaviour of the clergymen can be seen in the piling up of rhetorical questions and exclamations. His apparent need to preserve his notion of humanity's virtue causes him to imagine others who will repent of their sins; these are the so-called 'Gutgesinnten', whose existence seems necessary to preserve the poet's own.

The perpetrators are entirely absent from this poem. The truth about the poet-speaker's fellow inmates, of whom far more was expected, is more disturbing. When the post-speaker echoes the Schiller citation in the fifth stanza with his exclamation – 'Weh' mir, daß ich zu spät errat' – he extends the gravity of his lament beyond an individual grievance, giving it a broader, longer-lasting significance. The reference also helps to distance the poet from those he indicts: the poet-speaker, using the words of another, a literary figure, to record his distress, is to a certain extent shielded by those same words, at a remove from those to whom proximity is now distressing.

### Survival

Having explored several poems which enact distance to preserve one's identity, I will now consider those – the majority – which do so as a means of self-preservation that extends beyond identity to survival. Weber's poem above acts as a bridge between these two categories – which can never be seen as entirely discrete. His distance from the clergy is

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<sup>493</sup> A similar, but less critical, poem by Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz, 'Soutanen fielen', also focuses on the way in which camp life indiscriminately toppled established hierarchies. Kupfer-Koberwitz describes how the clergy imprisoned in Dachau are no longer distinguished by their metaphysical thinking but 'versinken in ihrer äußeren Not, / die Seele denkt nur an Brot und Brot' (Kupfer-Koberwitz, *Kette der Tage*, p.27).

both important for his identity as a 'Gutgesinnte' and also essential to maintain his worldview, his faith in humanity, and subsequent will to survive.

The following section will consider poems which create distance from three groups of inmates – the abused, the hopeless and dying (or *Muselmänner*), and the deceased – and the necessity of this distance for the poet's own continued existence.

### *Distance from the abused*

The previous chapter noted the important use of the inclusive first-person plural pronoun to both reflect and enact solidarity and shared experience. Pronoun usage is, unsurprisingly, just as significant in creating detachment. A small number of poets choose to use only the third person in their description of the inmates, particularly when describing situations of abuse or suffering. Nader has also noted this use of the third person in order to create an illusion of distance between the witness and that which is witnessed. He writes that when witnessing extreme suffering, 'a resolution to the pain seems urgently necessary. The inmates may need narrative resolution in order to avoid succumbing to a defeatist attitude that could easily lead to letting go of the will to live, reducing inmates to the condition of *Muselmänner*'.<sup>494</sup> He echoes Mess's statement, cited above, about the need to adopt a spectator's perspective, in which the 'the players and the action remain external to the speaker'; the poet-speaker 'keeps the humiliation at a distance from himself by referring to "the" (abstract, third-person) inmate who is subjected to abuse'.<sup>495</sup>

In turn, I would also link this to Falk Pingel's exploration of the splitting of one's self into 'eine konzentrationsäre, die leidet, und eine außerkonzentrationsäre, die interpretiert, sich über die erste Person erhebt und dadurch überlebt'.<sup>496</sup> Using the writings of Victor Frankl and Bruno Bettelheim, Pingel discusses this means of distancing (and thereby protecting) one's self from one's daily experiences. The poems discussed in this section reveal how this means of self-preservation was also enabled by carefully setting oneself apart from the suffering of others through one's narrative stance. That is, rather than a concentrationary

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<sup>494</sup> Nader, p.146.

<sup>495</sup> Ibid.

<sup>496</sup> Pingel, p.177.

self who suffers, and a non-concentrationary self who observes and interprets at a distance, the role of the concentrationary self is undertaken by another inmate.

Such strategies are particularly visible in the poetry of Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz.<sup>497</sup> Many of his poems focus on an individual or a group whose suffering Kupfer-Koberwitz witnesses. Whilst occasionally he extends empathy to his subject (normally subtly, implicitly), he deliberately adopts a detached stance for most poems. Often the poem is written entirely in the third person, from the perspective of an observer, not a participant. The poems can subsequently, in Kupfer-Koberwitz's own words, 'das Geschehen wiedergeben, es spiegeln' but without implicating the poet-speaker too closely, thereby shielding him, psychologically, from the full extent of the suffering.<sup>498</sup>

In 'Der Marterpfahl' (p.295), for example, the poet-speaker is close enough to observe the hangings, but nevertheless maintains a deliberate distance from those being hanged.<sup>499</sup> The victim here is, as in many poems by Kupfer-Koberwitz, de-individualised: the poet-speaker writes of 'das Opfer', 'die Arme', 'Des Körpers schweres, ganzes Gewicht' and 'das Gesicht'. This reflects the inmates' treatment by the perpetrators, implies the frequency of such hangings, and also, importantly, protects the poet. The suffering is experienced by an abstract figure, not an individual. There are no first-person pronouns in the seven stanzas. The third-person 'man' in the penultimate stanza – 'und man fühlt es nicht, wenn man an sie stößt' – is the closest the poet-speaker gets to assigning a personal connection to the victims, yet there is still considerable separation between the two: any physical contact between them is meaningless, is not felt, for those who have been hanged are now 'ganz fremd'. Once more, this de-individualisation both reflects the effects of the SS's treatment of the inmates and also protects the poet from the full reality of this treatment: that is, the loss of fellow inmates. This occurs one final time in the last stanza. The anaphora – the repetition of 'zehntausend' at the beginning of the first four lines – reflects the amassing of nameless victims. These victims are then reassigned a measure of agency; in their final moments they are able to perform a small act to convey their scorn for the perpetrators. Significantly, this brief assumption of power – the power to critique, to express their

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<sup>497</sup> This was mentioned briefly in the section above on 'Avoidance', with reference to Kupfer-Koberwitz's poem 'Laufschritt'.

<sup>498</sup> AKGD, Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz, 12th September 1944, 28.740.

<sup>499</sup> Kupfer-Koberwitz, *Kette der Tage*, pp.14-15.

opinion – and the poet-speaker’s reporting of it means he, the poet-speaker, need not intervene to defend the victims. He is able to maintain the established distance whilst reporting both the injustice and the need to punish those responsible for it. This supports Kathrin Mess’s observation that adopting the perspective of a spectator, at an emotional distance from the observed, should not be equated with a lack of feeling:

Da die Autorinnen und Autoren zu den Ereignissen im Lager keine räumliche Distanz aufbauen konnte, versuchten sie, sich für einige Momente emotional zu distanzieren. [...] Diese emotionale Distanz ist nicht gleichzusetzen mit Emotionslosigkeit der Situation gegenüber, sondern als ein Versuch, das Geschehen von außen zu beobachten, zu bewerten, sich in andere einzufühlen, vorübergehend eine souveräne, quasi imaginierte räumlich distanzierte Perspektive einzunehmen.<sup>500</sup>

The prevalence and importance of this attempt, ‘sich in andere einzufühlen’, was demonstrated amply in the previous chapter, where I showed the ability of the poem to restore what Dori Laub has termed the ‘empathic’ or ‘communicative dyad’.<sup>501</sup> Here, though, whilst this chapter’s focus is on creating distance, poems such as Kupfer-Koberwitz’s ‘Der Marterpfahl’ can also reveal an implicit enactment of an empathic link. In this particular example, the poet-speaker implicitly criticises the perpetrators for their treatment of the victims – thereby indirectly enacting solidarity with the victims – whilst maintaining his detached perspective.

This detached perspective, and the deliberate vagueness or abstraction in the victims’ portrayal, seems to become increasingly necessary as the depicted suffering intensifies. Nader, above, writes of the need to maintain a will to survive in order to prevent one’s becoming a *Muselman*.<sup>502</sup> Detachment within poems describing those inmates who can already be categorised as such is subsequently essential for many poets. The relatively low number of poems about such inmates suggests in itself the need to not dwell too long on their condition. The section below will consider the ways in which those poets recording the existence of the *Muselmänner* maintain or establish essential boundaries with these inmates.

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<sup>500</sup> Mess, p.270.

<sup>501</sup> Laub, p.50.

<sup>502</sup> Nader, p.146. For discussion of *Muselmänner* in the camps, see Agamben, pp.41-86.

### *Distance from 'Muselmänner'*

Having discussed the scarcity of first-person pronouns above, I now consider a poem which uses them in order to create distinct inmate groups. Alfred Kittner's 'Die Irren' (August 1942) employs the first-person plural pronoun to establish a clear 'us and them' dichotomy (p.296).<sup>503</sup> The poem follows groups rather than individuals, between which there are clear boundaries, reflected and reinforced by the poem. Despite physical proximity – the two groups are imprisoned in the same area of the same camp – a deliberate mental distancing occurs. The first two lines of the poem reveal this disparity between physical and emotional closeness: the other group of inmates (from the poem, these can be assumed to be *Muselmänner* and will be referred to as such in the rest of the analysis) will, we are told, perish before the eyes of the first group of inmates (the 'wir' of the poem; those who have not succumbed to the plight of the *Muselmänner*). The following line then states that 'we' will not look at 'them', even if they scream. That is, the poet-speaker states that the *Muselmänner* are close enough to see but they have made the deliberate choice to exclude them from their field of vision, even when, or precisely because, they are suffering greatly. Frequently, the syntax reflects this self-imposed boundary. The groups are often mentioned in separate clauses, and in the second stanza this occurs with parataxis, further separating the two groups: 'Sie gehn vorbei, wir lassen uns nicht stören'. Close contact between the two groups is minimal; when it occurs, it is highly negative ('Doch nahn sie uns, geraten wir in Wut'). It is 'einer' who throws rotten scraps to them; the identity of this person is kept vague and therefore does not provide an empathic link between the two groups.

As the poem progresses, the clauses become longer and there are several caesurae, the descriptions of the *Muselmänner* no longer fitting neatly into the lines. Having established the division between the two groups, the poet-speaker now seems more confident in describing the ways in which the *Muselmänner*, 'die Irren', threaten to transgress boundaries. In the final stanza there is one last interaction between the two: here, the word choice seeks to enforce the distinction between them. The 'Gezeter', 'gell' and 'schrill' of the one, contrasts with the 'dumpfen Schlaf' of the other. Here in this final stanza there is reference to the individual victim, 'ein irrer Beter'. The description of his suffering is more subjective and metaphorical in comparison to earlier in the poem, and the effects of this suffering on the poet-speaker's group are also given more attention. In this final

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<sup>503</sup> Kittner, *Schattenschrift*, pp.35-36.



description, the 'irrer Beter', dying of hunger, seeks to embrace his death. Though the *Muselmänner's* existence is now purely physical, the poet-speaker's final description of them incorporates the spiritual ('Beter') and emotional ('umarmen'): this ironic description of the madman embracing his death is unpleasant, increasing the distance between the poet-speaker and the observed and underlining the poet-speaker's choice to carefully place himself on the side of the living rather than the dead.

There is also, at times, a struggle to both separate oneself from the *Muselmann* in order to ensure one's own survival and to also extend a measure of empathy towards them (for, as the previous chapter discussed, the creation of empathic links was also highly important). This struggle is embodied in Armin Freudmann's poem from KZ Kittlitztreben (a satellite camp of Gross-Rosen), 'Der Muselmann' (pp.296-298).<sup>504</sup> In fifteen of the sixteen stanzas in Freudmann's poem, the poet-speaker adopts the perspective of the *Muselmann*, imagining his thought process (and occasionally his speech) as he declines mentally and physically. To illustrate the above-mentioned struggle in 'Der Muselmann', I will consider here the final three stanzas.

This poetic attempt to enter into the psyche of another and to understand their suffering represents a very clear example of empathy, however (in)accurate the imagined interior monologue might be. Sofsky's assumptions, for example, that a lack of 'self-distance' and an 'inner voice' are defining characteristics of the *Muselmann* would call into question Freudmann's imagined interior monologue, yet one must also recognise such assumptions are speculative and thus problematic.<sup>505</sup> One cannot say with certainty what a particular individual was thinking, or capable of thinking; moreover, the poet-speaker is here making a more subtle point than simply commenting on the mental capacities of the *Muselmann*. The poem as a whole can be understood as an empathic link, an attempt to understand another's suffering, whilst also seeking to protect the speaker from such suffering. That is, as an imagined inner voice, it contributes to the poet's psychological health and thereby fights against him potentially becoming like the one he describes. In seeking to understand the condition of the *Muselmann*, the poet is set apart from him by his extant ability to

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<sup>504</sup> Freudmann, *So sang zu mir*. Ebook.

<sup>505</sup> Sofsky, *The Order of Terror*, pp.101-2, pp.201-2.

extend empathy and take part in what Laub and Podell would term an 'imaginative act'.<sup>506</sup>

In their discussion of the value of such acts, they write:

When a person is subjected to a trauma, the only way he can maintain a connection between self and internal other is by exercising an inner capability to shape and order the coercive "facts" that confront him. Art aids survival [...] by widening one's vision and offering alternative perspectives and ways of seeing things.<sup>507</sup>

Thus, in widening Freudmann's vision and helping him to shape the events with which he is confronted, the poem aids the poet's own survival, even as he puts himself in the place of one losing the same battle. Whilst the distance produced by such an act, that which distinguishes the poet from the poet-speaker, may of course not have been intentional, the final stanza certainly represents a deliberate step back. There is a marked return to the position of observer, to one detached from the now deceased inmate, who is ultimately described, sparsely and objectively, as 'den Kadaver'. The poem represents the need for balance, then: the need to create empathic links to prevent one's own decline, but also to maintain a certain distance, to not lose oneself entirely in the fate of others and preserve one's own determination to survive.

#### *Distance from the deceased*

A similar tension – the need to reconcile closeness and distance – is found in poems which focus on the deceased. To illustrate this, I will consider a poem written in 1944 by the Austrian political prisoner, Antonia (Toni) Bruha following the suicide of a friend in Ravensbrück.<sup>508</sup> Bruha was arrested for her resistance activities in October 1941 and deported to Ravensbrück in autumn 1942, where she remained until liberation. Assigned to work in both the *Zuschneiderei* and as a 'Revierläuferin', she was able to save the lives of many women in the infirmary.<sup>509</sup> In the first quatrain of her poem, 'Manchmal fährt weit draußen ein Zug', the poet-speaker begins by describing far-away, unreachable things outside, 'hinter Draht und Mauer' (p.298). For the next four stanzas she then addresses an anonymous 'du'. The first mention of this addressee occurs in the short clause, 'und du bist tot'. After this declarative however, the poet moves on to ask the addressee questions

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<sup>506</sup> Laub and Podell, p.997.

<sup>507</sup> Ibid.

<sup>508</sup> AKGR, RA-LAG 18. A footnote reveals the poem's context (i.e. the friend's suicide).

<sup>509</sup> For more biographical information, see Jaiser, *Poetische Zeugnisse*, p.335 and Bruha's autobiography, *Ich war keine Heldin*.

(‘Fühlst du’s nicht?’), to imagine her encouraging speech (‘Ich weiß alles, was du willst sagen: / “Durchhalten! [...]”’) and to describe her in the present tense (‘Du bist tapfer, groß ist dein Mut’). In this way, she (re)enacts the presence of her now deceased friend. In comparison to her friend, however, the poet-speaker describes herself as ‘mutlos’ and as having lost any desire to be free. The intensity of her physical condition prevents her from seeing any end to her suffering: ‘doch ich hab’ blutende Hände; / heute schleppe ich Steine am Gut, / hab’ Hunger und seh’ gar kein Ende!’

The final stanza emphasises the poet’s feeling of weariness, as she describes having played her part ‘im Kampf’ but now being unable to wait any longer. There is here a change in the final two lines from the address of the second person to that of a third person: ‘Man möchte ihr vieles, ja vieles noch sagen, / doch früh lag ihre Leiche am geladenen Draht’. Moreover, the verb ‘lay’ contrasts sharply in its passivity with the imagined or remembered speech earlier in the poem, in which the friend encouraged the inmate-poet to actively persevere, ‘Kopf hoch’. This contrast reflects the sharp loss felt by the poet-speaker and her sense of discouragement. The courageous friend who told her never to lose heart has ultimately been unable to do so herself. There is no mention of how the friend came to die; this is simply implied by her proximity to the electric fence. We know that the poem was written in response to the friend’s suicide, but this is never made explicit within the poem. The small degree of power the friend assumed by taking her own life is therefore overlooked, intensifying the sense of passivity, powerlessness and despondency which pervades the final quatrain of the poem.

Whereas the ‘doch’ of stanza four contrasted the courage and encouragement of her friend with her own despondency, it now, in this final stanza, acknowledges the full extent of the rift between the two women. In this way, with its progression from the immediacy of ‘du’ to the distance of ‘sie’, the poem mirrors, or even enables, the poet’s mourning and the gradual recognition of her loss. The impersonal ‘man’ may represent Bruha’s desire to show how deeply her friend will be missed and that there are many others in the camp who would wish to talk to her, suggested also by the repetition of ‘ja vieles’. It might also provide a way for Bruha to distance and protect herself from the full reality of what she has witnessed. Indeed, the length of the final lines and the number of words packed into them suggests a difficulty in expressing and condensing all she desires to say in two lines of a

poem. The use of alliteration ('lag', 'Leiche', 'geladenen') draws attention to the key words within this final, lengthy clause: the 'du' whom the poet has been addressing is now recognised as being but a corpse.

The previous chapter explored the many poems and many ways in which empathic links were enacted between the living and the deceased. The importance of this closeness for the psychological health of the poet-speaker has been discussed. Poems which could be discussed in the equivalent section in this chapter – establishing boundaries between the poet and the deceased – are far fewer in number, yet it is necessary to acknowledge their presence and the role, albeit smaller, they too play in the poet's self-preservation. As with the poem above, the distancing is rarely absolute; more commonly, the poet-speaker recalls their previous closeness with the deceased before then employing a distancing strategy to conclude.

The following section will consider a number of other distancing strategies employed within camp poetry which seek to protect the poet-speaker from the reality of various aspects of camp life, including, but not limited to, abuse and death. Here the emphasis is less on separating oneself from a particular individual and more on protecting oneself from the implications of succumbing to daily life in the camps more generally.

## Distance from daily reality

### Idylls and illusions

In some camp poems there is not simply manipulation or transformation of one particular negative aspect. Moll writes of the 'zeitweilig völlige Loslösung von der eigenen materiellen Realität' that some poets seek through their writing.<sup>510</sup> This complete detachment occurs in two main ways: either the poet's existence within the camp is transformed to such an extent that it no longer resembles its material reality, or the focus is directed entirely on the world outside the camp. This latter choice was explored in the previous chapter as it frequently secured a connection with an individual (or individuals) from one's former life. Whilst it achieved distance from one's current existence, then, I propose that the connection achieved was just as significant. However, for those poems in the former group, in which the situation within the camp is transformed, or displayed only very selectively, establishing a (temporary) boundary seems of greater importance.

Unlike Moll, however, I propose that a 'völlige Loslösung' from one's reality occurs more rarely than one might expect. Surprisingly few poems seek to completely exclude the poet's current suffering; those which do achieve this primarily through concentrating on the beauty, harmony and rhythms of the natural world. Though not numerous, these works reveal the need to create as great a distance as possible between the poet-speaker and their present reality, and nature is subsequently often assigned what Jaiser calls a 'zauber- bzw. märchenhafte transzendente Kraft': 'Bemerkenswert sind die dichterische Ausgestaltung einer Ruhe, des Innehaltens in einer Bewegung und die Anspielungen auf eine paradiesische Welt'.<sup>511</sup>

Herbert Morgenstern's thirteen-line poem, 'Wenn dann der wilde Flieder blüht' (p.299), for example, fits this description, containing no details that would situate it within Buchenwald.<sup>512</sup> The poem consists of just two sentences. The first uses natural imagery to describe the inmates' feelings. The second consists of seven short assertions. The asyndetic accumulation of these simple declaratives, along with the poet-speaker's many claims to

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<sup>510</sup> Moll, p.158.

<sup>511</sup> Jaiser, *Poetische Zeugnisse*, pp.96-97.

<sup>512</sup> Herbert Morgenstern, *Kunst hinter Stacheldraht*, p.139.

their eternal validity, results in a sense of confidence that is independent of the poet's current circumstances: regardless of these and the actions of humanity, the passage of time, and the return of spring, will continue forever. This eternal perspective temporarily elevates the poet-speaker above the camp and the precarity of existence there.

Most poems which seek to establish a boundary with one's daily reality, however, do so only partially. However idyllic the poetic scene, there is usually at least a trace of the poet's material circumstances. This could point to the difficulty in completely excluding one's experiences in the camp, as well as the need to not lose oneself completely in fantasy.<sup>513</sup> Below, I will consider several poems by Fritz Löhner-Beda, which illustrate very well the various ways in which a (permeable) boundary could be established with one's material reality. Indeed, all but one of the poems Löhner-Beda composed during his four-year imprisonment in Buchenwald depict a world within the camp which appears significantly distanced from his daily reality.<sup>514</sup> This occurs in two main ways: selection and transformation. Moll focuses on this former strategy, choosing Löhner-Beda's 'Ich bin im Wald gesessen' (p.299) to explore the way in which the poet-speaker deliberately focuses his vision on particular aspects of his surroundings which, according to Moll, play little to no part in his daily suffering.<sup>515</sup>

Moll's argument, however, is somewhat simplistic, inconsistent, and unjustly critical. He writes, for example, that Löhner-Beda is seeking to mislead the reader about both the time and place of the poem's origin:

Das Verschweigen geschieht aber nicht nur, indem verräterische Schlüsselbegriffe vermieden werden, das ganze Gedicht wird in seinem Duktus, in seiner schwärmerischen Naturdarstellung zurückversetzt in eine literarisch schon historisch gewordene Situation, deren epigonale Nachfolge sogar schon vorüber ist. [...] Es versucht in der Irreführung des Lesers in der räumlichen und zeitlichen Bestimmung des Gedichts auch sein kulturelles und geistesgeschichtliches Umfeld aktiv und vollständig zu verschleiern. Das Gedicht ist somit auch seine eigene Leugnung. Es verleugnet seine materiellen Entstehungsumstände, es suggeriert die Vorstellung einer zeit- und raumunabhängigen Idylle.<sup>516</sup>

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<sup>513</sup> The potential dangers of this were mentioned in Chapter Two, with reference to Pingel, p.178.

<sup>514</sup> The exception is Löhner-Beda's poem from Winter 1940, detailing the suffering of those in the infirmary. Löhner-Beda, 'Sonnett auf das Revier im KZ-Buchenwald', in *Kunst hinter Stacheldraht*, p.152, p.154.

<sup>515</sup> Moll, p.159; Löhner-Beda, *Kunst hinter Stacheldraht*, p.138.

<sup>516</sup> Moll, pp.161-162.

I propose instead that, rather than seeking entirely to conceal the poem's historical context, the poet-speaker both uses the natural world as a temporary refuge whilst also hinting at the reality behind the idyll. Thus, I agree with Moll's earlier assertion that Löhner-Beda has 'eine Idylle entworfen, die Elemente der stofflichen Realität, Gegenstände aus der Natur einfängt, ohne aber einen Naturvorgang oder einen momentanen Naturausschnitt beschreiben zu wollen'.<sup>517</sup> That is, whilst the described scene may have been visible within the camp (the quarry would have afforded such a view, free of the usual markers of the camp environment such as barbed wire and watchtowers), one should not necessarily assume that Löhner-Beda is simply seeking, through his poem, to represent the camp's natural environment. His personification of the sun, for example, represents not just its positive vibrancy, but a desire or need to seek solace and companionship in an environment less hostile than his usual surrounds in the camp. Similarly, the choice of adjectives and nouns – 'sanft', 'süß', 'Duft', 'Ruh' – reflects not simply the natural beauty of the scene but the distance the poet-speaker is seeking to establish from his current existence.

This implicit tension between the seemingly idyllic descriptions of nature and the poet-speaker's reality becomes, at times, more pronounced. The complete exclusion of his daily reality seems to be impossible or unsustainable. Thus, the first line – 'Ich bin im Wald gesessen' – cannot simply be described as a dreamy idyll; 'Wald' has immediate negative connotations given the poet's current location. Similarly, the final line – 'Und Blätter schauen zu' – contrasts with the playful tone of the previous one. This image of being watched, albeit by natural elements, is unnerving and hints (if only indirectly) at reality. A final, important phrase to consider is the poet-speaker's assertion: 'Ich habe nichts gefühlet / Als Duft und tiefe Ruh' –'. Taken together, the two lines would seem to express an idyllic ease. The line break, however, creates a pause which draws attention to the poet-speaker's lack of feeling and implies a more sinister reality behind it. A similar contrast occurs in the first stanza: 'Hab' alle Welt vergessen / Und war so recht allein'. That is, whilst the poem's first two lines set up a carefree scene, which would lend the third line – forgetting the rest of the world – a similarly dreamy tone, the stanza's final line suggests that this exclusion of all others, of another world, is not wholly positive; the natural idyll described is entirely contingent on the shutting out of all other people and places. This results in a solitude and

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<sup>517</sup> Moll, p.159.

emptiness ('Und war so recht allein', 'Die Zeit war süß und leer', 'Ich habe nichts geföhlet') which reveal the fragility of Löhner-Beda's vision: the presence of others (people, feelings, places) would undoubtedly fracture his idyll. The poem therefore cannot simply be described, in Moll's words, 'als intensiver, aber verkitschter Wunschtraum', despite its 'formalen Leichtigkeit' and 'naiven sprachlichen Verspieltheit'; nor can it be described as the 'extreme Gegenteil dessen, was man real erlebt'.<sup>518</sup> Instead, it reveals the necessity of temporarily escaping into another world whilst also implying the cost (isolation and emptiness) and limitations (the unavoidable connotations of reality) of doing so.

Other poems also evidence a difficulty in completely excluding the poet's present reality. Often, they seek to maintain a distance from this reality by constructing a hierarchy of experience, in which experiences of nature, of peace and new life, are elevated above those of pain and suffering.<sup>519</sup> This difficulty in entirely concealing one's current suffering can be seen also in those poems which transform, rather than downplay the poet's suffering, transporting it into a fantastic environment. Several of Löhner-Beda's poems do so, namely 'Apokalypse', 'Kindermärchen' (discussed above, with regards to the perpetrators), 'Der Häftling', and 'Vision'.<sup>520</sup> This fantastic transformation of their suffering does not so much lessen it as it does distance the poet-speaker from it, allowing them to describe what otherwise might evade description. 'Apokalypse' (pp.299-300), for example, gives a measure of meaning to the poet-speaker's experiences: they are interpreted, as the title alone reveals, as the result of apocalyptic circumstances in which the devil and his horsemen have taken control and the world, in its 'starrem Schweigen', is powerless to resist.

The expressionist poem, unlike 'Ich bin in Wald gesessen', allows Löhner-Beda to convey the full gravity of the situation – 'Die Zeit ist nicht zum Spaßen' – yet he can do so without directly confronting the specific details of his imprisonment or those responsible for it. The sunshine in 'Ich bin im Wald gesessen' is described as playful, adding to the relative harmony of the depicted scene. Here, the sun is shining because the devil is preventing the

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<sup>518</sup> Moll, p.159.

<sup>519</sup> See, for example, Ferdinand Römhild, 'Silbern umwoben erwacht die Welt', in *Kunst hinter Stacheldraht*, pp.138-139.

<sup>520</sup> Löhner-Beda, 'Apokalypse', 'Der Häftling', 'Kindermärchen', 'Vision', in *Kunst hinter Stacheldraht*, p.159, pp.167-168, p.171, p.173.



clouds from crying. That he is doing so with his 'Schnabelschuh' appears an odd image, suited to expressionist poetry. It presents a caricature of the devil, comparable to a medieval depiction of the apocalypse, which sets the poet-speaker at a double remove from his circumstances, having changed the temporal as well as geographical setting. However foreboding the tone, then, and however inevitable the arrival of the horsemen and the suffering they bring, the poem (with its regular rhyme scheme and stanza structure) succeeds in concealing the poet-speaker's physical reality (if not the extent of his suffering) and thereby offers temporary protection from it. At the end of Löhner-Beda's 'Der Häftling', the poet-speaker also depicts the devil as his opponent, though here the encounter ends more favourably:

An mir beißt der Teufel die Zähne sich aus.  
Ich fühl' es: Ich komm' aus der Hölle heraus!  
Ich warte!

Nader comments that the personified devil (and death, earlier in the poem) are

more agreeable counterparts in the fantasy, more acceptable enemies or obstacles. One can also say that the nouns "devil" and "hell" more accurately characterize the inmate-speaker's perception of the perpetrators and of the situation than the language of the Nazis, than the terms the Nazis used to refer to themselves and to the camp.<sup>521</sup>

The fantastic setting therefore also helps to erect boundaries by enabling individual expression and communication that does not rely on the language of the oppressor.

The poems discussed in this section – both those using idyllic and apocalyptic imagery – all have in common their attempt to separate the poet from their suffering. They also, for the most part, evince the limitations of such an attempt. Such limitations are not only temporal, as Moll claims when he describes the impermanence of the poem's ability to distance. Within the poems themselves, there are frequently clues – how implicit these are varies considerably – to the poet's material reality, as Jaiser observed in her study of Ravensbrück poetry:

Die Konstruktionen einer „Ersatzwelt“ ermöglichen kein reales Entkommen, die Kraft von Erinnerungen und Phantasien greift zu kurz, und in den Gedichten findet sich häufig das Bewußtsein, wie relativ alle Bemühungen letztlich sind. [...] Die Gedichte verhelfen dem biographischen Ich dazu, die im Konzentrationslager unheimlich gewordenen Erfahrungen

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<sup>521</sup> Nader, p.82.

des Raumes und der Zeit zu benennen und Gegenrealitäten zu schaffen, doch schärfen sie zugleich auch das Bewußtsein für die reale Zwangslage.<sup>522</sup>

This 'Gratwanderung' Jaiser describes should not, however, be seen as a failing of the poetry; instead, I propose that the distance created by such poems, however imperfect or temporary, is nonetheless significant in its ability to provide the poet with a measure of control over a situation which they were otherwise powerless to influence.<sup>523</sup>

## Silence

The creation of an idyllic or illusory world within poetry is closely bound up with silence for it requires the circumstances of the composition to be disguised, if rarely completely concealed.<sup>524</sup> Moll calls this silence 'die zweite Dimension des Gedichts'; he argues it is this 'aktive[n] Verschweigen[s]' which enables and creates the idyll.<sup>525</sup> Contradicting somewhat his assessment of Löhner-Beda's 'Ich bin im Wald gesessen', he goes on to propose that, when one is aware of the poet's intended silence, one can uncover this 'Prozeß des Verschweigens' in the images they employ.<sup>526</sup> Indeed, I would propose that silence plays a role in every camp poem, not just in the idyllic or illusory poems described above, in the sense that the poet must decide what they communicate and what they omit.<sup>527</sup> No poem can, or seeks to, communicate the full reality of the concentrationary universe.

In this section, then, my intention is not to discuss the debated role of silence in bearing witness to the Holocaust; the debate over the representability of the Holocaust and the necessity of silence therein has been discussed in the introduction and is of little relevance

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<sup>522</sup> Jaiser, *Poetische Zeugnisse*, p.98.

<sup>523</sup> Ibid.

<sup>524</sup> Silence plays a role, of course, in all poetry, not just that from the camps. Peter Haidu calls it the 'necessary refuge of the poet': 'Silence is the antiworld of speech, and at least as polyvalent, constitutive, and fragile.' Haidu, 'The Dialectics of Unspeakability: Language, Silence, and the Narratives of Desubjectification', in *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the "Final Solution"*, ed. by Saul Friedländer (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp.277-299 (p.278).

<sup>525</sup> Moll, p.160.

<sup>526</sup> Ibid.

<sup>527</sup> We are, of course, dealing with only partial silence in this section. Complete silence would result in no poem at all, which for the camp poets was not a viable choice. Without attempts at using language to convey their experience of the camps, the poet risked this experience becoming forgotten.

here.<sup>528</sup> My analyses so far have shown that it was both possible and desirable for inmates to represent aspects of their experience, and thus my focus now is on the ways in which they worked with silence in order to, once more, distance themselves from their daily reality. By analysing a handful of poems from the camps, I will consider a few of the many ways in which inmates used silence within their poems. What did they choose *not* to say? What role do negation and ambiguity play? This kind of ‘active silence’ is entirely different from the failure of language and the so-called unspeakability of extremity. I therefore reiterate that my aim here is not to judge how ‘successfully’ inmates represent the unspeakable, but to explore some of the ways in which poetry assisted them in giving a presence to absence whilst protecting them from those things which would destroy their hope and will to survive.

Let us now examine a few poems in order to see how they incorporate silence and thereby create distance from particular experiences, whilst also pointing to their existence. Hasso Grabner’s ‘Essenausgabe’ (pp.268-270) was mentioned in the previous chapter in regard to extremity’s implication in the everyday, and the blurring of the boundaries between life and death.<sup>529</sup> The two men accepted the dying man’s proposal of carrying him between them after his death in order to receive an extra portion of food. Despite the undeniably shocking nature of the story captured within the poem – Moll calls it the most radical camp poem he has found – it is notable that the poet-speaker’s description never strays from an external, superficial description of the event.<sup>530</sup> The process of the third man’s death is not described; there is a smooth transition from him conveying his wishes as a dying man to his being dead: ‘Und war tot. / Als müßt’ es so sein’. The physical details of extermination are avoided; the poet refrains from describing in concrete terms what Jean Améry refers to as the complete ‘Verfleischlichung’ of a person – that is, their reduction to ‘only a body, and nothing else besides that’ – and thereby distances himself from such an experience, whilst not completely concealing its existence.<sup>531</sup> Similarly, Eva Lippold, describing the murder of a

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<sup>528</sup> For further discussion of the significance of silence within Holocaust poetry as a whole, see: Elaine Martin, *Nelly Sachs*; Jean Boase-Beier, *Translating the Poetry of the Holocaust: Translation, Style and the Reader* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2015).

<sup>529</sup> Grabner, pp.25-29.

<sup>530</sup> Moll, p.242.

<sup>531</sup> Améry, *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne*, p.52; Améry, *At the Mind’s Limits: Contemplations by a Survivor on Auschwitz and Its Realities*, trans. by Sidney and Stella Rosenfeld (New York: Schocken Books, 1990), p.33.

fellow inmate in Ravensbrück, writes, 'hat sie das Dunkel des Todes verschlungen'.<sup>532</sup> Whilst 'verschlungen' conveys the force with which her comrade was taken away, it omits any precise details about her death. Nowhere in the rest of the poem does Lippold reveal how or why the woman died.

In his writing on pain, Améry suggests that certain experiences in the camp – here, torture – may not be conveyed through language and that silence is therefore the only possible response:

The pain was what it was. Beyond that there is nothing to say. Qualities of feeling are as incomparable as they are indescribable. They mark the limit of the capacity of language to communicate. If someone wanted to impart his physical pain, he would be forced to inflict it and thereby become a torturer himself.<sup>533</sup>

Because a language for pain so often evaded the person experiencing it, camp poems describing extreme suffering almost always describe that of other people. As Nader writes, 'the experience of torment and humiliation is referred to – pointed to, not rendered in its particulars – and then set in a context that gives it some kind of meaning, a particular relation to (positive) life processes', thereby seeking to undo, in Elaine Scarry's words, pain's 'shattering of language' yet 'without delving into the details of the experience of physical torture'.<sup>534</sup>

Language describing the most painful of experiences is therefore very often elliptical, euphemistic, or deliberately vague. In another poem by Hasso Grabner, 'Appellplatz Buchenwald' (March 1940), for example, we find the lines, 'Haben wir Buchenwald-Soldaten / Andere Dinge schon in uns ersäuft' (p.300).<sup>535</sup> Preceding this citation, there are brusque commands to march and keep time. There is then an unexpected full stop at the end of the fourth line. The caesura it creates draws attention to the sentence that follows. It is ambiguous and discordant, the verb 'ersäufen' sitting awkwardly beside its active subject and its very imprecise object. 'Andere Dinge' is here reminiscent of imprecise terms such as 'törichten Sorgen' and 'alten Wunden' in Ferdinand Römheld's 'Silbern umwoben

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<sup>532</sup> AKGR, Eva Lippold, 'Aus der Kampf/Der Wald von Ravensbrück', RA-LAG 18A.

<sup>533</sup> Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, p.33.

<sup>534</sup> Nader, pp.133-134; Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p.5.

<sup>535</sup> Grabner, p.30.

erwacht die Welt' (mentioned in the previous section), yet even more is left unsaid in Grabner's description of the inmates' suffering. The only intimations of the reality behind his words are the appearance of Buchenwald in the title and the verb's subject, and the strength of the verb.

The second stanza also contains ambiguity: 'Alles Zaudern und alle Taten / Pflanzen sich in der Tuchföhlung fort'. The experiences behind this statement are not made explicit in the poem. Once more, it is only context – here, the occurrence of 'Buchenwald' and all it connotes – which gives further meaning to this sentence, which hints at how 'Tuchföhlung ist / Viel mehr als ein Wort'. The poem conveys the existence of experiences but does not describe them in detail or even name them. Moll argues that this is due to such experiences evading speech:

Das Gedicht sagt nichts aus sich heraus Plausibles, Nachvollziehbares, sondern behauptet nur Resultate als quasi-Fakten, ohne darauf hinzuweisen, worauf diese Resultate sich gründen. Das Gedicht ist somit im wörtlichen Sinn dem sprachlichen Verständnis verschlossen. Es demonstriert in der Weigerung, Dinge, Ereignisse, Kausalitäten oder Folgerungen zu berichten, auf denen die resultierenden Behauptungen beruhen müssen, um verständlich zu werden, eine Hermetik, wie sie für die „conditio inhumana“ charakteristisch ist.<sup>536</sup>

Whilst I propose this 'Weigerung' is not always, contrary to Moll's persistent argument, a result of an inability to translate experience into language, and is instead at times a conscious decision on the part of the poet to avoid doing so, the use of silence erects a (or protects the) boundary between the inmate and extreme suffering, and simultaneously hints nonetheless at its existence. The presence of silence, the presence of absence, is seen particularly clearly in 'Typhus' by Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz (pp.300-301), in which he documents the ravages of an outbreak of the disease in Dachau but, as above, gives very few details of the physical decay.<sup>537</sup>

The poet repeats the same two quatrains underneath the headings '1943' and '1945', changing just one detail in the two versions. The first line of each version is deliberately ambiguous in its pronoun usage. We do not yet know whom the poet-speaker is addressing, nor who is creeping through the camp, though from the title we can surmise the latter is typhus itself. The second line continues the anthropomorphism of the disease,

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<sup>536</sup> Moll, p.243.

<sup>537</sup> Kupfer-Koberwitz, *Kette der Tage*, p.23.

presenting it as a mysterious guest in the camp who has an intimate relationship with its inmates: 'sein Kuß läßt die Stirne erglühn'. Here there is a dramatic irony in the choice of words: 'Kuß' suggests a tenderness which is altogether lacking in reality. There is an acquaintance, certainly, as the disease is a familiar presence in the camp, but the image of typhus kissing the inmates belies their fate. The poet-speaker warns the man twice to be on his guard as he 'sah den Tod mit ihm [Typhus] ziehn!'

The second quatrain then distances itself from this personification of the disease and its companion, death. The personal pronouns, notably the direct second-person address, disappear and in their place appears a more objective description of typhus, with much more impersonal imagery – the disease hangs over the camp 'wie Gewitter'. Its arrival, presence and departure are all mentioned, but its effects on the inmates are not. Only the final line intimates the cost: 'waren 200 Betten - - - leer'. Whilst this laconic image avoids detailing the deaths of two hundred inmates, it is striking for its pithiness, and the pause before 'leer' compounds this. It suggests an inability to comprehend the ravages of disease and death: though their arrival and departure can be chronicled, the poet cannot, or does not seek to, find words for that which took place between the two events.

The image of empty bed after empty bed becomes all the more poignant in the poem's final line, the only line in the second section to differ from its equivalent in the first. '200 Betten' is replaced by '12000 Betten', and the change of just the number draws attention to the magnitude of this figure. Where twelve thousand deaths are difficult to conceive in abstraction, the image of twelve thousand empty beds is somewhat easier to imagine and quantifies an otherwise inconceivable loss by giving presence to the absence caused by death. In this way, Kupfer-Koberwitz's indirect description of death both encapsulates the inability to find words adequate to the magnitude of loss and also makes concrete the result of the epidemic.

Moreover, the three dashes after the number of beds create a pause that is significant in compounding the sense of anticipation but also signalling the existence of the unsaid. Kupfer-Koberwitz makes frequent use of ellipses and dashes in his camp poetry; indeed, they feature in almost every poem intimating that whatever is being said, there is much that remains unsaid, by choice or compulsion. In his poem 'Kette der Tage', for example, he

writes: 'So stampft jeder Tag unser Ich zur Form, / zum nichtssagenden Dutzendstück: ...'.<sup>538</sup>

Drawing attention to that which is unspoken gives it an unavoidable presence in the poem, whilst the silence cloaking it keeps it at a distance from the poet-speaker.

Indeed, Peter Haidu has called the unsaid 'the essential element of discourse'.<sup>539</sup> His discussion of silence serves to counter arguments that its prevalence in camp poetry is due to the unspeakability of the Holocaust. He proposes instead that silence is not simply due to a failure of language, but that it

resembles words also in that each production of silence must be judged in its own contexts, in its own situations of enunciation. Silence can be a mere absence of speech; at other times, it is both the negation of speech and a production of meaning. At times, it has to be overcome, and for the same reasons the effort is made to index a "beyond" of language in full recognition of the fact that language is not to be transcended; silence is one of the ways in which we make sense of the world [...]. But silence is enfolded in its opposite, in language. As such, silence is simultaneously the contrary of language, its contradiction, and an integral part of language. Silence, in this sense, is the necessary discrepancy of language with itself, its constitutive alterity.<sup>540</sup>

In this short section I have sought to show a few of the uses of silence in camp poetry. It is impossible to explore every use for, as Haidu argues above, they are as varied as the speech acts which contain them. Instead, I have shown the ways in which silence could create or maintain a measure of distance from one's daily reality, whilst acknowledging that the purposes and effects of silence are far more wide-ranging. Haidu goes on to mention several linguistic structures which hint at the presence of the unsaid:

The traditional disciplines of language have amply recognised the interdependence of the said and the unsaid. Structures like elision, irony in its multiple forms, apostrophe, apophasis, and praeterition not only recognise the existence of the unsaid but define linguistic structures of representation which ground the said in the unsaid, making the unsaid the essential element of discourse.<sup>541</sup>

The role of many of these structures has, or will be, considered within this chapter. In concluding this section, then, I underline once more the prevalence of silence in camp

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<sup>538</sup> Kupfer-Koberwitz, *Kette der Tage*, pp.39-40.

<sup>539</sup> Haidu, pp.278-279.

<sup>540</sup> *Ibid.*, p.278.

<sup>541</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.278-279.

poetry; its use extends beyond the small number of examples in this brief section into the majority of poems in the chapter.

### Preserving language and culture

We move now from a discussion of silence to a discussion of language. Heidi Aschenberg has commented on the existence of ‘Sprachterror’ and the resultant need for ‘Sprachbewahrung’ within the camps.<sup>542</sup> The so-called *Lagersprache* has been studied in detail by Aschenberg and others such as Esther Kilchmann and Wolf Oschlies.<sup>543</sup> This camp vernacular, a mix of German prison jargon, SS military jargon, and terms from other languages, was a ‘simplified system of communication born of necessity’.<sup>544</sup> Aschenberg notes, too, that ‘die sprachlichen Kontakte im Lager waren von der unmenschlichen Situation geprägt und mit Brutalismen, mit ordinären Verwünschungen und Ausrufen gesättigt’, and later refers to it as ‘depraviert und reduziert’.<sup>545</sup> Prisoners often used official SS terminology, for example, simply because the reality of a concentration camp could not be expressed in another way.<sup>546</sup> Consequently, poems became, for many inmates, a means by which they could distance themselves from the speech of the camps – both that of the perpetrators and that of the inmates – and thereby from their imprisonment there. For inmates of nationalities other than German, the choice to write in their native language would automatically distance them from the language of their oppressors. For the poets considered in this thesis, distance from their identity as inmates could nonetheless be achieved by particular linguistic choices – choosing to write in a high register, rarely used in

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<sup>542</sup> Aschenberg, ‘Sprachterror und Sprachbewahrung im Konzentrationslager’, pp.49-67.

<sup>543</sup> See, for example: Heidi Aschenberg, ‘Sprachterror. Kommunikation im nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager’, *Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie*, 118 (2002), 529-571; David Gramling, ‘An Other Unspeakability: Levi and *Lagersprache*’, *New German Critique*, 117 (2012), 165-187; Esther Kilchmann, ‘Gebrochen schreiben. Die Verwendung des Deutschen bei Primo Levi, David Rousset und Jorge Semprún’, in *artefakte: Holocaust und Zweiter Weltkrieg in experimentellen Darstellungsformen in Literatur und Kunst*, ed. by Esther Kilchmann (Cologne: Böhlau, 2016), pp.217-234; Wolf Oschlies, ‘“Lagersprache”. Soziolinguistische Bemerkungen zu KZ-Sprachkonventionen’, *Muttersprache*, XCVI (1986), 98-109.

<sup>544</sup> *Communication Problems and the Language of the Camp* (display board), (KZ-Gedenkstätte Neuengamme, Hamburg) (viewed 2 February 2018).

<sup>545</sup> Aschenberg, ‘Sprachterror und Sprachbewahrung’, pp.51-52.

<sup>546</sup> For an extensive glossary of these terms, see Martin Weinmann, ed., *Das nationalsozialistische Lagersystem* (Frankfurt a.M.: Zweitausendeins, 1990), pp.IX-LXXXVIII.



everyday speech in the camps, for example – or literary references which connected them to their previous lives and previous identity.<sup>547</sup>

In Ferdinand Röhild's 'Der Flüchtling' (Spring 1942), for example, there is a clear avoidance of the language of the camps (p.301).<sup>548</sup> The poem tells the story of the brutal punishment of an inmate who had attempted to escape. Röhild's description of the murder is lengthy, and he also expresses several times how little the inmate is worth in the eyes of his masters: 'Er war ja viel weniger als ein Hund, / Ein Geschöpf, kaum wert zu vernichten', for example. Unlike many other poets who described such a scene, however, Röhild refrains from using the language of the perpetrators.<sup>549</sup> Their speech and actions are carefully mediated by him, reported in his own words, avoiding any colloquial, pejorative terms. Thus, we find:

Man sagte, er werde nun aufgeknüpft  
Und sollte am Galgen büßen.

Und man fand der entrüsteten Worte viel;  
Denn er hatte dazu noch gestohlen.

Röhild's relative prestige within the camp is made clear in a poem from the same period, 'Ein Morgen' (Spring 1942), discussed in the previous chapter.<sup>550</sup> Though Röhild's poems reveal that he frequently witnessed the abuse of other inmates at first hand, he often sought to maintain a distance from this abuse by composing poems which eschewed the camp's vernacular in favour of a register more suited to his life before imprisonment. 'Der Flüchtling', whilst relating the physical and verbal abuse of the inmate in relatively stark terms, avoids depicting the total 'Verfleischlichung' of the man, like those poems described in the previous section. Instead, Röhild resorts to traditional poetic features such as simile – 'Wie ein Vogel war er dem Käfig entschlüpft / Wenn die Frühlingsdüfte ihn grüßen', for example – which distract from the senselessness of the man's suffering and the once more unspeakable details of physical extermination. This usage of simile identifies the poem as a

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<sup>547</sup> For more discussion on the specific difficulties and decisions facing native German-speakers within the camps, see Nader, pp.3-8; Esther Kilchmann, 'Gebrochen schreiben'.

<sup>548</sup> Röhild, *Kunst hinter Stacheldraht*, p.154.

<sup>549</sup> See, for example, the poems of Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz (some described above, e.g. 'Der Marterpfahl' and 'Ein Pole') in which the poet-speaker directly cites the verbal abuse of the perpetrators.

<sup>550</sup> Röhild, *Kunst hinter Stacheldraht*, p.160.

creative act, a mediated piece of writing.<sup>551</sup> Moreover, the choice of image – a bird attempting to flee his cage – helps also, in its almost triteness, to anchor the poet to his previous existence, to a cultural heritage in which such an image might be commonplace, and describe relatively commonplace events.<sup>552</sup> Here, then, I do not employ ‘trite’ negatively: whilst others have used such a label for camp poetry derogatively, I use it simply to reflect the ‘ordinary’ nature of the simile, but do not propose that this makes it less effective. On the contrary, I argue that its ordinariness makes it of greater help to the poet, rooting him in its stability. Similarly, later in the poem, the man’s struggle is depicted in noble terms, as him having sought to defend his freedom. Whether this is meant ironically or not, the choice to present the situation in terms relating to ‘Freiheit’ and ‘Herrenrecht’ sets it apart from the often senseless and arbitrary reality of the struggle for survival. Once more, the poet is carefully in control of the way in which devastating events are framed.

The poem’s final stanza contains another image, that of night personified, mourning the deceased man. Presenting the night as a benevolent figure, grieving for the inmate, can be attributed to the poet’s desire to give the deceased the honour he deserves but will not receive within the camp. The metaphor also serves to once more distance the poet-speaker from the horror of what he has just witnessed; night, as an intermediary, is able to undertake that which the poet-speaker may not feel able to, both because of the constraints of the environment and also the potential risk in directly confronting and accepting, emotionally, what he has seen. The poet-speaker’s use of register helps to further distance him from the situation: whilst the whole poem has been composed in formal language, the poet now, in this final metaphor, chooses particularly elevated words such as ‘vernahm’ and ‘Gram’ (further emphasised through the rhyme). These compound the solemnity of the event and the act of mourning, and also, importantly, help to distance the poet-speaker from the depravity of both the camp and the language of those within it.

A similar distancing strategy occurs in Kupfer-Koberwitz’s ‘Gestreiftes Kleid’ (p.302), discussed in the previous chapter.<sup>553</sup> Here, the poet-speaker also eschews the language of

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<sup>551</sup> The similar effect of the very regular rhythm, rhyme, and structure will be discussed more in the section on form in the following chapter.

<sup>552</sup> The criticism of camp poetry’s lack of innovation with regard to imagery is discussed in the ‘Critical Research’ section of the introduction.

<sup>553</sup> AKGD, 3336/1-06-3-7.

the camp, favouring archaic vocabulary (e.g. 'Gewand des Knechts' to describe the prisoner uniform) and an old-fashioned word order (e.g. subject/predicate inversion). He also, as Nader notes, interprets his situation according to 'the nineteenth-century classical humanist tradition, [in which] the poet must be an individual, an artist, and a thinker'.<sup>554</sup> Such an individual should, accordingly, 'be far removed, in his ideal world, from everyday concerns and all the more so from humiliating conditions such as those imposed on people in the Nazi camps'.<sup>555</sup> Using vocabulary, syntax, and philosophies from an earlier time period enables the poet-speaker to interpret his suffering whilst assuming a less vulnerable position in the past.

As mentioned above, literary references also helped to connect inmates to their former lives and so distance them from the daily reality of the camps. I discussed the reference to Schiller in the earlier section on establishing distance from inmates, and also refer back to Chapter One, in which I described the great efforts inmates took in order to sustain and participate in their cultural heritage. Here, my focus is specifically on literary references within the poems and the role these played in distancing the poets from the physical reality of their existence. To explore this, I will examine three poems which take as their subject one of Germany's most famous literary figures, Goethe: Heinrich Steinitz's 'Goethe', of which there are two versions, and Karl Feuerer's 'Goethe und der Buchenwald'.<sup>556</sup> The geographical location of Buchenwald and the renown of Goethe mean it is not especially surprising that the writer should feature in poems from the camps. Indeed, imagined encounters with Goethe by Buchenwald inmates are not limited to these three poems. In Jorge Semprún's article, 'Buchenwald: 1944-1945 und danach', for example, he writes:

In Buchenwald habe ich manchmal geträumt, daß Goethe, unsterblich und olympisch, mit einem Wort: goethisch, weiterhin auf dem Ettersberg spazierging, in Begleitung von Eckermann, diesem distinguierten Trottel. Es hatte mir, nicht ohne eine gewisse intellektuelle Perversität, gefallen, die Gespräche zwischen Goethe und Eckermann über das Konzentrationslager Buchenwald auszumalen. Was hätte Goethe zum Beispiel an einem

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<sup>554</sup> Nader, p.86.

<sup>555</sup> Ibid.

<sup>556</sup> Other literary figures also feature in camp poems. The poetry of Rilke, for example, was frequently recited in Ravensbrück, and Cläre Rupp wrote a poem inspired by Rilke to a fellow inmate, Yvonne Useldinger, during a stay in the infirmary in October 1944. It bore the dedication: 'Yvonne, dies ist nicht von Rilke, sag mir später, ob es Dir gefällt' (Jaiser, *Poetische Zeugnisse*, p.32, p.275; AKGR, Slg CJ/1-3).

Dezembersonntag gesagt, wenn er auf seinem Spaziergang durch die Allee der Adler die in das Eisentor des Lagers geschmiedete Inschrift entdeckt hätte: *Jedem das Seine?*<sup>557</sup>

This question – what might Goethe have said or done in response to Buchenwald? – is considered in the three poems from the camp discussed below, though the answers differ considerably between the two poets. Let us firstly consider the two poems by Heinrich Steinitz, both simply entitled ‘Goethe’ (pp.302-303).<sup>558</sup> It is interesting that Steinitz was so preoccupied by the figure of Goethe and his relevance to his own circumstances that he composed two sonnets about him. We do not know any more details about these two sonnets – which, for example, was composed first, and whether one was meant to replace the other. Both evince a number of similarities, however, which can help in determining the purpose of choosing Goethe as the protagonist of a poem.

Both poems address Goethe directly, the poet-speaker adopting the position of observer as Goethe and Eckermann hike nearby. Though the two works begin with picturing Goethe’s earlier walks in the area, neither remains a flight into the past as the final stanza of each considers Goethe’s reaction upon approaching the camp. There is thus a similar progression in each poem: the initial stanzas, were they to stand alone, would represent an idyll or illusion similar to those described in the above section. The poet-speaker enacts a connection to a significant figure from his cultural heritage and transforms the setting of the camp into the setting of creative inspiration and beauty: phrases such as ‘erfrischt von Herrlichkeiten’ and ‘Bilder, die Dir wie im Reigen kommen’ in the first version and ‘tiefste Melodien’ and ‘Der Wald [...] sah [...] / Deine Liebe sich zum Werke runden’ in the second. This natural idyll is compounded by religious terms such as ‘fromm’ and ‘heilig’ in the first, and the presentation of Goethe as a divine figure, revered by the poet-speaker, in the second: ‘Mir warst Du Gott in vielen Weihestunden’.

Like many of the idylls described earlier, this idyllic presentation does not, however, remain undisturbed. The pair come across the camp and here, for the first time, the behaviour of the protagonist seems to deviate from the poet-speaker’s expectations or hopes of him. In the first version, there is no cry of horror; Goethe’s eyes pass over the inmates inside and

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<sup>557</sup> Jorge Semprún, ‘Buchenwald: 1944-1945 und danach’, *Goethe Jahrbuch*, 112 (1995), 29-37 (pp.32-33). See also, for example, Bruno Apitz’s description of his sculpture, ‘Das letzte Gesicht’, carved from the felled ‘Goethe-Eiche’ (Staar, p.62).

<sup>558</sup> Steinitz, p.6.

there is just a murmur to Eckermann, 'Die armen Menschen dort'. Similarly, in the second, there is just a whisper in place of a shout of indignation, and Goethe's speech is even more condensed: 'Arme Menschen dort'. The exclamations and questions in both final stanzas reveal the poet-speaker's expectation that such an important figure would have intervened in some way. The final couplet in the first version (omitted in the second) makes explicit the poet-speaker's disappointment, explained in the final line: as in the second version, Goethe has now been elevated to the status of God. His withdrawal is attributed to his being 'gottgleich': his lack of intervention is explained by his divinity.

What is Steinitz seeking to achieve through this presentation of Goethe? The poem may represent an attempt to make sense of the conflict between camp and culture, past and present. The progression from natural idyll to disappointment and desertion could reveal a sentiment of betrayal on the part of the poet, having been abandoned by the culture and tradition (and by extension, the nation to which these belong) which he had once so revered. Through the poem, the poet-speaker is both confined to the camp – he observes Goethe from the camp and in turn is one of those whom Goethe's eyes pass by – and also escapes it through imagining Goethe's hike through the surrounding countryside, thereby temporarily adopting an outsider's perspective. Similarly, the poem both enacts a connection with Goethe and then also separates the poet from him, as he fails to intervene in the prisoners' fate. Such a distance may be necessary for the poet; it posits a wariness about his previous identity and cultural heritage and a need to express its limitations instead of simply seeking refuge in it. The omission of the final rhyming couplet in the second sonnet suggests this need to establish distance; the personal response to Goethe's lack of intervention is missed out. The poet-speaker's reverence of the protagonist has already been stated and there is no need to further unveil his pain at the figure's betrayal. In omitting this, Steinitz truncates the traditional sonnet form, thereby representing perhaps the failure of the interaction between camp and culture. Similarly, the second version appears much more controlled and contained, not just because it has lost the final emotive couplet. The many instances of enjambment in the first sonnet, along with the anaphoric 'Und' in three consecutive lines and one instance of a mid-line caesura, suggest a burst of emotion and lack of reflection which contrast with the more measured response of the second.

Heidi Aschenberg has proposed that one function of the use of literary quotations by camp inmates is 'Schutz der eigenen Identität im Lageralltag'.<sup>559</sup> Though we are dealing here with the appropriation of an author, rather than the use of quotations, this focus on self-preservation seems to be key in the poems by Steinitz, as he separates himself from a previous cultural identity and the vulnerability this now engenders. Karl Feuerer's poem, 'Goethe und der Buchenwald' (pp.303-304), is very different from the above two sonnets, yet I propose here too that this need to preserve one's identity also plays a role.<sup>560</sup> The poem consists of fifty-one lines, without stanza divisions, and, despite its length, was by some means distributed within the camp in 1944.

Perhaps because of the differing audiences, with 'Goethe und der Buchenwald' being written for other inmates to read, the poet employs a more playful, light-hearted tone, and his presentation of Goethe, whilst far from reverential, is much more optimistic than Steinitz's. The poem is narrated from a third-person perspective and lists various unpleasant aspects of camp existence, the majority of which are depicted flippantly or humorously, concealing the reality of these experiences. Goethe is transported into the present and, unlike in the sonnets, is imagined inside the camp. The following eight lines illustrate well the tone of the whole poem:

Scheissetragen ist sehr beliebt,  
Weil es starke Muskeln gibt,  
Goethe freute sich ohne Frage  
Auch über den Duft der Kläranlage...  
Lagerleben – „lustig“ Leben,  
Nur mehr zu rauchen müsste es geben,  
Ja, mit dem Rauchen wirds immer schlimmer,  
Umso mehr rauchten ringsum die Trümmer.

The first four lines deal with the removal and treatment of sewage in the camp, notoriously arduous and unpleasant jobs. Here, however, the poet-speaker jokes that 'Scheissetragen' is popular because it gives strong muscles and asserts that Goethe would also like the aroma of the sewage treatment area. His subsequent alliterative description of camp life as "'lustig" Leben' is clearly intended humorously, but the term also highlights the reality of the camp by being so obviously erroneous. The poet-speaker's only complaint – again,

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<sup>559</sup> Aschenberg, 'Sprachterror und Sprachbewahrung', p.60.

<sup>560</sup> Karl Feuerer, 'Goethe und der Buchenwald', in *Augenzeugenbericht des Häftling Nr. 738 im KZ Buchenwald 1937-1945. Die Leben des Buchenwaldhäftlings Alfred Bunzol 738*, ed. by Alfred Michael Andreas Bunzol (Bad Langensalza: Rockstuhl, 2013), pp.157-159.

humorous – is the shortage of anything to smoke. His subsequent assertion of the increasing gravity of the situation ‘mit dem Rauchen’ extends the joke; given the setting of the poem, the use of ‘rauchen’ also has deeply negative connotations. Whilst the poet-speaker is overtly bemoaning the lack of smoking material, inmates in Buchenwald would likely, with the three-time repetition of smoke, be mindful too of the nearby crematorium.

The rest of the poem continues in this vein, presenting light-hearted observations which hint at a much darker reality. Unlike Römheld’s poem earlier in this section, this poet embraces colloquial language and camp jargon: Goethe is imagined to ‘Zebra anhaben’ (to wear the striped uniform of the camp) and to be thin ‘wie ein Muselmann’, for example. The poet-speaker also refers to camp-specific places (e.g. ‘Gustloffwerk’, ‘Sonderbau und DAW’) and even a particular individual, Dr. Eisenbart. This is juxtaposed with regular references to Goethe and occasionally his writing. The poet-speaker instructs the listener, for example, to think about ‘berühmte Goethezitate [...] wenn Du bist im Bade’ and paraphrases the famous citation from Goethe’s ‘Götz von Berlichingen’ (‘Er aber, sags ihm, er kann mich im Arsch lecken’): the poet-speaker instructs, ‘Biete, wie einst Götz so barsch, / Deinem Feind den nackten Arsch...’. Expressing contempt for the guards through the use of a well-known citation from their own cultural tradition (and one they share with the German-speaking inmates) gives the poet-speaker a temporary position of authority, reversing the hierarchy of power.

Overall, this somewhat lengthy poem uses the figure of Goethe to several purposes. Above, I cited Heidi Aschenberg’s statement about one effect of using literary quotes. She proposes that this usage has in fact three key effects: ‘Anknüpfen an kulturelle Traditionen der zivilen Welt, Schutz der eigenen Identität im Lageralltag und, besonders wichtig, Einbindung des Einzelnen in eine solidarische Gemeinschaft durch Rekurs auf ein gemeinsames kulturelles Wissen’.<sup>561</sup> She goes on to also mention ‘ein [...] Abrücken von der erlebten Realität’ as another effect.<sup>562</sup> My analysis of the poem above has shown ways in which all of these occur through the poet’s appropriation of Goethe. I propose also that employing a literary figure in this way is also more complex than merely citing an author’s work and has effects beyond the four mentioned by Aschenberg. The incongruity of the

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<sup>561</sup> Aschenberg, ‘Sprachterror und Sprachbewahrung’, p.60.

<sup>562</sup> Ibid.

confrontation between camp and culture (the latter represented here by the figure of Goethe) results in humour but also a kind of *Verfremdungseffekt*, which distances (and thereby shields) the listener or reader from the full reality of the camp. The poem also helps to encourage, and encourage resistance, not only through its use of humour, but by imagining Goethe as a fellow inmate (not someone at a distance, as in Steinitz's sonnets) who would also seek to resist the oppressors. We are told, for example, that he would 'allen Gewalten zum Trotz sich erhalten', that he would deceive Dr. Eisenbart in order to save himself, and would compose 'ein neues, großes Gedicht' about Buchenwald.

The poem succeeds, then, in reappropriating a significant figure of German culture and using this figure to various aims, the majority of which seek to encourage the audience and temporarily distance them from their suffering. The use of humour is clearly central to the poem's success in this regard, creating distance in many ways, not least by making a revered figure an object of light-hearted jokes. The following section will consider the widespread use of humour in camp poetry in more detail.

## Humour

Humour has long been recognised as a defence mechanism, a means of coping with traumatic circumstances by distancing oneself from them. The role of humour in concentration camps has been studied previously, both generally and in particular cultural forms, such as drama, art, and jokes.<sup>563</sup> In this section I will consider a small number of poems (out of the many possible examples) which use humour in order to distance the inmate-poet and any listeners from their physical reality, thereby helping to prevent their being overwhelmed by it. Some camp poets, for instance, employed humour that was entirely unrelated to the inmates' imprisonment. The unknown author of 'Ach, wenn ich doch schon Großmutter wär', for example, wrote the poem as a gift for a fellow prisoner in

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<sup>563</sup> For a discussion of the role of humour generally, see: Michael Hellenthal, *Schwarzer Humor: Theorie und Definition* (Essen: Blaue Eule, 1989); Renate Jurzik, *Der Stoff des Lachens: Studien über Komik* (Frankfurt a.M: Campus, 1985) and for a brief overview of the role of humour in the camps, see: John Morreall, *Comic Relief: A Comprehensive Philosophy of Humour* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), pp.119-124. For discussion of jokes, see: Jaiser, *Poetische Zeugnisse*, p.210. For humour in art: Stephen Feinstein, 'Art from the Concentration Camps: Gallows Humor and Satirical Wit', *Journal of Jewish Identities*, 1.2 (July 2008), 53-75. For humour in plays: Lisa Peschel, *Performing Captivity, Performing Escape: Cabarets and Plays from the Terezin/Theresienstadt Ghetto* (New York and London: Seagull, 2014).



Ravensbrück.<sup>564</sup> The poet-speaker here addresses a young woman who is yearning to be a grandmother. Amidst the encouragement and advice the poet-speaker offers, she jokes that in her next life the young woman will be a grandmother of ninety-nine grandchildren, a role which would cause her to regret her current yearning. Light-hearted quips such as these are found in many poems, and whilst humour of this kind would also help to distract, comfort, and distance the listener from their current circumstances, my focus here is on those works which use humour to confront the reality of the camps, yet succeed also in establishing distance from this reality. As Jaiser writes:

Das Lachen stellt eine Loslösung aus der Erstarrung, eine (physisch sich vollziehende) positive Erschütterung dar. Erfordert es einerseits, sich in die katastrophale Situation hineinzusetzen, so ermöglicht es andererseits, den Bann der Erstarrung zu brechen und sich gerade dadurch zu distanzieren. Die Gedichte, die als ein Lachen über die oft grotesk anmutenden Situationen des Lager-Lebens angesehen werden können, stellen eine der letzten Möglichkeiten dar, den Mut nicht zu verlieren.<sup>565</sup>

Consequently, writing about the effects of Karl Schnog's writing and performing in Buchenwald, Eugen Kogon declared:

Deine Satire, gegen die übelste Abart der Schergen Hitlers bei unseren illegalen Veranstaltungen von dir vorgetragen, hat uns damals mit befreiendem Lachen erfüllt. Sogar Wilhelm-Busch-Verse gaben Dir Gelegenheit, den „Führer“ als das darzustellen, was er war: ein leerer Sack, der sich mit Körnern füllte, ihnen aber weiszumachen suchte, daß er allein es sei, der sie zu einer Volksgemeinschaft mache.<sup>566</sup>

'Goethe und der Buchenwald', described in the previous section, is one such poem which provokes laughter about many of the 'oft grotesk anmutendedden Situationen des Lagerlebens'. Its jokes about the sanitary facilities (or lack thereof), for example, create an ironic distance between the poet and the camp, temporarily minimising the horrors of the latter. Moll argues that this distance, this 'Wahnvorstellung, über den Verhältnissen der Haft zu stehen oder stehen zu können' is necessary, 'da nur so die Erkenntnis der eigenen wie der kollektiven aussichtslosen Lage in der NS-Haft nicht mehr tödlich betroffen machen kann'.<sup>567</sup> Like 'Goethe und der Buchenwald', 'Neue Jahr 1944-5' (p.304), by an anonymous inmate of Ravensbrück, takes as its subject the issue of sanitation within the camps.<sup>568</sup>

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<sup>564</sup> AKGR, V 959 F2.

<sup>565</sup> Jaiser, *Poetische Zeugnisse*, pp.204-205.

<sup>566</sup> Staar, p.42.

<sup>567</sup> Moll, p.151.

<sup>568</sup> Washington D.C., United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Kulisiewicz Collection, RG 55.002 M\*28. Poetry book of Zofia Pienkiewicz-Malanowska, containing poems in various languages.

There is immediately a disjunction between the title of the poem and its scatological contents. Whilst a thoughtful reflection on the previous year and the one to come might be expected, the actual subject matter is surprising, as is the colloquial register, thereby provoking amusement in the listener.

The new 'Scheißhauskommandant' is described as bearing 'dieses grosse Glück' with 'Würde und Geschick'. The reality of the role is concealed – as Jaiser puts it, 'bagatellisiert' – by this ironic portrayal, which says nothing of the degrading nature of the task, or the impossibility of carrying it out successfully.<sup>569</sup> Moreover, the inability of most inmates to control their bodily functions is portrayed as 'ein Akt unhöflicher Gleichgültigkeit', rather than a result of the unhygienic conditions and their treatment in the camp.<sup>570</sup> The reference to the new year at the end of the poem again subverts expectations of profound resolutions as the inmates' expectations remain once more confined to the sphere of excretion. The coarse language used throughout now jars in these final two lines with the archaic 'dass wir alle uns befleischen', creating a humorous effect which the wordplay in the final line maintains. The inmates' intention – 'auf's ganze Lager scheißen!' – once again makes light of their incontinence, extending, as Jaiser puts it, 'die wörtliche Bedeutung eines unkontrollierbaren Stuhlgangs zu einem universalen Akt, der das Lager unter sich begräbt'.<sup>571</sup> This act of defiance is mirrored in the phrase's other meaning, suggesting a complete indifference towards the camp, and this again sets the inmates at a distance from it. The amusement this poem likely aroused in fellow inmates would help to create solidarity and lessen the power of the perpetrators, helping the listener to temporarily escape their material reality.

Many other poems use humour similarly, making light of situations which might otherwise seem unbearable. Armin Freudmann wrote his poem 'Wanderlied' (p.305) during a forced march of approximately 400km from KZ Kittlitztreben (a satellite camp of Gross-Rosen) to Buchenwald.<sup>572</sup> Whilst Freudmann's march would have been exhausting, and undoubtedly fatal for many inmates, he presents an amusingly optimistic interpretation within the poem. The poet-speaker ironically describes the ease of walking with an empty stomach

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<sup>569</sup> Jaiser, *Poetische Zeugnisse*, p.206.

<sup>570</sup> Ibid.

<sup>571</sup> Ibid., pp.206-207.

<sup>572</sup> Freudmann, *So sang zu mir*. Ebook.

and empty breadbag, and his luck in having nothing but his very light self to carry. Imagining his return home, he presents himself as Hans im Glück. As in the ironic fairy tale, there is here an inversion of the normal 'rags to riches' story format.<sup>573</sup> The poet-speaker, assuming the role of Hans, returns home empty-handed, having lost everything, but presents this loss in a language of abundance: 'alles', 'voller' and 'Riesen-'. The regular rhythm and rhyme scheme help to carry along this playful presentation. Moreover, the recourse to a German fairy tale connects the poet to a former, more carefree existence, providing him with a frame to tell his story, the humorous presentation of which distances and protects. As Anne-Berenike Rothstein writes: 'Die Ironie hat hier die Funktion, das Leben auf verschiedenen Bedeutungsebenen darzustellen, die durch den Leser [...] entdeckt werden sollen, sie hat die Schutzfunktion, Trauer oder auch Angst abzuwehren'.<sup>574</sup>

A similar ironic distancing can be seen in many of Freudmann's poems, where humiliating or arduous experiences within the camp are humorously reinterpreted. In 'Denn wir sind Deutschlands größter Schatz', for example, Freudmann separates the long, exhausting daily act of being counted from the resultant anonymity and the prisoners' identity as a mere number.<sup>575</sup> He instead construes the roll call and counting as a sign of the inmates' great worth. Though this interpretation is ironic, the humour reveals a resistance on the part of the poet to accepting the imposed devaluation process:

Denn wir sind Deutschlands größter Schatz  
Und wehe, wenn einer fehlt!  
So wie vom Geizhals seine Batz'  
Werden gezählt wir und gezählt.

Indeed, the colloquial, pejorative language he uses at this point upends this process: the image of the penny-pinching scrooge, counting his wads of money, satirises the perpetrators, making them a figure of fun. Their painstaking counting is interpreted not as a sign of their power and dominance but as one of miserly, laughable greed.

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<sup>573</sup> Maria Tatar, *The Hard Facts of the Grimms' Fairy Tales* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), pp.100-101.

<sup>574</sup> Anne-Berenike Rothstein, 'Die Erschaffung eines Kulturraumes im Raum der Unkultur. Germaine Tillions *Le Verfügbar aux enfers* (1944)', in *Poetik des Überlebens: Kulturproduktion im Konzentrationslager*, ed. by Anne-Berenike Rothstein (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), pp.103-122 (p.109).

<sup>575</sup> Freudmann, *So sang zu mir*. Ebook.

Other commonplace elements of camp existence are given similar treatment by other poets. Kupfer-Koberwitz, for example, deconstructs the act of writing letters home in 'Wir schreiben' (p.305).<sup>576</sup> The poem's tone is pragmatic; its stanzas progress smoothly and unremarkably from the introduction of the letters, to that which the inmates cannot write, to that which they must instead write. In her analysis of a poem about the inmates' beds, Jaiser notes:

Die Beschreibung selbstverständlicher Dinge wie hier eines eigenen Bettes wird über die Sprache des Gedichts wie unter eine Lupe vergrößert. In der Ausschließlichkeit, in der es inszeniert wird, erscheint es als ein natürliches Sujet. Doch zeigt sich in der gleichmütigen, distanzierten Art der Beschreibung ein komischer Effekt, der zugleich auf die Unnatürlichkeit, die Nichtselbstverständlichkeit der Situation im Lager verweist. [...] Damit wird die Realität im Lager gleichzeitig als gegeben angenommen und angeprangert.<sup>577</sup>

This analysis is applicable to Kupfer-Koberwitz's poem, too. The matter-of-fact introduction in the first stanza and the understated suffering in the second contrast with the banal, blithe, 'alte Lied' in the third. This contrast, and the distanced manner with which the poet-speaker describes the censoring of their letters, creates the comical effect that Jaiser described, simultaneously downplaying and illuminating the reality of the camp. In Heinz Hentschke's poem, 'Sie beugen uns nicht', from the Emslandlager, he writes:

Du schreibst mir:  
Wenn man deine Briefe liest,  
Könnte man vergessen, wo du bist.<sup>578</sup>

I propose that the tone, and the steady, measured structure and progression of 'Wir schreiben' would mirror the censoring and silencing it describes. Hentschke's above description of letters from the camp is therefore also applicable to Kupfer-Koberwitz's poem describing them. That is, one could read 'Wir schreiben' and, despite the mention of misery, almost forget where the author was, were it not for the comical effect arising from the poet's use of contrast and his narrative choices. This comical effect makes it impossible for the reading of the poem to occur as smoothly as the structure and tone would initially suggest.

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<sup>576</sup> Kupfer-Koberwitz, *Kette der Tage*, p.38.

<sup>577</sup> Jaiser, *Poetische Zeugnisse*, p.206.

<sup>578</sup> Heinz Hentschke, 'Sie beugen uns nicht', in *Hölle im Moor*, ed. by Perk, p.131. The Emslandlager were a collection of fifteen moorland labour, punitive and POW camps located in the northwest of Germany and active between 1933 and 1945.

There is also a dramatic use of contrast in another of Kupfer-Koberwitz's poems, 'Invaliden – nach 1941' (pp.305-307), in which he describes the transportation of sick inmates away from the camps.<sup>579</sup> The twelve-stanza long poem initially employs dramatic irony. The poet-speaker sets himself in the position of the naïve inmate, believing that the transportation would result in a period of convalescence and then release. Phrases such as 'es sorgt für sie der große Staat' and the description of inmates searching for any minor physical defect that might allow them to be selected for the transport present an interpretation of events which the listener and poet-speaker know to be fatally flawed. When the poem then describes the reality of the transportation and the true fate of those selected for it, the contrast is unsettling, but the initial naïve description remains a source of gallows humour. Michael Hellenthal writes of gallows humour that it is used

im Zusammenhang mit Situationen [...], in welchen eine Figur dem Tode ins Auge zu blicken hat. In ihrer Reaktion auf die tödliche Situation erkennt sie zwar das drohende Schicksal als nicht mehr abwendbar an, erhält sich aber ihre Würde, indem sie den Tod in seiner Finalität ignoriert.<sup>580</sup>

This occurs in the first half of Kupfer-Koberwitz's poem; in the second, the tone becomes much more sombre as he reveals the true meaning of the transport. The tenth stanza, for example, avoids any cloaking of the truth:

Und wer auch ging, der kam nie zurück –  
man sprach von Kammern mit Gas. –  
Der Erstickungstod, das war das Glück - - -  
die Menschen gemordet, Stück für Stück,  
wie Vieh, mit kaltem Rechnerblick –  
so sparte man Kleidung und Fraß.

Within the solemnity of this stanza, there are echoes of the earlier, hopeful representation of the transport: the rhyme 'Glück'/'Stück' is employed once more, now with far darker overtones. Even here, however, irony is in play: the description of the inmates' 'Erstickungstod' as their 'Glück', and the explanation that they were murdered to save food and clothing, for example. The colloquial 'Fraß' both refers to the previous line's description of the inmates' treatment as animals and also implies, pejoratively, the quality of food the inmates were given. Small linguistic choices such as these, along with the earlier darkly

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<sup>579</sup> Kupfer-Koberwitz, *Kette der Tage*, pp.31-33.

<sup>580</sup> Hellenthal, *Schwarzer Humor*, p.38.

amusing portrayal of the inmates' mistaken expectations, provide the poet with, as Nader puts it, a 'strategy for coping with the horror'.<sup>581</sup>

The above poems have revealed some of the many ways in which humour (in the form of irony, sarcasm, satire, gallows humour and more) was employed by camp poets. Whilst humour's effects were undoubtedly multifaceted – entertaining, distracting, critiquing, and so on – I propose that they all helped in turn to create a crucial distance between narrator and narrative, enabling inmates to endure daily life. One reason for humour's success in temporarily separating inmates from their circumstances has been noted by Nader in his analysis of Fritz Löhner-Beda's poetry. The use of humour requires self-distance, the ability to step back from one's experiences in order to depict and interpret them humorously: 'Humour, like poetry, is an affect, an attitude, an activity that is experienced as personal, as free'.<sup>582</sup> This ability to enter into a dialogue with one's own self about one's experiences is of course discussed in more detail in the previous chapter in relation to a connection to an empathic other. That such a connection also enables a crucial distance from one's circumstances has been demonstrated not only in this section on humour, but throughout this chapter.

Thus, we return here to where the chapter began, with the idea that both connection and distance are necessary and desired consequences of these poems and that one cannot and does not exist without the other. This is not simply because in aligning oneself with a particular group one separates oneself from others, but also because in detaching oneself through poetry from one's situation, one is able to explore one's own experiences and those of others, thereby enacting a connection with them.<sup>583</sup> In this regard, what Kathrin Mess refers to as the role of passive spectator does not, strictly speaking, exist. In assuming the role of spectator, inmates made the choice to step back, but also to act, to witness, to present a particular narrative. As an active observer, the poet-speaker embodies a separate entity from the poet themselves and is therefore of value as an empathic other.

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<sup>581</sup> Nader, p.115.

<sup>582</sup> *Ibid.*, p.78.

<sup>583</sup> I do not mean by this that the poems in this chapter which focus on the perpetrators, for example, are seeking to enact an empathic connection with them. Through the poems, a relationship of sorts is nonetheless shaped, even if this is one in which the inmate takes superiority and the perpetrator is deprived of power.

This active spectating is arguably particularly relevant for camp poets – as opposed to the diary writers Mess describes – who often mediate events more overtly and pay more explicit attention to formal choices. The significant role played by poetry’s form will therefore be considered more closely in the following chapter. Having discussed in this chapter some of the many ways in which inmates needed and chose to distance themselves from their circumstances, as well as the inevitable persistence of connection in this distancing process, the following chapter will examine how poetry could not only erect and remove boundaries but could also contain one’s experiences.

## Chapter Four

### Containment

The previous chapter's focus on the creation of boundaries links smoothly to poetry's ability to contain: within the boundaries – the form – of the poem, inmates were able to control or preserve particular elements of camp life. Here, the emphasis is on those things *around* which, rather than *with* which, they sought to erect boundaries. Having demonstrated the benefit or even necessity of using poetry to separate oneself from particular aspects of one's existence, I will now examine the ways in which poetry separated out particular aspects, once more giving the poet a measure of agency by allowing them to control the representation of their situation.

Two verbs which recur, often together, in previous discussions of camp poetry and are of particular pertinence here are 'benennen' and 'bannen'. That is, through poetry, inmates could name their suffering and thereby temporarily banish it. Georg von Boris wrote in his Flossenbürg poem, 'Die Lieder des Grauens', for example:

Was in den Stunden,  
In denen sie gefoltert und gequält,  
Geschlagen und geschunden,  
Mir die Sterbenden erzählt,  
Bann ich im Erleben des Beschauens,  
In die Lieder meines Grauens.<sup>584</sup>

Here, Boris describes his viewing of the events around him in interesting terms. The phrase 'im Erleben des Beschauens' presents the process as one of careful, active contemplation – as discussed at the end of the previous chapter – rather than merely the passive reception of impressions. The poet-speaker *experiences* the act of viewing, making the process even more active. He then captures these experiences of his fellow inmates in a song, presenting the poet as one who speaks for the other and also condenses their testimony into something more intense. Nader has commented on the dual meaning of the verb 'bannen': here, the poet is both seeking to banish or exorcise what the dying have told him, and also to record or capture it (as in 'ein Geschehen auf Zelluloid bannen': to capture an event on

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<sup>584</sup> Boris, *Mitten in tiefer Nacht*, ed. by Elling, p.63.



celluloid) and so pass it on.<sup>585</sup> Similarly, Jaiser has noted camp poetry's ability to simultaneously name, contain, and banish:

Die Realität der KZ-Haft in die lyrische Form zu bringen, heißt aber eben auch, sich im Moment des kreativen Prozesses von ihr zu distanzieren, sie ins Wort zu bannen und über eine Form, die Anfang und Ende hat, vorübergehend handhabbar zu machen.<sup>586</sup>

Below I will explore more systematically the ways in which this frequently occurred: how exactly did poetry's form, and its relationship with poetry's contents, enable inmates to negotiate what Jaiser has called the 'paradoxe[n] Bewegung von Benennen und Bannen'?<sup>587</sup> Crucially, unlike the majority of other scholars who have discussed camp poetry, my aim in this section is not to discuss the 'value' or 'success' of camp poetry's form according to established aesthetic criteria, but rather to explore how the poem's form enabled inmates to contain and banish their experiences.

### (Traditional) Form

Understandably, then, it is the form of the poem on which most observations in this chapter will focus. Naturally, it is impossible to cleanly separate the role played by poetry's form and content, and so previous chapters have discussed numerous formal choices and how these have helped to remove or erect particular boundaries. Here, however, the discussion will revolve temporarily around poetic form as a whole, rather than individual formal choices. How did the form of a poem, as opposed to a prose or dramatic piece, facilitate the inmates' need and desire to contain aspects of their suffering?

Before considering this, I return briefly to previous criticism of camp poetry's form, mentioned in more detail in the introduction. There I discussed its largely negative appraisal, namely the supposed inadequacy of traditional forms when faced with the events of the Holocaust. Susan Gubar, for example, has called the use of traditional poetic devices, such as rhythm, rhyme, and caesurae, 'absurd in the context of the Shoah'.<sup>588</sup> Even some scholars who have studied the poems in depth have commented on form's frequent

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<sup>585</sup> Nader, pp.134-135.

<sup>586</sup> Jaiser, 'Benennen und Bewahren', p.94.

<sup>587</sup> Ibid.

<sup>588</sup> Susan Gubar, 'The Long and the Short of Holocaust Verse', *New Literary History*, 35 (2004), 443-468 (p.459).

meaninglessness, subordinating it to the poems' content. Jaiser, for example, proposed that, 'Als *Poesie* genommen, fällt es schwer, sie in ihrer einfachen, ja oft trivialen Ausgestaltung auf ihren ästhetischen Gehalt hin zu befragen'.<sup>589</sup> Similarly, Moll described form as often inadequate, especially in those works which do not seek to establish distance from the suffering:

Aber dort, wo dem Autor Distanzierung oder Flucht nicht mehr möglich war, wo im Gegenteil Erlebniselemente seiner Haftsituation die Texte beeinflussen oder gar beherrschten, erstarrten die ästhetischen Formen entweder zu gehaltlosen Hüllen oder gerieten in einen Strudel der Selbstauflösung.<sup>590</sup>

I propose that this assessment of form as often no more than a meaningless shell is vastly inaccurate and my analysis below will show some of the ways in which such a judgment is misplaced. Moll argued, for example, that many poets maintained traditional poetic forms, 'sie aber ihres tradierten Gehalts, ihrer geistigen Aussagefähigkeit radikal beraubt, sie zu reinen sprachlichen Ordnungsschema degradiert, wie z.B. Alfred Kittner in geradezu beklemmender Konsequenz'.<sup>591</sup> I have discussed many of Kittner's poems in previous chapters and pointed out many ways in which his formal choices supported and enhanced the imparted meaning. Kittner's highly regular use of rhythm, rhyme and stanza structure, and the prevalence of established poetic forms such as the sonnet, is consistent throughout his imprisonment – regardless of the content of his poems – and, for the most part, consistent also throughout his pre- and post-imprisonment poetry.<sup>592</sup> Moll interprets this consistency as indicative of form's loss of meaning in the camps:

Die Inhalte werden von den Formen ignoriert, die lyrischen Formen reagieren nicht auf die Inhalte. Die Formen unterliegen der Bedeutungs nivellierung und beginnen ihrerseits, die in ihnen gefaßten Inhalte zu nivellieren. Die Zertrümmerung aller humanen Werte in den Todeslagern, die Kittner durchlitten und in seinen Gedichten dargestellt hat, zerstört notwendig auch den Eigenwert der Form. Sie bleibt aber unbeschadet ihres Bedeutungsschwunds und ihres radikalen Transzendenzverlustes weiterhin handwerklich verwendbar. Sie kann als leere Hülle in ihrer äußeren Erscheinung resistent bleiben.<sup>593</sup>

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<sup>589</sup> Jaiser, '„Ich flüchte heimlich“', p.169.

<sup>590</sup> Moll, p.246.

<sup>591</sup> Ibid., p.249.

<sup>592</sup> Moll describes Kittner as using the same forms as he did in the death camps thirty years after his release. Whilst I believe Moll should not take issue with this, he also overlooks some of Kittner's post-imprisonment poetry (e.g. 'In der Schlinge' (1947), in *Schattenschrift*, pp.59-60) which is formally less regular.

<sup>593</sup> Moll, pp.249-250.

Moll's problem seems to be a lack of what he calls 'correspondence' between the poems' form and their content.<sup>594</sup> He believes that the form should reflect the content, that traditional forms should in some way radically change to reflect the horrors of camp existence (unless the content is illusory, like the idyllic poems described in the previous chapter). By examining one of Kittner's poems, 'Molotschna' (February 1943) (p.309), I seek to show how form could be valid and 'successful' by the way it enabled the expression and containment of one's experiences, that traditional forms could not be merely 'empty shells' if they facilitated the poet's endeavour to bear witness.<sup>595</sup>

The poem is relatively lengthy and contains specific details about experiences of 'Molotschna'. As a text documenting these experiences, it could have taken the form of prose, instead of a poem of eight highly regular quatrains. What does the form of the poem do here, then? According to Moll's line of argument, above, such a conventional rhyming form could only take the role of a meaningless container for such disturbing content. Through examining the poem more closely I seek to present a different view, that the regular structure, rhyme and rhythm help the poet to communicate the reality with which he is confronted, rather than simply being meaningless physical constraints for the content.

'Molotschna' is interesting firstly because it is explicitly about the act of witnessing, of attempting 'stockend auszumalen, / Was ihr Entsetzensvolles, Unsagbares, / Erlebt im Winter des vergangenen Jahres'. The poem confronts the issue of unspeakability, of being unable to find words for one's experiences, but seeks, through its existence, to overcome this. All those who have experienced Molotschna can initially say about it is 'Molotschna'; the poem then uses its form to expand and provide a physical record of their testimony. As the final stanza says, it will be the addressees' responsibility in the future to be 'Zeugen' and 'Rächer', but the poem takes that role where they currently struggle.

Let us begin now by considering the role of the poem's regularity, before considering the effects of deviations from this. The *aabb* rhyme scheme and iambic pentameter carry the

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<sup>594</sup> Moll, p.249.

<sup>595</sup> Kittner, *Schattenschrift*, pp.45-47. Molotschna was the name of a settlement in Ukraine, the residents of which were evacuated to Nazi Reichsgau Wartheland in 1943 and then marched into Germany, under Nazi plans to reunite ethnic Germans. In Kittner's poem, the significance of Molotschna goes beyond its geographical location and comes to connote particular experiences of suffering.

listener steadily along. They assist the poet-speaker in his task of conveying 'Entsetzensvolles, Unsagbares'; seeking here to find words for these things, the regularity of rhythm and rhyme create a momentum, a space, which the poet-speaker can fill. They limit his possibilities, not arbitrarily or meaninglessly, as empty requirements, but shaping his formal and linguistic choices. As Nader proposes, 'such structure seems to provide a frame within which these authors may describe the desolation without being overcome by it'.<sup>596</sup>

The story of 'Molotschna' is related through a series of confounded expectations and unwelcome discoveries. Having reached their (temporary) destination, the poet-speaker's 'brothers' collapsed on the ground, before catching sight of those who were shot down because they were unable to move on once more when ordered. Awakening confused from shivering fits, 'beraubt, verhungert', they believed themselves to be 'errettet', before discovering their feet were frozen blue and they had long since lost those they loved. Wanting then to get up from the ground, they are frozen in place by the discovery of masses of lice on their bodies and clothes. The final image is the most disturbing of all: they watch as their parents, 'in Todeszuckungen' yet 'noch lebend', are transported on 'Schinderkarren' to their grave and thrown with hundreds of others onto Jewish corpses. Here, the hiding of 'Leichen' in 'hundert ihresgleichen' hints at the fate of these bodies and the subsequent rhyme; the proliferation of pronouns in this line – 'In die man sie mit hundert ihresgleichen' – reflects the anonymity and deindividualisation of the victims and their fate. Below I consider the effects of individual formal choices in shaping the communication of these images, but I pause here to emphasise the overall effects of the regular structure and rhythm of the poem. Both the stanza structure and the steady rise and fall of the iambic metre mirror this continual movement, back and forth, between expectation and its confoundment in reality. This, I argue, is as effective and necessary a use of form for the poet-speaker as any 'innovative', 'fragmentary' choices would have been.

The regular stanza structure also makes the circularity of the poem more evident. Beginning with 'In euren Augen, Brüder, flackern Qualen' and the injunction to tell of their experiences, the poem ends with 'Aus euren Worten, Brüder, spricht das Grauen' and the

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<sup>596</sup> Nader, p.108.

injunction to bear testimony in the future. The form of the poem facilitates this structuring of the content with its clear introduction, middle and conclusion. Its clarity corresponds also to the poet-speaker's matter-of-fact tone. Whilst the content is undeniably disturbing (and the poet's careful word choice, use of exclamations and rhetorical questions, amongst other choices, convey his disturbance at what he has heard), the reporting of it occurs clearly and steadily. The need for such a distanced position has been discussed in the previous chapter; here, I simply point out that whilst the content may be horrifying, the regular form is not at such a disjunction with it as those such as Moll would claim, due in part to the correlation between steadiness of form and tone.

Let us briefly consider now how specific formal choices influence the poem's content and its communication. The regularity of the poem's form allows the poet-speaker to make strategic deviations at particular moments. The caesura in the second stanza, for example, ('Führt ihr den Lauscher durch die schwarze Pforte / Des Todes, der euch hier zu Boden stieß') disrupts the previously steady metre. The pattern of stresses becomes less clear in the third line; death is emphasised, but the subsequent metre is less certain, also mirroring the upheaval wreaked by death. Caesurae in the third and fifth stanzas also disrupt the rhythm. In the third, 'Jener' is initially stressed and followed by a pause, drawing attention to those who would otherwise be forgotten. In the fifth stanza, the break between 'wie Massen' and 'Von Läusen' mimics the inmates' discovery of the lice. In these ways, too, the poem's regularity can be seen as a strength, allowing a sharper contrast with, and more emphasis on, those specific moments of irregularity.

In his criticism of Kittner's use of form, Moll also singles out those inmates who wrote sonnets, claiming that these, too, were inappropriate forms for the camps, rendered meaningless by their contents.<sup>597</sup> Once more I contest this point of view and through closely examining one particular sonnet, Fritz Löhner-Beda's 'Sonett auf das Revier im KZ-Buchenwald' (p.285), written in winter 1940, I seek to show how this traditional form maintained value and meaning.<sup>598</sup>

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<sup>597</sup> Moll, p.250.

<sup>598</sup> Löhner-Beda, *Kunst hinter Stacheldraht*, p.152, p.154.

The popularity of traditional, conventional forms such as the sonnet in politically turbulent times has been noted by many, and my corpus would support this. Walter Mönch, for example, noted that ‘in Zeiten, die großen Erschütterungen unmittelbar folgen, das Sonett zu wuchern beginnt’.<sup>599</sup> The reasons behind this have been discussed in detail in other works. In summary, Theodor Ziolkowski notes that ‘das Sonett in der deutschen Literatur vor allem zu drei Zwecken verwendet wurde: Liebe, Politik und Bewahrung der geistigen Tradition. Aus allen drei Gründen eignete sich das Sonett in Zeiten der soziopolitischen Unruhen zu einer beliebten Gattung’.<sup>600</sup> Naturally, practical reasons for choosing the sonnet also played a role in the context of camp poetry. A French inmate of Buchenwald, Richard Ledoux, for example, wrote that he chose the form of the sonnet, ‘da nur wenig zu Papier gebracht werden konnte. Eben diese Form war leichter im Gedächtnis zu behalten’.<sup>601</sup> Heinrich Steinitz, who composed over sixty sonnets whilst imprisoned in Buchenwald, also memorised them all.<sup>602</sup> Here, I am interested not solely in what the sonnet as a form represented for the poet, but how its form could still be utilised to contain the experiences of the camp. To do so, let us consider Löhner-Beda’s poem, the form of which he explicitly indicates in its title.

Löhner-Beda employs the Petrarchan sonnet form, with the rhyme scheme *abba abba cdc dcd* and regular iambic pentameter. Typically, in such a sonnet, the octave would present some form of argument, observation, or question; the sestet would then begin with the volta, a pronounced change in tone and direction of the narrative marked by the change in

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<sup>599</sup> Walter Mönch, *Das Sonett* (Heidelberg: F. H. Kerle, 1954), p.257. As well as being popular in times of crisis generally, the sonnet was especially prevalent in Europe in the 1940s. See, for example: Albrecht Haushofer’s famous sonnets written whilst incarcerated in Berlin Moabit prison (Haushofer, *Moabiter Sonette* (Munich: Langewiesche-Brandt, 1999)); Mole’s discussion of the sonnets written by French deportees (Gary D. Mole, *Beyond the Limit-Experience. French Poetry of the Deportation, 1940-1945* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002), pp.145-148); Theodore Ziolkowski, ‘Form als Protest. Das Sonett in der Literatur des Exils und der Inneren Emigration’, in *Exil und Innere Emigration*, ed. by Reinhold Grimm and Jost Hermand (Frankfurt a.M.: Athenäum, 1972), pp.153-172.

<sup>600</sup> Theodore Ziolkowski, *Die Welt im Gedicht. Rilkes Sonette an Orpheus II.4: „O dieses ist das Tier, das es nicht giebt.“* (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 2010), p.114. See also: Stephen Parker, Peter Davies, and Matthew Philpotts, *The Modern Restoration: Re-thinking German Literary History 1930-1960* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2004).

<sup>601</sup> Staar, p.44.

<sup>602</sup> A fellow prisoner of Steinitz, Kurt Mellach, wrote: ‘Ihm [Steinitz] quälte der Gedanke, daß er sie vergessen könnte, und deshalb sprach er sie [die Sonette] sich unermüdlich in Gedanken vor, sicher, sie eines Tages aufzeichnen zu können. Er trug sie seinen Freunden mit leiser, ein wenig singender Stimme vor’ (Mellach, ‘Dr. Heinrich Steinitz zum Gedenken’, *Der neue Mahnruf*, 2 (February 1953), 4).

rhyme scheme. The sestet's purpose is then traditionally to counter the octave's argument, clarify the observations within, or answer any question posed. Let us briefly consider Löhner-Beda's sonnet to see if and how he abides by this traditional structure.

The octave describes the inmates in the infirmary, seeking refuge in dreams: 'In scheuen Augen glänzt ein schwerer Traum'. The alliteration of the adjectives draws attention to them and prompts questions: why are their eyes shy and their dream difficult? The poet poses another question, which might answer this: 'Was träumen sie? Von Brot und Zigaretten!' Their engagement with the world is sensory, their dreams of physical needs and comforts, not easily imagined in the *Revier*, a place of suffering and death. The following quatrain continues this mixture of the physical and metaphorical as the poet-speaker further contextualises the patients' suffering, referring for the first time to the setting of the infirmary in the camp. The day's chains clink from a distance (whether these chains are literal or symbolic is unclear); the screams of the camp ebb at the threshold of the building; a snow-covered tree shines through the window; intermittently, Death strikes his castanets. The energy within this series of images contrasts with the stillness of the first stanza, only the colour white connecting the two. Moreover, the images present a somewhat incoherent group, both because of the juxtaposition of the literal and metaphorical, and also that of the mundane and the terrible. Chains and screams, daily elements of camp existence, and personified Death, presented as engaging in an energetic dance, bookend the serene image of a bright, snowy tree.

These initial eight lines can easily be classed as an observation of the inmates' circumstances; let us now consider the following six lines to see how the poet-speaker responds to the octave. There is certainly a turn, a change in perspective, as the poet-speaker's focus moves inward from the overview of the infirmary within the camp to one particular individual, the doctor. The description here contrasts once again with the preceding stanza's energy and suffering; the doctor is presented as a benevolent figure, the stereotypical caregiver seeking to ease the suffering of his patients and carrying an invisible burden for them. Once more, the only link between stanzas is the colour white, implying a difficult connection between the patients, the camp outside, and the doctor.

The final triplet is one of the most interesting sections of the poem. It adds another layer to the depiction of death, encapsulating the unimaginable barbarity of camp life. The strength of the verbs and adjectival phrases here contrasts with those earlier in the poem: 'glänzen', 'geistern' and 'leise' are replaced by 'zersägen', 'zittern' and 'angstgepeitscht'. Though the feverish are 'cut up' by pain, the thought of becoming healthy and having to return to the rest of the camp, from which the 'Schrei ebbt an des Hauses Saum', fills them with dread and lashes them with fear. This perception that health is less desirable than sickness and pain embodies the paradox of camp existence, whereby survival is more fearful than encountering Death, dancing with his castanets. This final, surprising revelation is redolent of twists commonly found in the final section of a sonnet, revealing that Löhner-Beda is able to utilise its form, notwithstanding his current circumstances.

Moreover, the sonnet as a whole can be described as a series of contrasts and contradictions which are intensified in the final sestet (with the climax in the final triplet), in a way that is not dissimilar to many other sonnets. In this way, Löhner-Beda successfully adopts the sonnet's form, which is far from being simply a rigid or empty shell which cannot respond to his situation. It is a means to convey the poet-speaker's paradoxes and lack of answers; arguably, these become more striking for their depiction in a sonnet, which has often been used to investigate problems (though 'problem' as a term obviously downplays the severity of Löhner-Beda's situation). In this respect, this use of a form that should suggest continuity and wholeness to instead suggest fragmentation is far from unprecedented (even if the experience it described was unprecedented); it continues a modernist tradition, which, from 1910 onwards, questioned form and forms, proposing the modern world was not graspable in these. It was nonetheless necessary for modernist artists to work with the arising tension between form and content, just as camp poets such as Löhner-Beda did.<sup>603</sup> It is helpful to note here, too, that Löhner-Beda's use of imagery also draws on poetic tradition. His presentation of the Dance of Death, for example, is not new, but draws on a medieval motif also used in expressionist artistic representations of the First World War.<sup>604</sup> Observing some of the ways in which camp poetry draws on and adapts

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<sup>603</sup> For more on modernism's use of form, see Parker, Davies and Philpotts.

<sup>604</sup> For more on the *Totentanz* motif, see: Erwin Koller, *Totentanz. Versuch einer Textbeschreibung* (Innsbruck: Institut für Germanistik der Universität Innsbruck, 1980); Wolfgang Stammeler, *Der Totentanz: Entstehung und Deutung* (Munich: Hanser, 1948).



poetic tradition helps to dispel arguments that its form is meaningless, yet there have been few attempts to carefully situate camp poetry within a particular tradition.<sup>605</sup>

Indeed, to return to the sonnet, many other poets adopt and adapt its traditional form to respond to the conditions of the camp. Steinitz, for example, omitted the sestet from his sonnet, 'Wo bist Du, Gott?' (p.264).<sup>606</sup> This striking diversion from the conventional fourteen-lined sonnet physically represents the solution to his 'problem' of where God is to be found. Steinitz, an Austrian Jewish lawyer, also wrote and published poetry, drama and novels before his imprisonment. He had contact with a number of prominent writers, including Stefan Zweig and Thomas Mann, and founded the *Vereinigung sozialistischer Schriftsteller* in 1933. His published collection from Buchenwald demonstrates an accomplished familiarity with the traditional form of the sonnet, and so the omission of the sestet above can be assumed to be a deliberate choice on his part. The two quatrains follow a highly regular and conventional metre and rhyme scheme: iambic pentameter and *abba* respectively. According to Moll, this regularity renders the form meaningless and should be at great odds with the irregular circumstances described, and indeed it is. Kurt Mellach, a fellow prisoner of Heinrich Steinitz, notes this disjunction in his eulogy to Steinitz, writing about a different sonnet:

Als die SS-Leute den Sechzigjährigen mit anderen Alten und Kranken aus dem Keller der Strumpfstopferei, wo sie ein für Lagerverhältnisse erträgliches Asyl gefunden hatten, in den Steinbruch trieben, überlebte Steinitz diesen Tag. Schon am nächsten Morgen teilte er uns das Sonett mit, dessen schöngeformte Verse einen seltsamen Gegensatz zu der Schilderung der Vorkommnisse im Steinbruch bildeten.<sup>607</sup>

My argument diverges from Moll's crucially, however, as I propose that this 'seltsamen Gegensatz' helps to reveal, rather than mask or belittle, the poet-speaker's horrific situation. The very structure and stability of the form, rather than undermining the sonnet, helps to capture a small portion of the poet-speaker's reality whilst also, importantly, illuminating the disjunction between this reality and any form of structured civilisation.

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<sup>605</sup> Irmela von der Lühe points out Jaiser's attempts to do so, but also the limitations of these attempts: 'die Verfasserin weist Bezüge zur Lyrik der 30er und 40er Jahre nach und versucht damit im Anschluß an Emmerich (1981) eine (allerdings nicht recht überzeugende) genuin literarhistorische Situierung der Gedichte'. (AKGR, Gedichte Sammlung Jaiser, Erstgutachten, p.3.) Nader also briefly mentions camp poets' reproduction of 'structures of consciousness and textual cultures that were part of aesthetic ideology in the 30s and 40s in Europe as well as in Nazi Germany' (p.183).

<sup>606</sup> Steinitz, p.7.

<sup>607</sup> Mellach, p.4.

Indeed, this is the case for countless other camp poems which also draw on regular, traditional forms.

Moreover, the individual formal details of the poem – the mixture of simple and complex sentences, its rhetorical questions, caesurae, and the montage of images – successfully intensify the poet-speaker’s presentation of a world that is ghostly, nightmarish, disjointed and inexplicable. The imagery of the first line could initially be taken as snapshots of the poet-speaker’s surroundings, yet the subsequent lines of the stanza suggest a more apocalyptic interpretation. Whether one or both are intended, the poet-speaker seeks no explanation for his circumstances: the second line’s beginning, ‘Was ist, ist’, avoids any attempt to categorise or define his experiences, which is then partly undermined by the asyndetic list that follows. Here we have a mixture of adjective and noun, the abstract and mythological, together connoting an unreal, dreadful, but still indistinct, reality. The choice of ‘Alpdruck’ is particularly interesting, intensifying the hellish, mythological, and unfathomable nature of the description. This inability to make sense of one’s experiences, and the horror of these, is neatly contained within the rhetorical question that follows: the poet-speaker cannot judge whether he is dead or alive. As the boundaries between the concrete and abstract are blurred within the poem, so too they represent a similar blurring in reality, in which one of the most immovable of boundaries, that between life and death, now appears to have been obscured.<sup>608</sup>

The second quatrain begins with a more concrete image once more, and one which, temporarily, secures the poet-speaker’s understanding of death and life: the fleeting image of an anonymous child dying, distinguished only by their ‘hilflos leisen Gewimmer’. The caesura allows a pause after the unsettling horror of this concise description; it also signals a return to the question in the poem’s title. The metre and phrasing become more unsteady now, mirroring the poet-speaker’s inability to reconcile what he has witnessed and what he once believed (or what he has heard others believe). The poem’s form now once more reflects this struggle, the absence of the final sestet mirroring his belief that God is absent from his current situation, or, worse, that somehow his current experiences represent the thousandfold crucifying of His Son and should demonstrate God’s love. His

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<sup>608</sup> The removal of this particular boundary was discussed in Chapter Two, with regards to extremity’s implication in the everyday.

questions of the first and second quatrains cannot be answered, or at least, not satisfactorily. His only recourse is to his chosen poetic form, its truncation embodying not the failure of form, but the failure of himself, humanity, God, to provide satisfactory explanations for the situation in the camps.

Moll, however, remains convinced that in using traditional forms such as the sonnet, one runs the risk of presenting the lyrical form as surviving the Holocaust unscathed. He believes it essential therefore that the author explicitly reflects upon his poem, its form, and its communicative boundaries in view of the unspeakable so as to not trivialise or misuse the subject matter.<sup>609</sup> Interestingly, however, this is the demand of a modernist scholar, a proponent of critical concepts from the 1950s, and would not, contrary to Moll's supposed aim, result in an innovative response to an unprecedented event. In his assessment of camp poets' use of form, Moll goes on to mention Hasso Grabner, whose poetry we have considered in previous chapters. He claims that Grabner's 'Essenausgabe' (pp.268-270) is the clearest example of a camp poet acknowledging form's inadequacy to 'tame' or 'stylise' the inhumanity they faced.<sup>610</sup> My initial observation here is that 'Essenausgabe' was neither the only nor the last poem Grabner wrote whilst in Buchenwald. Of the five published works he composed during his two-year imprisonment, 'Essenausgabe' is unique in its abandoning of a traditional formal structure. This implies that Grabner was not wholly convinced of form's inadequacy, but that conventional forms could still be utilised and of value despite the poem's subject matter.

Moreover, I propose that upon closely examining 'Essenausgabe', one discovers not the breakdown of form in the face of inhumanity, but deliberate formal choices which facilitate communication. (I have discussed the story contained within the poem in the two previous chapters, so will touch on it here only when in relation to form.) Here, I will focus primarily on those choices relating to rhyme and narrative structure. Regarding the former, whilst the poem certainly has no regular rhyme scheme, every stanza contains at least one deliberately rhymed section. Frequently these rhymed sections are reserved for those details of the story which are particularly shocking or unsettling. See, for example:

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<sup>609</sup> Moll, p.250.

<sup>610</sup> Ibid., pp.250-251; Grabner, pp.25-29.

Vor einigen vierzehn Tagen  
hörten die zwei den dritten sagen:  
„Ich werde sterben“,  
und haben dazu genickt.  
Anderswo ist das sicherlich ungeschickt  
und ohne Pietät.

[...]

„Legt mich in die Ecke im Zelte.  
Und seid nicht bange,  
bei dieser Kälte  
halte ich mich lange.  
Bei der Essenausgabe nehmt ihr mich dann,  
aber ihr dürft mich nicht fallen lassen,  
und einer sagt: Essen für drei Mann.  
So kann ich jeden Tag  
für euch einen Schlag  
mit fassen.“

If 'Essenausgabe' represents, according to Moll, the best example of the breakdown of form in camp poetry, why does Grabner retain basic formal choices which could easily have been omitted? I propose that, once more, the poem's form is not unavoidably at odds with the content but that particular moments of disjunction are strategic choices which further the poet-speaker's aims. Let us consider the above cited sections, for example. The rhyme of 'genickt' and 'ungeschickt' mirrors the poet-speaker's point at that moment: if nodding is an inapt response to hearing someone is going to die, then surely containing that experience within simple, rhymed lines reflects and underlines the insensitivity of this response. Similarly, the dying man's assertion that his corpse will not decay quickly in the cold weather and that it should accompany the men to get food each day (and thereby an extra portion) is relayed in stark language in rhymed lines. The contrast between the reality of the man's proposal and this relatively regular rhyme scheme (*abab cdceed*) is striking, yet I propose this does not occur because Grabner, consciously or unconsciously, is demonstrating form's inadequacy. Instead, the jarring effect between subject and its communication mirrors the unsentimental tone found throughout the poem, through which the poet-speaker seeks to show the omnipresence of death within the camp and the pragmatism needed to survive there.<sup>611</sup> Moreover, if a rhymed poem can be said to belong to the everyday, to one's cultural heritage, Grabner's use of rhyme here can also represent

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<sup>611</sup> This is discussed more in Chapter Two.

and draw attention to the implication of extremity in the everyday, the uneasy juxtaposition of the two which occurred in the camps.<sup>612</sup>

Moving on to consider narrative structure, the poem has an unavoidable circularity, beginning and ending with the very same scene. This is a deliberate choice which is made particularly conspicuous by the almost word-for-word repetition of the poem's first eight lines. I discussed the significance of this use of narrative circularity in Chapter Two, so here I underline simply the active role of form in creating and drawing attention to this structure. Importantly too, it is once more the existence of a degree of structure and regularity which allows deviation from this to be perceptible. In this case, Grabner alters 'und sie lassen / einen dritten / in ihrer Mitten / nicht allein' to 'aber ein Dritter / läßt sie nicht allein'. This smallest of changes initially opposes expectations: the third man is bestowed with greater agency, assuming the subject position, at the end of the poem when the poet-speaker has revealed that he is in fact a corpse. This could represent a desire on the part of the poet to honour the third man's selflessness and acknowledge the active role he has played in saving the other two men, a point which up until this point has been frequently minimised by the matter-of-fact tone and use of irony. Alternatively, the change could be interpreted more sombrely, suggesting that although the third man is now deceased, he does not leave the other two alone, his constant presence haunting them. Regardless of the interpretation, it is the poem's form which enables subtle changes to be made, and this is far from simply being a fragmentary, irregular form which Moll believes would better suit the story described.

Through the analyses above, then, I have shown some of the many ways in which inmates were able to utilise formal features, even the most traditional, to represent and contain their experience of the camps. Even critics who would continue to condemn such forms must recognise, as James Young argued:

if modern responses to catastrophe have included the breakdown and repudiation of traditional forms and archetypes, then one postmodern response might be to recognize that even as we reject the absolute meanings and answers these 'archaic' forms provide, we are still unavoidably beholden to these same forms for both our expression and our understanding of the Holocaust.<sup>613</sup>

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<sup>612</sup> This refers to Michael Rothberg's theory of traumatic realism, again discussed in detail in Chapter Two.

<sup>613</sup> Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust*, p.192.

As I argued above, however, these 'archaic' forms are valid and valuable forms of expression which deserve to be carefully analysed, rather than merely tolerated as our only access to the reality of the camps. Furthermore, the value of conventional forms in establishing a sense of stability and continuity in the midst of great insecurity should also not be minimised. Where Carolyn Forché asserted that 'extremity [...] demands new forms and alters older modes of poetic thought', my analyses above have shown, instead, that the following assessment by Nader is more valid: 'in extremity, old forms became useful, or even necessary, as readily available shapes to constrain in some sense, and to serve as containers for experiences that overwhelm the psyche'.<sup>614</sup> Moreover, taking Nader's argument one step further, such forms not only constrain and contain overwhelming experiences, but also draw attention to the disjunction between these experiences and the forms' own structure and stability. In this way, traditional forms cannot be considered meaningless, but instead help to further unmask the inmates' daily reality.

## Circularity

The above discussion of form's ability to represent camp experiences ended with an analysis of Grabner's 'Essenausgabe' and its narrative circularity. Within this section I pick up once more the idea of circularity, relating it primarily here to the overarching theme of this chapter, containment. The closed, relatively brief, form of a poem allows camp poets to contain particular aspects of their experience whilst also, through its formal structure, depicting the repetition, monotony, and futility of their experiences generally. This occurs frequently in poems describing the daily routine of the camp. Examining one such work, Grabner's 'Morgen' (pp.309-311), will reveal some of the ways in which the numerous horrors of one's repetitive daily existence could be contained within the structure of the poem.<sup>615</sup>

The poem was written in August 1939, almost one year after Grabner's arrival in Buchenwald and just over two years after the camp was established. 'Morgen', like

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<sup>614</sup> Forché, p.42; Nader, p.182.

<sup>615</sup> Grabner, pp.22-24.

‘Essenausgabe’, is one of the longer and more irregular poems written during his imprisonment and focuses on the monotony and meaninglessness of daily existence in the camp. Grabner is not alone in writing a poem which takes the beginning of the inmates’ day as its own beginning.<sup>616</sup> There are several possible reasons for this. Considered practically, early morning was one of the few times in which inmates were not consigned to work or other duties and consequently had relatively more space – both temporal and mental – in which to write and reflect. This would also explain why a considerable number of poems were written about dusk and the arrival of night.<sup>617</sup> These times were a respite, albeit brief, from the ceaseless control of almost all waking hours. Beginning poetry with the time of day in which they had most freedom might have provided camp poets with a stepping-stone to representation of experience that was less easily representable. In line with this, allowing the rigid structure of the day to shape the structure of the closed form of the poem could facilitate the containment of experience that might otherwise seem boundless or uncontrollable.

Grabner’s poem begins with an elucidation of what morning now means, the lingering stillness of night and its motionless sea of fog contrasting sharply with the activity that follows. The verbs of standing and being are replaced by those of sound (‘tönen’) and awakening (‘erwachen’). The adjectives now used – ‘harten’ and ‘schrillen’ – stand in opposition to the singular adjective of the first sentence, ‘stillen’. These contrasts are reinforced by the irregular use of rhyme within this first stanza. Though there are three pairs of rhymes – ‘Nacht’ / ‘erwacht’, ‘stillen’ / ‘schrillen’, ‘Nebelmeer’ / ‘Häftlingsheer’ – there is no symmetry in their use. Instead, when a rhyme does occur, it is separated by at least three lines; this faint echo of a previous, contrasting word suggests the disparity and metaphorical distance between the inmates’ experience of night and their sudden awakening. The final rhyme, however, implies coherence more than dissonance. The ‘Häftlingsheer’ is connected to the ‘Nebelmeer’ by the adjective assigned to it. This army of

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<sup>616</sup> Other poems which begin with a description of morning activities include Kupfer-Koberwitz’s ‘Die Sonne’ (AKGD, 3336/1-06-3-7), Hanna Himmler’s ‘Morgenappell’ (AKGR, Slg CJ/1-37), Ferdinand Römhild’s ‘Silbern umwoben erwacht die Welt’ and ‘Ein Morgen’ (in *Kunst hinter Stacheldraht*, pp.138-139; p.160), and Herbert Morgenstern’s ‘Wenn dann der wilde Flieder blüht’ (in *Kunst hinter Stacheldraht*, p.139).

<sup>617</sup> See, for example, Roman Gebler’s ‘Still über Nacht’ (in *Mein Schatten in Dachau*, p.172), Maria Günzl’s ‘Zwischen Tag und Nacht’ (in *Mitten in tiefer Nacht*, p.99), Franz Hackel’s ‘In der Zelle’ (in *Kunst hinter Stacheldraht*, p.151) and the anonymous ‘Schwalben segeln zwitschernd über Blütenbäumen’ (in *Kunst hinter Stacheldraht*, pp.139-140).

inmates is described as 'grau', an adjective used and repeated in numerous camp poems and by far the most frequent descriptor of colour within the corpus. Though 'grey' certainly provides a foretaste of the monotony into which they have once again been involuntarily plunged, it also anchors the inmates to the calm of night, with its sea of fog, and the rhyme reinforces this. Moreover, the inmates occupy the stanza's final subject position – they are described as waking up, though in fact they have been woken – and final word, despite now being entirely subject to the routine imposed upon them.

This first stanza, with its antithesis of night and morning, is set apart from the others by its length. The following five stanzas are identical in line number – ten, rather than the eight of stanza one – and thereby signify the inmates' forced conformance to the rigid and repetitive structure of camp existence, 'zu einem Tagwerk monotoner Schwere'. The chiasmic structure within the second stanza, in which the two temporal noun phrases fall at the end of the first sentence and the beginning of the second sentence – 'Morgen um Morgen neu. / Und Abend für Abend' – reinforces the sense of the unchanging passage of time, with little variation in daily occurrences. Furthermore, by bringing the two temporal phrases together in the poem, Grabner is able to bridge the gap of time between morning and evening in daily life. This would be the period of time in which the most disturbing and less easily described events would take place. By juxtaposing morning and evening, the poet moves between the two times of day, relating the state of affairs in the evening but without having to detail exactly how these painful circumstances have come about: 'Abend für Abend / sind von unserem Heere / Kameraden, Freunde / hinübergegangen ins Leere'. As in the first stanza, here again the inmates retain agency within the poem, remaining the grammatical subject even after having been killed, directly or indirectly, by the actions of the SS. Moving from army, to comrades, to friends, the increasing intimacy of these juxtaposed nouns gradually intensifies the sense of loss the poet-speaker feels and explains his unwillingness or inability to describe the events of the day in more detail.

In the third stanza, the pronouns change from first- to second-person as the poet poses a series of four questions to an anonymous 'du'. With the shift from declaratives to interrogatives, there is a shift from the monotony of daily life to its uncertainty. In various forms, Grabner asks how one can know how much time one has left, but these are questions which can only remain unanswered: whoever the 'du' is, whether real or a



construction, he is unable to reassure the poet. The stanza's form reflects this lack of knowledge and security: its lines vary much more in length and there is just a single rhyme. The question in the following stanza encapsulates the way this uncertainty has destabilised the ability to reason, to judge, to evaluate: 'Was ist der Wert der Dinge, / was ein Problem?' The inmates' emotional numbness – 'Uns wundert nichts mehr' – is illustrated with a hypothetical example from the natural world, allowing Grabner once again to avoid specific details of daily life in the camp: 'Und wenn einer in dem Regen / einen schimmernden, / leicht geflügelten Falter finge, / wöge er ebenso schwer / wie ein Klumpen Lehm'. The subordinate clause is lyrical, with its alliteration, lengthy adjectival phrase, and choice of subject. The main clause then contrasts noticeably in line and phrase length, tone and sound. The light, shimmering butterfly is set against a lump of clay; similarly, the alliterated soft fricative [f] is displaced by the nasal [m].

The contrast is clear and is pursued in the following stanza, whereby further natural elements, the sun and rain, no longer fulfil the roles they once did. Instead, the sun 'trocknet uns heute / vielleicht die feuchten / Kleider am Leib'. Rather than being key agents in growth and life, the one simply cancels out the actions of the other. The lack of purpose in this cycle mirrors the monotonous cycle of the inmates' days, which has little connection to their earlier interaction with the world. Only through the repetition of a small number of sounds does the poet maintain any link at all to the previous way of things. Even then, the majority of these phonemes are juxtaposed with differing sounds in order to prevent exact rhyme (for example: 'gedeiht', 'vielleicht', 'Kleider', 'Leib') and thus continue to signify the unavoidable disparity between the past and present, despite some of the components (the sun and rain, for example) remaining the same.

The stanza's final sentence contains an interesting choice of words, which also reveals much about the way in which the inmates now perceive time. 'Der Abend', rather than the SS, is the agent in bringing about the end of work. This occurs 'zum Zeitvertreib', which could be interpreted in several ways. The most common translation for the phrase, 'as a pastime', would accentuate the arbitrariness of camp existence already evoked. However, the phrase might also be translated more literally. Ruth Klüger described her recital of poems whilst in Auschwitz as a *Zeitvertreib* in the most literal sense: 'Ist die Zeit schlimm, dann kann man nichts Besseres mit ihr tun, als sie zu vertreiben, und jedes Gedicht wird

zum Zauberspruch'.<sup>618</sup> Grabner's use of the word might also intimate this forceful understanding of 'vertreiben'. In the context of a poem that describes the harsh monotony of daily life, evening no longer has any inherent value or meaning as a time of day, but is simply a means of driving away the daytime and its horrors.

This conception is stated explicitly in the following stanza: 'Abend und Morgen, / das sind fast leere Begriffe'. The colour grey in the following lines recalls the earlier description of the inmates and dawn, all of which are entangled in 'ein grauer Brei der Zeit'. Time is simply a formless mass. Interestingly, Grabner chooses an edible substance as his metaphor, a substance on which his life depended, but which here takes the most insipid and shapeless form. The inmates' experiences have transformed the role and meaning of both food and time. Once again, the poet employs a hypothetical construction to underline this point, connecting the two through a rhyme scheme that is more regular than in previous stanzas. If the inmates were told it was evening immediately after the morning roll call, they would not be surprised, nor would they be if seized at midday by the 'Knochenhand' (again, specific ways in which prisoners would likely die are omitted here, with Grabner preferring a more abstract, poetic construction). The two main clause phrases – 'das wäre alles eins, wir sind immer bereit' – with their more regular metre and similar syntax, assert the inmates' acceptance of time's new meaning (or meaninglessness) and a confidence in facing it.

This assertion continues in the final stanza, signalled by the conjunction 'Und' which begins it. Significantly, the poem contains very few conjunctions and the majority of these are coordinating. This suggests an inability to understand or explain how different experiences are connected. Using mostly 'und' and 'oder', the poet simply lists events and proposes possibilities, sometimes suggesting temporal, but rarely causal, links between them. In this way, time is again depicted as being neither predictable nor subject to reason. Indeed, the only time in which a causal conjunction appears in the poem – that is, the only time the poet can be sure of a connection between circumstances – is when Grabner describes the possibility of death at any moment. This acceptance of death's omnipresence is one of the few certainties of daily life, but such a bleak certainty is then given a more positive effect: 'ist uns das Leben nahe wie nie zuvor'.

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<sup>618</sup> Klüger, pp.122-123.

In the poem's final eight lines, Grabner brings together his thoughts on the passing of time and attempts some form of resolution. Within the poem, the final stanza has the most active sentences with the first-person plural pronoun as subject, and it is here that the inmates' shared and assured conception of time is most clearly elucidated. These final statements are structured around the verbs of asking, feeling and knowing. Firstly, instead of asking for 'irgendeinem Kalender', they feel 'in Tag und Traum / nur dunkle Nacht': a calendar for the mental marking of days has no purpose when the inmates sense no distinction between them or between day and night. The steady decrease in line length mirrors the inmates' reduced perception of discrete times of day, culminating in the two-word line 'und wissen'.

What is it that the inmates know, when the previous lines have conveyed so much of what they cannot know? The parallelism in the final sentence reveals this with the interplay between 'Morgen' and 'Nächte'. Abstract nouns once again assume agency, and with the most positive of consequences. Firstly, morning takes the role of subject as the longest line of the poem reveals the most significant content, the only fact about which the inmates are sure: 'Ein Morgen ist aller Nächte Beender'. The meaning of the poem's title expands at this moment: the poem is no longer only about the everyday experience of morning within the camp, but also the future experience of a singular morning that will end their imprisonment. The details of this liberation are again missing: the comfort is found in knowing that this period of their lives is finite, not in knowing how or when this end will come. Morning is therefore a carefully chosen agent of liberation: in the midst of uncertainty, it is stable in its constant and timely arrival.

Grabner could arguably have ended the poem there, but the second part of this sentence provides some sense of meaning for his present experience, as well as for the future. Here, the subject position is taken by the nights, which are keeping watch for that particular morning. The nights' positive agency as guards provides another sense of security in the middle of a highly insecure existence: their permanence makes them reliable watchmen. Moreover, the poet-speaker's earlier metaphor is positively transformed here. If the inmates experience everything as 'dunkle Nacht', then at least this night is benevolently keeping watch for the day of liberation. Here, the symmetry of the poem becomes clear:

just as in the early stanzas, the poet juxtaposes morning and night and thereby bridges the temporal gap between them. In this final case, Grabner creates a connection between the present and the future, implying the end of their suffering is as inevitable as the passing of time.

The above analysis has demonstrated, then, how the poem's self-contained, structured form is ideally suited to reflecting both the rigid, structured passing of time and the circularity of existence within the camps. As Grabner's 'Morgen' reveals, this structure can also be exploited, in both its regularity and deviation from regularity, to offer hope that the described monotony and circularity is only transitory. The following section will examine how the form of the poem can reflect and contain not just the cyclical reality of daily life but also individual, 'epiphanic' moments within that recurring cycle.

### Epiphany and montage

The self-contained, (relatively) short form of the poem makes it particularly suited to communicating not the whole spectrum of camp experiences but specific moments which capture or illuminate the inmates' reality (and also, frequently, the difficulty of capturing this). These moments are often what Robert Eaglestone, in his study of prose Holocaust testimony, refers to as epiphanies.<sup>619</sup> Eaglestone concentrates on the role of the epiphany in disrupting any identification the reader may feel with the narrator, but I propose that in camp poetry its role is somewhat different: in the latter, the emphasis is less on the disruption of identification and more on 'focus[ing] the horror in a specific, revealing incident', as Eaglestone puts it.<sup>620</sup> Similarly, Eaglestone and Antony Rowland note Susan Gubar's description of 'the epiphanic quality of [Holocaust] poems: "these "spurts of vision" are effective in their engagements with baffling, traumatic experiences'.'<sup>621</sup>

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<sup>619</sup> Robert Eaglestone, *The Holocaust and the Postmodern* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), p.54.

<sup>620</sup> Ibid.

<sup>621</sup> Gubar, *Poetry after Auschwitz: Remembering What One Never Knew* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), p.7, cited in Antony Rowland and Robert Eaglestone, 'Introduction: Holocaust Poetry', *Critical Survey*, 20.2 (2008), 1-6 (p.3).

Let us now examine a couple of poems which use epiphany to capture a particular moment the author believes to be indicative of daily reality: Georg von Boris's 'Der ewige Schmerz' and 'Die Schwangere'.<sup>622</sup> As cited in the introduction to this chapter, Boris sought, 'in die Lieder [s]eines Grauens', to capture that which the dying had told him in their hours of torture and agony. Unsurprisingly, then, most of his poems are snapshots of particularly horrifying moments of his imprisonment. In the previous chapter, for example, I discussed Boris's poem, 'Hunger' (p.286).<sup>623</sup> There I focused on the personification of Death and the inmates' desperate cries for him to take them. Despite this unsettling wish for death, it is arguably the poem's final lines which are the most disturbing, particularly the concluding confession, 'Wir fressen an Leichen'. Incidents of cannibalism within the camps, whilst isolated, have been reported; the final confession should not therefore be assumed to be metaphorical.<sup>624</sup> Indeed, the interruption of the confession by the phrase 'Es ist zum Erbleichen' and the subsequent repetition of the pronoun 'wir' suggests the poet-speaker's unease about making such a disturbing revelation, one which has compelled him – as the previous lines reveal – to question his humanity.<sup>625</sup>

The two poems by Boris we will now examine contain similarly unsettling images. 'Die Schwangere' (p.311) tells the story of a woman who was raped by a guard, became pregnant, and was then gassed when she began to show signs of being pregnant. The injustice of the woman's fate and depravity of the guard's actions are undeniable. I am interested here in how the poem relates this horrific story and how it might be considered an epiphany. In its formal features, the poem is very different from the regularity of many of the poems discussed above, such as those by Kittner. The three sections of the story – the woman's rape, her pregnancy, her telling others of the pregnancy and then being gassed – are contained within separate sentences, but with no stanza divisions. Moreover, the order in which the details of the woman's story are revealed is not chronological: the poet-speaker begins, for example, by revealing the woman is pregnant, before telling how

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<sup>622</sup> AKGD, 23.486. Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz is another poet whose works frequently feature epiphanic moments.

<sup>623</sup> Ibid.

<sup>624</sup> See, for example: Tadeusz Borowski, *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen*, trans. by Barbara Vedder (London: Penguin Books, 1992), p.156; Anita Lasker-Wallfisch, *Inherit the Truth, 1939-1945: The Documented Experiences of a Survivor of Auschwitz and Belsen* (London: Giles de la Mare, 1996), p.92.

<sup>625</sup> For a more in-depth discussion of the poem, see Nader, pp.112-116.

this occurred. That the woman was murdered – ‘gestern’ – is concealed until the very end of the poem; the frequent use of the present tense contributes to this deliberately imprecise presentation of the sequence of events. Other formal features such as the varying line length (ranging from ten syllables to just three) and the persistent yet faltering rhyme (*aababacadeffcdd*) also suggest that the event the poet-speaker has witnessed has disrupted (and continues to do so) his worldview and any ability (or need or desire) to order or structure such an event. The poem’s role here is to contain the event and to pass on the poet’s horror and disbelief that it could occur.<sup>626</sup>

There is also the intimation that such an event, the poem’s focus, is far from unique. The anonymity of those involved – they are types, not individuals (‘Weib’, ‘Mann’, ‘Brüder[n]’, ‘Schwestern’) – suggests both the widespread de-individualisation within the camps and the potential for such an event to recur. The single event, the epiphany, whilst horrifying, functions here almost like a synecdoche, a part seeking to point out the existence of the whole. There is an underlying tension between the specificity and horror of the particular incident, and the wider context of daily reality in the camps. The non-referential, impersonal pronoun constructions in the poem, for example – ‘Es trägt ein Weib’, ‘Es schleppt das Weib’ – deprive the woman of agency (she is the subject of the clause yet is denied subject position), reflecting her powerlessness in the situation. They also, along with the short, simple lines and use of rhyme, create a tone that might be expected for the telling of an everyday tale, rather than a one-off, horrifying incident. This could reveal the poet-speaker’s difficulty in processing what he has witnessed, as well as his desire to not present it as exceptional.

Finally, having discussed the use of de-individualising types, it is interesting to note the particular way in which the poet-speaker refers to the woman. His use of ‘Weib’, repeated three times in the poem, is emphasised twice through its line-end position and its repeated rhyme with ‘Leib’. As above, the connection of these two words implies the reduction of the woman to her physical being, with no distinguishing characteristics besides her now pregnant body. The choice of ‘Weib’ enables this whether it is interpreted as defining the

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<sup>626</sup> This is supported by the far greater formal regularity of other poems by Boris which do not focus on one singular horrifying incident. See, for example: ‘Mein ist die Rache, redet Gott’, ‘Gebet’ and ‘Die Mutter’ (AKGD, 23.486).

woman in terms of her gender or, more colloquially and pejoratively, as an object of sexual desire. There is a tension between this representation, and the more elevated, literary description of the woman's body as 'Leib', sustaining the tension running throughout the poem.

Besides the shocking nature of the story as a whole, I propose there are two points in particular where this tension reaches a particular climax, where the epiphany becomes particularly prominent. The first is the choice of 'Zeitvertreib' (emphasised by its rhyme with 'Weib' and 'Leib') to describe the guard's motive for his actions. It is shocking for its triviality, portraying the woman's rape simply as a way to pass the time. Revealing the horror of the situation through its temporary adoption of the guard's perspective, the word also conceals the reality of the situation within itself, 'vertreiben' intimating the violence of the event that 'Zeitvertreib' as a compound masks. The poem's final line also halts the reader: 'Dank Gott, das Weib war erlöst.' All the formal and linguistic choices described – presenting the horror and injustice of the situation – culminate now in this shocking analysis of the woman's fate. The poet-speaker interprets the woman's gassing as positive, as her redemption, because it liberates her from a past and future which he judges to be worse than death. There is a parallel here with Löhner-Beda's 'Sonett auf das Revier im KZ-Buchenwald', described above, in which the inmates in the infirmary are terrified of recovering and having to return to the camp outside. Boris's poems frequently end with a line that is particularly shocking, as mentioned above with the poet-speaker's confession, 'Wir fressen an Leichen'. This final climactic point is important for the communication of the epiphanic moment: whilst the poet has sought to convey both the singularity and the commonplaceness of such incidents, this final utterance reinforces the horror of the particular incident, preventing it from becoming only one of many, only part of the whole.

Many of the above described features are also found in Boris's 'Der ewige Schmerz' (pp.311-312): the lack of stanza divisions, lines of varying lengths, and irregular but persistent rhyme, for example. These have similar effects, conveying the poet-speaker's shock at that which he witnessed. The simplicity of the short lines also resembles the speech of a child, as if the scene has confounded the poet's adult wisdom and worldview. The three adverbial phrases describing the child keep the reader waiting to find out exactly what the child was doing, reflecting the poet's difficulty to process and express what he

saw. The sentence reaches its climax in the one-word line which draws all attention to the surprising verb, unusual for its object. A kiss, a gesture of intimacy and pleasure is bestowed not upon another human but upon a crust of bread, once again subverting expectations. With one word, the poet reveals the value of food: it is so rare and therefore appears so exceedingly precious to a child that his first thought is to kiss it.

The poet-speaker then moves his gaze to another inmate, an old man. The short lines and repetition of 'Ich sah' create the sense of a montage, as the poet-speaker pieces together the moments which 'Brennen [...] in dem Herzen'. In his analysis of another camp poem, Karl Schnog's 'Der Steinbruch', Nader describes the eschewing of a traditional narrative portrayal and the favouring of a 'more expressionistic approach [which] uses montage, repetition, and fragmentation to convey a sense of chaos and desolation'.<sup>627</sup> Here, I propose that repetition, rather than expressing chaos, provides the poet-speaker with a structure within which he can express what he has seen. In turn, the use of montage and fragmentation suggest his difficulty in both expressing and processing that which he has seen: the two key images (the child kissing the crust of bread in the snow and the lame, blind old man giving him his last piece of bread) are juxtaposed and joined only by the repeated exclamation, 'Oh, das tat weh'.

Following the description of the child, and the first utterance of 'Oh, das tat weh', sentences become more fragmented. The poet-speaker begins to describe the old man, the structure mirroring the description of the child, but there is no final verb to describe what the old man is seen to be doing: 'Ich sah einen Greis, / Der lahm und blind / Im Schnee, / In einer Stunde der Not'. The following sentence clearly follows on from this, describing the old man giving the child his bread, but is also grammatically fragmented, lacking an explicit subject. Similarly, the final two sentences of the poem are separated by a full stop where a comma would be expected and would result in a less disjointed effect. Thus, despite the simplicity of the two images, the expression of these within the poem succeeds in conveying the extremity of camp reality and its jarring of the poet-speaker's composure. The poem's final lines, similarly to the poet-speaker's efforts in 'Die Schwangere', seek to reiterate both the horror of such incidents but also their commonplaceness: whilst they may be more painful than all other wounds, they occupy 'Stunden', not just moments.

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<sup>627</sup> Nader, p.105.



Having shown how the abovementioned uses of epiphany and montage were of great value to certain poets, allowing them to, in Eaglestone's terms, 'focus the horror' and capture particular moments indicative of their daily reality, it is necessary now to mention that many poets avoided focusing on singular, horrifying incidents and instead chose another method of containment, namely poetic resolution. Some of the ways in which this resolution occurred will be considered in the following section.

## Poetic resolution

Representational modes which resolve the horror of one's experiences of the camps in some way have been frequently criticised in post-war texts. Adorno, for example, condemned literature that 'shows us humanity blossoming in so-called extreme situations, and in fact precisely there, and at times this becomes a dreary metaphysics that affirms the horror'.<sup>628</sup> Similarly, Lawrence Langer has often criticised works which display narrative closure, a 'redeeming' narrative, or a tendency to stress a positive aspect.<sup>629</sup> Some of these characteristics of poetic resolution are frequently seen in camp poetry. In this section I focus on how this resolution often occurred, especially the ways in which camp poems allowed inmates to redraw boundaries through their definition or interpretation of words, places and events. Through their poetry, they were able to gain control over circumstances which camp reality had made them powerless to resist by carefully assuming the role of interpreter.

My analyses below will highlight the positive effects of redefining and re-signifying aspects of one's imprisonment within poetry. The abovementioned criticism of such acts of resignification is, I propose, irrelevant with regard to poetry written in the camps. For those in the midst of witnessing and experiencing the unbearable, 'a resolution to the pain seems urgently necessary', Nader writes, and goes on to say: 'The inmates may need narrative resolution in order to avoid succumbing to a defeatist attitude that could easily lead to

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<sup>628</sup> Adorno, 'Commitment', in *Notes to Literature*, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann, trans. by Shierry Weber Nicholson, 2 vols (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), II, pp.76-94 (p.88).

<sup>629</sup> Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies*, p.2.

letting go of the will to live, reducing inmates to the condition of Muselmänner'.<sup>630</sup> This would support his earlier proposal that 'few of the camp poems end without offering some kind of resolution, however minimised or ambiguous one might read this to be'.<sup>631</sup> In this section, my focus will be less on resolution in terms of a redemptive or happy ending and more on forms of resolution which involve redrawing the boundaries of meaning.

### (Re)defining words

The degree to which this redrawing of boundaries occurred ranged from defining words to re-signifying one's experiences in the camp. Whilst the definition of single words may seem inconsequential, it nonetheless reendowed inmates with a measure of agency and control. Crucially, with regard to the above criticism and also in contrast to the re-signifying of experiences, (re)defining words did not always have a positive outcome in terms of the definition's tone.

I have briefly touched on redefinitions in the previous chapter: for example, in 'Capo', Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz redefined the meaning of the word to align the SS term with the behaviour of the aforementioned inmates, thereby setting him in a position of authority (in the poem). More frequently, words from outside the camp setting are redefined to reflect their corruption by experiences within the camp. Kupfer-Koberwitz's 'Transport', for example, describes the title word as 'ein grauses, ein düsteres Wort' and gradually implies its new meaning as the poem progresses.<sup>632</sup> In 'Die hätten nicht das Recht...?', Karl Schnog hints at the real, sinister meanings of terms and descriptions used by the SS through his use of speech marks: 'Die die „Erhebung“ noch im Rückgrat spüren'; 'sie haben Willis Tochter „untersucht“; / Pauls Bruder ist „an Krämpfen eingegangen“ / und Fritzens Eltern: „Als vermißt gebucht.“'<sup>633</sup>

Many poems also depict the camp's distortion of previously positive objects or concepts. In Ferdinand Römheld's, 'KL Gross-Rosen', for example, the poet-speaker laments the way in which the scent of roses has been eternally spoiled for him, 'seitdem das Wort mir nichts

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<sup>630</sup> Nader, p.146.

<sup>631</sup> Ibid., p.108.

<sup>632</sup> Kupfer-Koberwitz, *Kette der Tage*, pp.33-34.

<sup>633</sup> Karl Schnog, 'Die hätten nicht das Recht...?' (1942), in *Zeitgedichte – Zeitgeschichte, von 1925-1950* (Berlin: Allgemeiner Deutscher Verlag, 1949).

als Jammer birgt'.<sup>634</sup> Other familiar, positive concepts – friendship, love, and home, for example – are all re-examined by poets, who often take a more active stance than Römheld, not just mourning the loss of their former meaning but defining them anew. Armin Freudmann, for example, describes the protagonist's journey 'home' in 'Die Ambulanz', before clarifying that 'heim' now means 'ins Bett'.<sup>635</sup> More negatively, Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz's 'Kamerad sein', considers the way in which the description in the title has become 'verbraucht und [...] leer': 'wer hier sich Kamerad nennt, ist nicht dein Freund, / ist einer, der schreit und der schlägt'.<sup>636</sup> To the poet-speaker, the term is now hard to hear, 'wie ein übel erdachter Scherz'. The final stanza presents an even more damning verdict:

Sie nennen sich Kamerad,  
 doch --- sie können's nicht sein.  
 Kamerad sein heißt: Mensch sein.  
 Die alles verloren, verloren das Menschsein auch.

Kupfer-Koberwitz's departure here in this final stanza from an otherwise fairly regular rhyme scheme (*abaab cdcd efef*) and metre underlines the severity of his judgment. The breakdown of the meaning of 'Kamerad' reflects, or causes, the breakdown of humanity, too. Kupfer-Koberwitz reaches similarly sober conclusions in 'Kette der Tage', describing certain words' complete loss of meaning within the camp setting:

Und ein jeder Tag löscht uns etwas aus,  
 einen Funken in unsrer Brust.  
 Wir sagen nur noch: "die Liebe – das Haus" –  
 doch es klingt nicht echt, das Echo bleibt aus,  
 wir empfinden nicht mehr die Lust.<sup>637</sup>

Whilst such redefinitions are primarily negative, then, reflecting the steady loss of previous positive connotations, I propose that the poet's role in acknowledging this loss and presenting their new interpretation of particular concepts is a small but significant way of regaining agency and containing these concepts within a definition. In this way, the poet is able to fight against words' complete loss of meaning – like that mentioned in 'Kette der Tage' – where there is only emptiness when certain words are spoken. Even negative meanings appear to be of greater value than this emptiness in that they are defined, pronounced and recorded by the inmate.

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<sup>634</sup> AKGD, 6203.

<sup>635</sup> Freudmann, *So sang zu mir*. Ebook.

<sup>636</sup> Kupfer-Koberwitz, *Kette der Tage*, p.28.

<sup>637</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.39-40.

### Re-signifying experience

In a similar way, but occurring more frequently, camp poets concentrate on one specific aspect of their imprisonment, using the poem to reinterpret it and impart meaning. As in the epiphany section above, focussing on a particular place, event or item allows the poet to contain an aspect of their suffering; here, though, the focus aims less to capture the horror of daily reality and more to deconstruct and redefine everyday aspects of their imprisonment. Nader identified this in two poems he analysed, Hasso Grabner's 'Die Häftlingsnummer' and Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz's 'Gestreiftes Kleid', describing the way they 'strive for a reversal of signification': 'Both poems take an element from the camps designed to deny the inmates their individual identity and they imbue that element with a meaning that counters or reconfigures such denial'.<sup>638</sup> In this section I aim to show how widespread this reversal of signification is through examining the treatment of common or familiar events, places, and items.

Alice Lesser's poem, 'Wir schleppen schwere Lasten' (p.312), exemplifies the transformation of many everyday events of camp life.<sup>639</sup> Lesser wrote the poem in Ravensbrück in memory of Käthe Leichter, who was gassed, along with many other Jewish women, in 1942 at the Bernburg 'euthanasia' centre.<sup>640</sup> Whilst the stanzas start with descriptions of commonplace occurrences, these oppressive and gruelling experiences are given positive consequences. The knocking together of heavy stones, for example, is depicted as shattering the world's evil, shovelling a grave is presented as making a place in which to bury the putrid world, and the arduous task of building a road is made more bearable by the assertion that a better world will march upon it. The poet-speaker does not deny the tiredness, hunger, pain, cold and sickness which are part of daily life, but the deliberate transformation of certain gruelling circumstances seems necessary in order to maintain courage, persistence and hope in the face of these. This enables the progression of the final lines of each stanza from 'eine ungerechte Welt', 'eine harte, böse Welt', 'eine schon verfaulte Welt' to 'eine neue bessr Welt'.

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<sup>638</sup> Nader, p.72.

<sup>639</sup> AKGR, RA-LAG 18.

<sup>640</sup> Ibid.; Jaiser, *Poetische Zeugnisse*, p.34.

Of the other daily camp events described, the roll-call is by far the most common. In the previous chapter, I described Armin Freudmann's humorous interpretation of the exhausting daily act of being counted as a sign of the inmates' great worth. Whilst ironic, this interpretation shows the poet's resistance to the imposed deindividuation. Camp poems' frequent focus on the roll-call is unsurprising given its frequency, its gruelling effect on every inmate (except those too ill to attend), and the length of time it occupied each day. It structured the inmates' days and reduced the inmates to an anonymous mass. Poetry was able to capture this reality, but also to fight against it, reversing power relations and restoring individuality and agency to the inmate.

It is therefore unsurprising that the *Appellplatz* is one of the most common places within the camp to become a centre point of the camp poem. In the previous chapter, I discussed Hasso Grabner's 'Appellplatz Buchenwald' (p.300), and the ambiguity with which the poet describes painful experiences.<sup>641</sup> Here, I highlight the confident tone used throughout, which culminates in the final defiant assertion: 'Marsch, ihr Buchenwald-Soldaten! / Zehn für einen jeden, der fiel!' This promise of revenge mimics that undertaken by the SS if a guard were attacked or killed by an inmate; here, the agents are reversed, with the SS bearing the future repercussions for the many inmate deaths. Moreover, despite the poem's title, it avoids describing the gruelling process of the roll-call, during which the inmates were expected to stand still for hours at a time. Instead, the inmates are presented as mobile and active, obeying orders issued by a fellow prisoner ('Marsch durch den Lehm, / Und Takt, Kameraden!'; 'Seitenrichtung und / Links, Kameraden!'; 'Die Augen links, / Durchzähl'n, Kameraden!'; 'Arbeitskommando weg, / Kameraden!') and ultimately moving away from the site of the roll-call towards a future in which revenge is certain. Finally, as in Freudmann's poem above, there is the deliberate reinterpretation of the anonymising act of being counted. It is the inmates who are instructed to count ('Durchzähl'n, Kameraden!') and the outcome of this, rather than a number signifying the inmates' deindividualisation, is an assurance of their collective strength: 'Zahl ist Masse, / Und Masse ist Schritt. / Vor die Weltgeschichte geladen, / Zählt die Masse zum Wollen mit'. This final use of 'zählen' furthers the poet-speaker's transformation of the act: the inmates are once more presented as the agents, but the act is further removed from the contained setting of the

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<sup>641</sup> Grabner, p.30.

*Appellplatz* with its implication in 'die Weltgeschichte' and the more positive meaning of 'mitzählen'.

A similar transformation is seen in several poems which use the motif of the 'Kolonne' as a physical representation of the inmates' collective strength. Fritz Leo's 'Die Kolonne' (pp.312-313), for example, written in Buchenwald in 1938, gradually reworks the title image, resignifying its negative aspects.<sup>642</sup> This turnaround is encapsulated in the poem's first and final lines, with the progression from 'Wir haben dem Grauen ins Auge gesehen' to 'Und der Morgen wieder graut': the repetition of 'grau' is now a sign of hope and change rather than the horrors of the past. Similarly, the relentless pace of the 'Arbeitskolonne' is initially depicted as negative, the inmates forced to keep on moving, 'Durch die ausweglose Zeit', 'wenn von uns auch mancher fällt, / Und wenn auch manch ein Aufschrei gellt'. This latter sentence disrupts the otherwise regular stanza structure and rhyme scheme of the poem (adding an extra line to the quatrain), just as the actions described would disrupt the progression of the convoy, but the poem's immediate return to its previous regular structure reveals the unrelenting motion of the 'Kolonne'. As the poem progresses however, this is interpreted more positively, becoming symbolic of the emotional resilience, resistance and persistence of those within it, who will not give up until the world has changed: 'Die Kolonne geht, sie wird nicht müd', / Der Schritte Takt schallt laut; / Bis die Dunkelheit nach Westen flieht'.

Other poems similarly interpret the 'Kolonne' as a metaphor for strength and freedom. The anonymous Ravensbrück author of 'Kolonnen' (pp.313-314), for example, transforms the 'Kolonne' from a symbol of mass suffering to one of mass liberation: 'Kolonnen frei! Kolonnen froh!' After lengthy descriptions of the exploitation and suffering of the masses, almost every line beginning with 'Kolonnen', the poem breaks away from this use of anaphora, mirroring the breaking away of the inmates from their subjugation.<sup>643</sup> Another Ravensbrück poem, 'An meine Brüder in den Konzentrationslagern!', by Käthe Leichter, ends with a declaration of hope and future liberation; its final image is of 'die letzte große Kolonne'.<sup>644</sup> Leichter's poem was learnt by heart by her fellow inmates and passed on

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<sup>642</sup> Fritz Leo, 'Die Kolonne' (1938), in *Kunst hinter Stacheldraht*, p.162, p.164.

<sup>643</sup> AKGR, V 914 F1.

<sup>644</sup> *Ibid.*, 17/56; RA-LAG 18; Slg CJ/1-9 (1). (Also printed in *Mitten in tiefer Nacht*, pp.104-105.)

orally, thus this image of the 'Kolonne' breaking free from its subservience would have been heard by others besides Leichter.<sup>645</sup> As Jaiser noted, this oral transmission would also have helped to temporarily transform one's perception of one's situation:

Im Dialog der Schreibenden mit sich selbst und den Leidensgenossinnen dient die geschlossene lyrische Form mit ihrem Rhythmus, ihren Wiederholungen und ihren Formeln dazu, sich selbst und den eigenen Lebenswillen zu stärken. Sie kann als momentaner Schutz vor der Realität des unberechenbaren Todes empfunden werden, indem durch sie der Herzschlag imitiert und die Angst sprachlich beherrschbar wird.<sup>646</sup>

The hope of future change, of a complete reversal of the inmates' present circumstances, is seen in many camp poems, particularly those which focus on places or moments of particular exploitation. Thus, the Buchenwald quarry – one of the most dangerous places to work in the camp – features in many poems, few of which end without offering some hope for transformation. Karl Schnog's 'Der Steinbruch' (p.314), for example, presents the horrors of working in the quarry before, in the final stanza, asserting that freedom and justice are imminent and the stones themselves will cry out on behalf of the inmates.<sup>647</sup> This claim is intensified by its biblical resonances, echoing Luke 19.40 in which Jesus proclaims that if his followers were silent, the very stones would cry out. The oddly phrased final line – 'Wird der Steinbruch einst von dir gerächt?' – proposes that one day the quarry will be avenged by the addressed inmate. Whilst the poet's choice of subject is somewhat strange here – one would expect the inmate to be avenged, rather than the quarry itself – it nonetheless presents a reversal of the current situation. Similarly, Durchham's 'Steinbruchkaleidoskop', having presented the destructive nature of the stone crushing machine in the quarry, provides a final glimpse of hope that the day of misery will come to an end, for 'morgen ist die Schicksalswende'.<sup>648</sup>

The treatment of particular objects often displays a similar reversal. In the previous chapter, for example, I discussed Gösta Durchham's poem 'Transportabler Galgen' and its avowal that the gallows will be used on the perpetrators and not the inmates. I also examined how Durchham's 'Der Winkel' transformed the purpose of another object, interpreting the coloured triangle on the inmates' clothing as a badge of honour. Similarly,

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<sup>645</sup> AKGR, Slg CJ/1-9 (1).

<sup>646</sup> Jaiser, *Poetische Zeugnisse*, p.212.

<sup>647</sup> Schnog, *Kunst hinter Stacheldraht*, p.162. For a detailed analysis of the poem, see Nader, pp.104-108.

<sup>648</sup> Durchham, pp.43-53.

Chapter Two explored Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz's resignification of his uniform, turning the humiliating outfit into an 'Ehrenkleid'. One final example of such a transformation can be seen in Hasso Grabner's 'Die Häftlingsnummer' (pp.314-315), written shortly after the poet's arrival in Buchenwald.<sup>649</sup>

Its first two stanzas are laden with poetic imagery as the narrator goes to great lengths to convey the destructive power of the number on the prisoner's identity. Whereas the first 'sie' refers to the perpetrators, the second refers back to the title and the prisoner number. The number now assumes agency, having the capacity to erase the person it refers to and make their name vanish into oblivion. The juxtaposition of these two actions implies that the disappearance of the name will necessitate or hasten the erasure of the person. This implication persists in the ambiguity of the following lines: nouns ('Ruf', 'Strich', 'Nichts', 'Schatten') are listed and described without specifying if they are in apposition with 'den Menschen' or 'seinen Namen'. The poet thereby infers the psychological significance of the name. Its loss cannot be easily separated from the breakdown of the individual.

This list of nouns, and the imagery they evoke, also compounds the all-encompassing nature of the loss. Every facet of the name (and by association, the person) is rendered powerless.<sup>650</sup> The name loses any aural resonance, either because it is simply no longer used or because the person it refers to no longer feels a connection to it. Nader has commented on the homonymous 'Ruf' which, besides referring to the name's sound, hints also at the lost reputation of those entering the camp.<sup>651</sup> The stripping away of the name coincides with, and also accelerates, the loss of any status connected with one's previous occupation or public standing.

Having been silenced, the name also loses any visual meaning: the image of a grey stripe on a grey surface encapsulates its impotence. It can no longer be read or understood as it once was. The identity of the individual becomes similarly indistinct, and the choice of grey as

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<sup>649</sup> Grabner, p.21.

<sup>650</sup> Numerous other poems comment on the loss of the inmate's name and the anonymity of the poetic subject. See, for example, Georg von Boris's 'Die Namenlosen' (AKGD, 23.486) and Gösta Durchham's 'Einem Unbekannten Häftling' (pp.18-19).

<sup>651</sup> Nader, p.74. Father Karl Schmidt also makes the connection between name and status in one of his poems: 'Man hat uns den Namen geraubt / und den Rang, / wir sind eine Nummer bloß' (Schmidt, 'Und die Tage sind grau', in *Mein Schatten in Dachau*, p.126).



the colour to conceal this identity emphasises the sense of impotence. This is emphasised even further in the second stanza, where there is continued ambiguity as to whether the nouns refer to the prisoner's name, the whole person, or both. The reference in the final two lines to 'ein Herz' implies once again, however, that the removal of the name has wider consequences for the inmate's identity and existence. This is an existence which threatens to be reduced to 'ein windverwehtes Nichts'. The choice of adjective and noun here – the juxtaposition of which is somewhat incongruous – emphasises yet again the incapacity of the inmates. Just as it makes little sense to make a grey mark on a grey surface, so too there is little sense in the wind blowing away something that doesn't exist. These incompatible images serve thereby to capture the poet-speaker's incomprehension over that which he is witnessing and the senselessness of it.

From these images, the poet returns to those which have direct referents in the camp environment. In the following line, he tells how this wind-scattered nothing is put aside by life 'als Karteiblatt'. The past participle here ('abgelegt') contains both the sense of discarding something no longer needed or wanted as well as filing something away. The poet thereby encapsulates the sense of worthlessness attached to the individual as well as the bureaucratic processes by which this worthlessness was conveyed (that is, the reduction of the individual to the details on a card). This renders the inmate's identity formless and lifeless: echoing the previous image of greyness, the poet describes the inmate as having but a shadow where his heart once was. Here, the use of the indefinite article ('ein', as opposed to 'das Herz' in the following line) suggests a remoteness or disconnection between the individual and their heart. The reason for the heart's current inactivity is then revealed in the final line of the second stanza, where the poet-speaker returns once again to the poem's title: the number has been introduced in order to break the heart of the inmate. This image neatly encapsulates the poem's previous imagery and underlines Christoph auf der Horst's assertion that 'das Austauschen des Eigennamens gegen eine Häftlingsnummer als Vernichtung und Auflösung der Identität empfunden wurde'.<sup>652</sup>

Crucially, however, the poem does not continue in this same vein. Despite this detailed, careful description of the number's destructive effects, the third and final stanzas signal an

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<sup>652</sup> Horst, p.177.

important reversal in the poet-speaker's interpretation of the number's function. It remains the agent in these final stanzas, yet it is now very clearly on the inmates' side rather than an agent of destruction. As Nader comments, 'the prisoner's number undergoes a transformation from a bureaucratic, humiliating, and oppressive instrument for record keeping into a positive, binding force that creates unity'.<sup>653</sup> The final declaration – 'Ich war, ich bin, ich werde sein' – is a clear assertion of the triumph of the individual (through collective resistance) over the perpetrators' 'dunklen Wollen'; it is given greater weight through its echoing of Rosa Luxemburg's final slogan from 1919, affirming that the revolution did and would live on. We also see here the first use of the first-person pronoun in the poem, its repetition reinforcing the endurance and preservation of the self. Moreover, the use of the three tenses connects the inmate to both a past and a future in which the prisoner number did not and will not define them.

One final group of poems to mention before moving on to the next section are those that rely on the poet's religious beliefs to interpret their suffering. Interestingly, within my corpus, this occurs far more frequently with Christian texts than it does Jewish.<sup>654</sup> Georg von Boris's 'Die Dornenkrone' (p.315), for example, draws a parallel, through its form and contents, between the suffering of Christ and that of a priest in the camp.<sup>655</sup> The simple two-stanza poem begins by recounting the dawn of Jesus' day of crucifixion; the second stanza closely resembles the first linguistically and structurally, with a few small changes. Instead of a centurion taking Jesus from his cell, it is now an SS man telling a priest his hour has come. The priest is described in strikingly similar terms to Jesus, however: the SS man tells him, 'Dein Weg geht nach Golgatha', just as the centurion did Jesus, and he is described as 'dem heiligen Sohne', echoing the description of Jesus as 'dem Heiland, dem Sohne'. Both priest and Christ are given a crown of thorns, the only difference being that the latter crown is described as being made from barbed wire. The poem's simple structure and unmistakable repetition make the poet-speaker's aim clear. He is not seeking to deny

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<sup>653</sup> Nader, p.75.

<sup>654</sup> One reason for this is, of course, the greater number of German-language poems available by Christian authors. Nevertheless, the proportion of Jewish poets who transform their suffering is noticeably far smaller; Moll writes that German-language Jewish religious poetry is instead characterised predominantly by 'das Hadern mit Gott über den Zustand, in dem er sein auserwähltes Volk ausharren läßt' (Moll, p.179). For analyses of poems of this kind, see Moll, pp.179-182. This kind of 'Hadern mit Gott' can also be detected in Steinitz's, 'Wo bist Du, Gott?' (p.7).

<sup>655</sup> AKGD, 23.486.

the priest's suffering, yet by presenting it alongside that of Christ he provides a frame within which to interpret this suffering. Indeed, the use of repetition results in an ambiguity which compounds the effect of this parallel: the description of the 'dem heiligen Sohne', mentioned above, might certainly be attributed to the priest, given the other similarities of description between his fate and that of Christ. However, the final four lines of the first stanza could also be interpreted slightly differently, with the murderous actions of the SS being equated to a re-crucifying of Christ, 'wie Gott und aller Welt zum Hohne'. Regardless of the desired interpretation (if indeed only one was intended), the poet-speaker's presentation of the priest's suffering renders it less unprecedented, if no less disturbing.

Other poets also draw strength from comparing their own suffering with that of Christ. Similarly, Katharina Staritz, a Protestant theologian, finds comfort in likening her situation to that of the Virgin Mary in her Ravensbrück poem 'Als zu der Reinen, Gnadenvollen' (p.315).<sup>656</sup> The poem, like 'Die Dornenkrone' above, does not downplay the poet-speaker's suffering: God's plan for Mary is described as being both 'leid- und freudevollen' and the poet is similarly 'blessed' with 'Leid und Seligkeiten'. However, by repeating Mary's response to God, from Luke 1.38 – 'Des Herren Wort gescheh / an seiner Magd' – and then echoing it in her own personal response – 'Laß mich gehorsam deinen Willen ehrn / Maria gleich: / Ich bin die Magd des Herrn' – the poet-speaker minimises the senselessness of her own suffering, making it not only more bearable but also understandable within the context of her personal faith. As Jean Améry writes, 'Er [der gläubige Mensch] ist nicht der Gefangene seiner Individualität, sondern gehört einem geistigen Kontinuum an, das nirgends und auch in Auschwitz nicht, unterbrochen wird'.<sup>657</sup> The religious person could fix their eyes on a certain future, but could also choose to interpret their present in a way that would protect their will to survive. The following observation of Améry is certainly applicable to many of Staritz's and Boris's poems, as well as those of other religious inmates:

Dem glaubensfreien Menschen ist die Wirklichkeit im schlimmen Fall eine Gewalt, der er sich überlässt, im günstigen ist sie ihm Material für die Analyse. Dem Gläubigen ist sie Ton, den er formt, Aufgabe, die er löst.<sup>658</sup>

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<sup>656</sup> Staritz, p.29.

<sup>657</sup> Améry, *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne*, p.29.

<sup>658</sup> *Ibid.*, p.30.

The poems analysed in this section have, however, shown that it was possible, if not necessarily easy, for camp poets of all worldviews to shape and resolve their circumstances through their writing. This poetic resignification of disempowering places, events and objects appears to have been an important means for inmates to contain and positively transform an aspect of their suffering, and thereby maintain the will to survive and resist. The frequency of such transformations with regards to situations of intense suffering and death – many of these poems having been described in the previous two chapters – would support this proposal. Whilst these transformations do not minimise or conceal the horror of the situation – Grabner’s detailed description of the prisoner number’s effects, for example, shows this – they provide the inmate with the means to control and contain otherwise unbearable aspects of their imprisonment. Such aspects could be controlled not only through their initial poetic depiction, but by the subsequent revision of this depiction; the reasons for and effects of rewriting poems will therefore be considered more closely below.

## Mediation

In this section I consider one of the more material ways in which inmate poets reworked boundaries by examining those texts which were edited and rewritten during imprisonment and of which we have several versions. Such works are very clearly mediated, directly contradicting those who have viewed camp poetry as unmediated and a raw, direct expression of the poet’s voice. For example, the following proposal of Adorno – ‘Das perennierende Leiden hat soviel Recht auf Ausdruck wie der Gemartete zu brüllen; darum mag falsch gewesen sein, nach Auschwitz ließe kein Gedicht mehr sich schreiben’ – may focus on post-Holocaust poetry, yet likening it to the screams of the tortured makes it applicable to camp poetry, too.<sup>659</sup> This association problematises the status of Holocaust poetry; as Charlotte Ryland writes, it is treated ‘at best as the inarticulate and unmediated expression of pain and suffering voiced only by those who have directly experienced the violation’.<sup>660</sup> A similar view of such poems’ lack of mediation is mentioned in David Roskies’

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<sup>659</sup> Adorno, *Negative Dialektik* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 1966), p.353.

<sup>660</sup> Ryland, p.145.

description of the fetishization of camp poetry, whereby 'every scrap of paper rescued from the Holocaust' is viewed 'as Scripture'.<sup>661</sup> There is the presupposition that such texts are direct expressions of the poet's voice and all are treated as 'equally naive, primitive, and holy'.<sup>662</sup> This is a belief that is replicated for all forms of first-person Holocaust testimony. Michael Bernstein, for example, writes about the myth that testimonies are unmediated and that reading them is, in some way, the same as actually being there:

One of the most pervasive myths of our era, a myth perhaps partially arising out of our collective response to the horrors of the concentration camps, is the absolute authority given to first person testimony. Such narratives [...] are habitually regarded as though they were completely unmediated, as though language, gesture and imagery could become transparent if the experience expressed is sufficiently horrific.<sup>663</sup>

Dieter Lamping's assessment of camp poetry as being unsuccessful not because of a lack of talent but because of a lack of distance to the events of the Holocaust also implies that immediacy and a lack of mediation are both features and failings of these works.<sup>664</sup> Even critics who view camp poetry favourably have made comments which suggest it is often unmediated. Jaiser, for example, states that 'Die Reime schmiedeten sich wie von selbst'.<sup>665</sup>

My aim in this section is not, however, to present an in-depth argument in favour of camp poetry's mediation. I believe my analyses of camp poems up until this point have clearly shown the ways in which inmates carefully crafted their works and it would therefore be redundant to propose that poetic form does not always mediate its contents in some way, that unmediated communication is ever possible. Here, then, I am interested in discussing some of the ways in which mediation works, in exploring its sophistication in camp poetry, rather than arguing for its existence.<sup>666</sup> My focus will be primarily on those works for which we have several versions, in order to explore the ways in which re-writing these poems enabled the poet to better shape and contain the representations of their experiences. Some of the most interesting examples of rewriting are seen in the works of Henrich

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<sup>661</sup> Roskies, p.29.

<sup>662</sup> Ibid.

<sup>663</sup> Michael André Bernstein, *Foregone Conclusions: Against Apocalyptic History* (London: University of California Press, 1994), p.47.

<sup>664</sup> Lamping, pp.285-286.

<sup>665</sup> Jaiser, '„Ich flüchte heimlich“', p.169.

<sup>666</sup> John Guillory's article, 'Genesis of the Media Concept', provides a helpful discussion of the terms 'mediation' and 'medium', and a convincing argument that communication is always mediated (Guillory, 'Genesis of the Media Concept', *Critical Inquiry*, 36 (2010), 321-362).

Steinitz. In the previous chapter I discussed the rewriting of his poem, 'Goethe', and his collection of sonnets contains two other poems which have alternate versions: 'Träume' (two versions) and 'Weihnachten 1938' (three versions).<sup>667</sup> Through examining the ways in which these two poems were reworked, I hope to show in more detail some of the specific ways in which writing poetry in the camps empowered inmates to intricately shape their representation of reality and thereby gain a measure of control over it.

Beginning with the two versions of 'Träume' (p.316), one must firstly note that the texts are undated and there is no external sign of the order in which they were written, which may differ from the order of printing. Summaries of the two poems' contents would be more or less identical: each poem laments the lack of writing materials in the camp and describes the subsequent importance of dreams to bring back images and figures from a previous existence and thereby prevent the poet from being consumed by his suffering. Given the similarities in content, then, it is interesting to consider what other, smaller changes Steinitz made between the two poems.

One of the only differences that persists throughout the whole poem relates to pronoun usage. The second (though, importantly, not necessarily the chronologically second) version gives more agency to the poet-speaker, with twice as many occurrences of the first-person singular pronoun (six as opposed to three). The distribution of these is also somewhat different: the first version contains one in each stanza, whereas the second contains three in the first stanza and three in the final stanza. This latter distribution corresponds more closely with the progression of the poem: the poet-speaker begins by describing his earlier recourse to the written word to contain his experiences and then his discovery of the power of dreams; the middle stanza describes the poet-speaker's more passive reception of the imagery within dreams which saves him from his current suffering; finally, he recounts the ways in which dreams have empowered him to perceive a different world: 'Dann sing dem Leben ich – sing ohne Säumen: / O Welt, wie bist du schön – ach, nur in Träumen'. The differing choices of expression in the final stanza also reflect this change in emphasis. Both begin by mentioning the unwelcome presence of the SS in their dreams, but the first then maintains a more passive (albeit positive) attitude, with dreams assuming the subject position once more: 'Ihr gebt das reine Einst mir dennoch wieder. / Ihr seid die Dichtung,

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<sup>667</sup> Steinitz, p.7; pp.8-9.

die mein Leid bemeistert'. In contrast, the second takes more time to describe the destructive presence of the SS, but the poet-speaker then asserts his regained identity and agency more explicitly: 'Und doch in euch fühl ich als Ich mich wieder'. Dreams have returned to him not only 'das reine Einst', but his own self. This contrasts with the poet-speaker's declaration in the first version: 'Es [des Geistes hohes Walten] muß verklingen, wie ich selbst verklinge'.

Most other changes in the poem can be categorised as differences in the order and choice of imagery and words. In the first version, for example, the noun 'Walten' is used to refer to the former reign of the mind in the written word; in the second, it is that of 'eines gütigen Geschickes' which gave the poet-speaker everlasting images. It is these images which prevent his suffering from consuming him; in the first version, the verb 'verschlingen' is also used, but here it is 'die Öde', rather than 'das Leid' which threatens to consume the poet-speaker. The phrasing 'mich nicht ganz verschlingt' suggests also that the wasteland comes closer to its aim than in the second version, where it is held at a greater distance. Such changes are, of course, minor, yet collectively they result in a slightly more positive tone in the second version, in a similar way to the change in pronoun usage. Other, even smaller, changes have even less of a noticeable effect on the poem's message. The change in the final line from 'ach, nur in Träumen' to 'nur, ach, in Träumen', for example, cannot be said to be of consequence to the poem as a whole. Similarly, the most striking result of the change between 'verschlingt' and 'verschlinge' is simply a more regular rhyme scheme (*abba* as opposed to *abbc*).

Cumulatively, these changes reveal the many careful, deliberate ways the poet shapes his poem and its particular depiction of his daily reality. They highlight many of the choices the poet makes in writing and rewriting a poem, choices which are self-evident in poetry as a genre, but which have historically been less so in camp poetry. Whilst there is undoubtedly a spectrum of mediation within the corpus, examining Steinitz's differing versions highlights the need to be aware of the degree to which camp poems may be carefully crafted, purposefully thought-out representations of reality.

Steinitz's other edited poem, 'Weihnachten 1938' (pp.316-317), confirms this. The first (in print, rather than chronologically first) version is significantly different from the subsequent

two to be considered a separate poem which merely shares a title with the others. The other two versions are, however, extremely similar. The first stanzas are identical; the second stanzas differ only in a few minor word changes (e.g. 'Kinderherz' becomes 'Herz'; 'wenn's Euch' is no longer contracted, becoming 'wenn es Euch'). The most prominent changes occur, then, in the final couplet of the sonnet. In the second version, the poet-speaker instructs his tears to flow and then to question how it can be that those 'mit blutbefleckten Händen / Die Lichter zünden und die Menschheit schänden'. In the third version, the poet-speaker also describes this questioning, though here the subject of inquiry is how it can be possible 'Daß uns're Mart'rer dort das Licht entzünden / Und's Fünklein nicht in ihrem Herzen finden'. This change is interesting, with the focus moving from the perpetrators' actions, or the external results of these actions ('die Menschheit schänden') to their internal, emotional condition.

Considering the three poems as a series, there would then be a definite progression from the initial poem, which bitterly laments the perpetrators' singing of Christmas carols ('Kein Fluch hat je mir so als Fluch geklungen!'; 'Nicht mir, Dir gilt sie Christ: Hallelujah / Von diesen dort, schmerzt mehr als Golgatha'), to the second poem which imagines loved ones, and particularly children, gathering around the tree and cannot reconcile this with the SS doing the same, to the third poem, which begins identically to the second but then moves away from consideration of the SS's activities to question the state of their heart. We cannot, of course, assume that the poems were written in the order in which they were printed. Nevertheless, they represent a journey (regardless of the order of its stages) between bitter lament, incomprehension of actions, and incomprehension of motives, thereby helping the poet to address different aspects of his suffering in turn. In this way, writing and rewriting poetry is a means of incremental containment, of steadily regaining agency and one's sense of self, choice by choice, small change by small change. In the following section I will consider a final, more comprehensive and less incremental means of containment.



## Containment metaphors

To conclude this chapter, I will examine two poems which redefine and re-signify their circumstances in a very particular way, through the use of an extended metaphor to transform an aspect of their situation. In this way, the situation can be said to be contained, temporarily, within the metaphor, giving the poet a measure of control over its appearance and significance. Metaphors are, of course, a common feature of poetry in general, and camp poetry is no exception. Here, though, my focus is on a particular kind of metaphor: that which implicitly posits the poem itself as a container for one's suffering and explores both the efficacy and unavoidable limitations of this.

Let us begin by examining Alfred Kittner's 'Alter Brunnen' (pp.317-318), written in Lager Obodowka in Transnistria in December 1943.<sup>668</sup> The poem takes as its focus the eponymous well. Whilst Kittner may have been referring to a particular well within the camp, the poet-speaker's preoccupation with it suggests a significance beyond its physical presence. The unusual word order in the poem's third line – the separation of subject and verb – implies the threat to self should the poet-speaker confront the 'Tiefen, die ich meide'. In view of this threat, the well provides a contained, natural image, which enables him to set his suffering and fears at a physical remove (albeit metaphorically), down at the bottom of the well. Similarly, descriptions such as 'Finstre Lockung' and 'dunklem Zauber' also render his suffering abstract and therefore less immediate. The poet-speaker's use of metaphor thereby allows him to maintain or establish a sense of self and avoid being drawn down into the 'Schlunde'. Indeed, the poem enacts an important reversal of agency: whilst the poet-speaker is initially the object of many clauses, the containers he sends down into the well survive the journey and become the agents in place of the well and its contents: 'Schäumend brechen sie das schwarze Siegel, / Wieder kehren sie voll reiner Nässe'. I propose that in this way the well can be read as a metaphor for the poem itself, acting as a container for the poet's suffering and fears and allowing the poet-speaker to distance himself from these.

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<sup>668</sup> Kittner, *Schattenschrift*, pp.55-56.

The water retrieved from the well, its mirror-like surface, then becomes a means for self-examination; though the observations are far from positive, the subject pronouns in this penultimate stanza are all first-person singular, signalling the increased agency and self-awareness of the poet-speaker enabled by the well's metaphorical significance, which in turn is enabled by the poem itself. The final stanza then signals a significant change: for the first time in the poem, the poet-speaker adopts a first-person plural pronoun, distancing himself further from his experiences through the enacting of community. His direct address of another, the plea to follow him, suggests that community and friendship will enable him to survive and escape his suffering in a way that the containment of the well does not. In line with this, the poet-speaker enacts, metaphorically, a distance from the well, preferring a cheerful, noisy, natural source of water, as opposed to the manmade well. This hints at the limitations of the written word in entirely containing and overcoming one's fears and suffering. That it is the poem through which the poet-speaker enacts an imagined connection to an other (as described in detail in Chapter Two) is also significant, however, and reveals the poem's continued value.

Kittner's 'Altes Haus' (p.318), written just a few months after 'Alter Brunnen' in March 1944 (and with no published poems written in between these two) also focuses on an old, manmade structure that has become a metaphorical container for the poet-speaker's suffering.<sup>669</sup> The eponymous house could initially be understood merely as a literal description of the poet-speaker's location, the place where he spends his nights. As the poem progresses however, it becomes evident that the house is significant less for its physical sheltering of the poet-speaker and more for its incorporeal residents: 'Gespenster[n]', 'verschwiegne Laute', and later, 'Mord', 'Leid' and 'Lust'.

Whilst the initial stanzas focus primarily on the spectral inhabitants of the house and their haunting of the poet-speaker, the final two stanzas signal a change to focus on the house itself. Here, as the instability of the house is revealed, the structure of the poem also becomes more fragmented. The long sentences of the first four stanzas, frequently stretching over the whole stanza, now become clipped, and midline caesurae at the beginning of both the fifth and final stanzas emphasise this change. Questions are also introduced, and there is a nominal sentence in the final stanza, all changes suggesting

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<sup>669</sup> Kittner, *Schattenschrift*, pp.56-57.

uncertainty and disintegration within the poem, and by extension, the house it describes. This crumbling of the house – reflected by both the poem’s content and form – is somewhat ambiguous. As a container for ghosts, and, as the fifth stanza goes on to speculate, murder, its disintegration would appear a positive development, yet the final stanza provides an alternate suggestion of the house’s significance.

Its first line is the most striking of the poem: the sentence lacks a verb and consists of two, acoustically similar noun phrases, separated by a midline caesura. The adjectives describing the nouns are particularly interesting. ‘Versteintes Leid’ depicts the suffering as having boundaries marked out by stones, thereby being physically contained. This unusual description, made more prominent through the verb’s obsolescence, is arguably fitting, however, for a poem considering a physical building, made of stones, which acts as a container for suffering. The second adjective, describing desire as glazed, is also of interest. Once more the imagery relates to a physical attribute of the house; where glass might help to make the building more impermeable, more secure as a container, the poet-speaker notes that such containment requires that desires – signs of life and energy – become rigid. The price for seeking to contain suffering is presented as emotional stagnation. This idea of stagnation is continued with the following description of time freezing over. Here, the acoustic repetition of ‘ver’ (‘Versteintes’, ‘verglaste’, ‘vereist’) becomes more striking. The poet-speaker’s descriptions of things becoming contained, secured, immobile, contrasts with the crumbling state of the house and the movement of the beings within, as if he is seeking to prevent this decay through his use of words. I will return to this idea shortly, but firstly let us consider the poem’s final lines. These are the most dynamic of the poem: where the poet-speaker has previously been somewhat inert, the effects of the ghosts only minor, he now vividly describes his sensation of being strangled by their ‘Schattenfinger’, a neologism which draws attention to this new potency. Whether he is literally dying or seeking only to convey the devastating effects of the house’s inhabitants, the poem’s final image reveals the poet-speaker’s ultimate verdict on the old house, depicting it as a container for death.

The poem as a whole, then, seems to argue that a physical structure cannot or should not contain (or hide, for ‘bergen’ in the penultimate stanza could also be translated in this way) one’s suffering, the evil one has experienced. The correlation between the crumbling of the

house and the breakdown of the poem's regular structure emphasises the poet-speaker's efforts and struggles to contain his suffering in some way. I propose, however, that whilst the house may prove to be an unsatisfactory structure, the poet's judgment of the poem's suitability as a container is more positive. Whilst the house is the site of death and decay, the poem proves more resilient and ultimately records and preserves the poet-speaker's final horrifying experience within the house. That is, form is being used to reflect the breakdown of form, just as the poem preserves an individual voice which laments the loss of one's individuality and agency.<sup>670</sup> The poetic form is not in itself crumbling, but reveals an extra level of reflection, in which form's supposed breakdown represents the breakdown of another structure. I return here to the poem's second stanza where we find some of the few explicit references to the significance of poetry within my corpus. Here, the poet-speaker describes the power of the spoken and written word to banish (or perhaps, returning to the discussion in the introduction, capture, for the verb here is also 'bannen') ghosts and transport the poet-speaker to another time and place.

As a container for one's suffering, then, the poem can be likened to the house it depicts, yet it also supercedes this structure, lasting longer and providing a means, albeit temporary, for dispelling ghosts. In this way, 'Altes Haus' is a fitting poem with which to end this chapter: whilst the power of the poem to contain is far from faultless, I have nevertheless shown many of the ways in which it is temporarily able to 'versteinen', to provide boundary stones for, the suffering of the poet. These ways relate to both the poems' form and content, and more often than not involve the two closely working together. Accusations as to the inefficacy of these texts, their formal and linguistic inadequacies, are subsequently largely groundless; instead, camp poems have proven themselves to be effective means of containment, of great value to the poet.

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<sup>670</sup> This builds upon Jaiser's statement that the poems should be read as 'paradoxe Zeugnisse [...], in denen über die poetische Form ein Ich geschaffen wurde, das seine Zerstörung zu vergegenwärtigen suchte' (AKGR, Gedichte Sammlung Jaiser, Brief Constanze Jaiser an den Verlag J. B. Metzler, 3.2.99).



## Conclusion

This thesis has considered some of the diverse ways in which concentration camp inmates were able to (re)negotiate boundaries through their poetry. Whilst 'Holocaust poetry' as a whole has been the object of considerable attention in recent decades, poetry written in the camps has been widely overlooked for a range of reasons. Of the scholars who have studied it, many have failed to take into account any inherent value as poetry. The poems have frequently been categorised as historical documents to be mined for potentially new information about the camps, as sacred texts which should not be probed too critically, or as testimonial works which are valuable for revealing experience but whose poetic form consequently takes second place or is considered irrelevant. At worst, they have been dismissed altogether as failed poetry.

The key scholars who have sought to view these poems as poems (whilst not ignoring their testimonial or historical value) are Michael Moll (1988), Constanze Jaiser (2000), and Andrés Nader (2007). Their monographs form valuable contributions to the study of camp poetry, helping to establish these works as a unique corpus worthy of study. Whilst they all propose and expound the poem's ability to reassign a degree of agency to the author, to enable them to make sense of some aspect of the senselessness that surrounded them, the scholars' individual focus and conclusions remain varied. Moll produced the first lengthy study of the poems, yet ultimately doubted the ability of the poetic form to capture the reality of the camps. Jaiser was less critical of conventional forms, yet her research revolved around her analysis of the works as 'poetic testimonies', rather than 'testimonial poems', and subsequently poetic analysis is often secondary to sociological and historical analysis. Here it must also be remembered that Jaiser's focus on poetry from Ravensbrück necessarily limits the study's broader pertinence (whilst not undermining its individual validity).<sup>671</sup> Finally, Nader sought to redress this previous and persistent imbalance of focus, taking into account the poems' historical origins whilst simultaneously considering how inmates were able to use poetry and its various forms to testify of their daily reality.

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<sup>671</sup> Similarly, Jaiser's inclusion of non-German poems, whilst valuable, also limits its comparability with Moll's and Nader's studies.

Nader's monograph therefore provided a helpful stepping stone for my own research. Given the breadth and diversity of the corpus of poetry, *Traumatic Verses* is, however, as Nader himself admits, unavoidably limited in the number of poems it can consider, particularly when viewing these *as poems* necessitates detailed formal analysis. Moreover, whilst Nader mentions the ability of the poem to, for example, establish a connection with another person or distance oneself from one's surroundings, these techniques remain one of the many (valuable) threads of his analysis and are never examined in greater breadth or depth. Following my own archival research and close readings of the poems, it became clear, however, that such techniques – that is, the negotiation and renegotiation of boundaries – were widespread, developed, and deserving of more detailed analysis.

My thesis, then, provides a further stepping stone in our knowledge and understanding of camp poetry. This occurs primarily through detailed analysis of a broad range of poems, many of which remain unpublished and do not feature in the aforementioned critical works, thereby constructing a more detailed and nuanced picture of German camp poetry. Crucially, this is a picture in which the poems are allowed to speak for themselves rather than being analysed according to preconceived notions of what the camp poem's role is or should be. Where Nader's work sets out the essential argument for the value in interpreting these texts in this way – that is, as *poems* – my own thesis uses this foundation to conduct a more thorough examination of their varied poetic functions. That is to say, my starting point is the assertion that the poems concerned are valid and valuable forms of witnessing, and thus my focus is less on what the poems *are* and more on what they *do*.

My unique argument here is that, whilst inmates employed a diverse range of poetic strategies to re-empower themselves and make some sense of their circumstances, many of these strategies can be better understood by considering how they relate to the negotiation of boundaries. That is, the vast majority of the poems in my corpus seek to create connections, establish distance, or delimit a particular aspect of the author's daily reality (and many seek to achieve two or more of these functions). Examining the poems under these headings subsequently allows a better understanding of the inmates' reasons for writing and their reasons for writing poetry in particular. This approach provides an insight into their daily reality and some of the diverse, creative and resourceful ways in which they sought to survive and resist this. Notably, in a setting which confined and

constrained, poems allowed inmates to temporarily escape such restrictions, not simply through distraction and the creative act of writing, but also through the deconstruction of existing, destructive bounds and the strengthening or formation of empowering ones.

Thus, in Chapter Two I demonstrated how poetry enabled inmates to solidify existing empathic bonds and imagine new ones, thereby preserving their own sense of self. In Chapter Three I then examined how poems could be used to distance the poet from the perpetrators, from other inmates, and from their daily reality. Chapter Four, finally, set out to explore how poetry was used to erect boundaries around particular aspects of one's existence in the camps; how it could name, contain and simultaneously banish these aspects. Within this, I addressed the contentious issue of form and explored how traditional, conventional forms – so frequently criticised in previous studies – maintained meaning and value in the face of extremity. Indeed, the centrality and necessity of detailed formal analysis to the thesis as a whole provides a further compelling argument for the texts' form to no longer be shoehorned into other arguments or dismissed as empty and meaningless. Taken together, these central chapters prove the important role camp poems played in endowing inmates with agency and helping them to make sense of their daily reality. Importantly, they show that the (re)negotiation of boundaries through and within poetry was crucial to this endeavour.

This thesis therefore fills a considerable gap in existing research on camp poetry. Understandably, however, the size of the corpus exceeds the scale of my PhD research and I have consequently had to be consistently selective in choosing poems to analyse. Whilst I have attempted to analyse a representative sample, one which reveals both the striking patterns within the corpus and also points out the more unusual or surprising features, there are numerous poems which remain unanalysed. These works, many of which have never appeared in published anthologies or individual collections, have the potential to further enrich our understanding of the camps and the role of poetry within them. Such an understanding could also be deepened by establishing the position of these poems within an oeuvre or tradition. That is, whilst examining their role within the closed world of the concentration camp is essential, further research might consider the everyday function of poetry for inmates before imprisonment and the ways in which this affected poetry's role within the camps. What was the repertoire of poetry they carried with them, from their



schooling and daily lives, and how did this influence their engagement with poetry once imprisoned? Moreover, how does camp poetry fit within the oeuvres of those who were poets before entering the camps or those who continued to write after liberation. The similarities and differences between these time periods could help to highlight the unique features of camp poetry. This might also be achieved by exploring more closely whether these works can be placed along a continuum of poetic tradition, or whether the so-called 'Zivilisationsbruch' the Holocaust represents precludes this.<sup>672</sup> Moreover, how do those poems written immediately following liberation, many of them whilst still in the camp, relate to such a continuum?<sup>673</sup> Finally, whilst this thesis concentrates predominantly on drawing similarities between a diverse range of poems by a diverse range of authors, future analyses might focus instead on difference: are there, for example, marked differences between poems from different camps (in content and form, not just quantity) and from inmates of different genders? How did German poetry in single-language communities differ from that in multi-language barracks, and what does this reveal about the different functions poetry undertook in the camps? To widen one's understanding even further, one might also consider whether German camp poetry differs significantly from that in other languages, and how camp poetry differs from that written in other places of imprisonment such as prisons and ghettos.

Notwithstanding these opportunities for further research, this thesis significantly enriches our current understanding of camp poetry, of 'die Jamben und Trochäen seltsam herber Art', as Hugo (Sonka) Sonnenschein put it.<sup>674</sup> Where previous research has frequently been elitist, this thesis as shown how the camps levelled the distinction between high and low cultural forms, despite the persistence of social hierarchies there. I have established the multiplicity of functions and richness of these poems – even those nonsensical and light-hearted texts which have never before been taken seriously yet which are an equally valuable source – and thereby dismissed a range of patronising critical views. In conclusion,

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<sup>672</sup> Dan Diner, 'Zwischen Aporie und Apologie: Über Grenzen der Historisierbarkeit des Nationalsozialismus', in *Ist der Nationalsozialismus Geschichte? Zu Historisierung und Historikerstreit*, ed. by Dan Diner (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1987), pp.62-73 (pp.71-72).

<sup>673</sup> Gary Mole's study of French camp poetry suggests these liberation poems demonstrate a 'general continuity in form' and also in language, but naturally, does not consider German-language poetry in his proposal and admits, too, that there is much still to be explored (Mole, pp.183-184).

<sup>674</sup> Hugo (Sonka) Sonnenschein, 'Traumgedichte', in *Schritte des Todes: Traumgedichte aus Auschwitz* (Vienna: Monte Verita, 1993), p.5.

I have revealed some of the key ways in which these texts allowed their authors to not only record but also, importantly, resist their daily reality – whether through the enactment of empathy, the use of distancing mechanisms, or the provision of a container for their experiences. Sonka's poem cited above captures this dual role, the ability of poetry to simultaneously represent the poet's suffering and provide a means to survive it: 'Vom Hauch des Schattens sind berührt die Reime, [...] vom Ich als Form und Sinn bewahrt'.<sup>675</sup>

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<sup>675</sup> Sonnenschein, p.5.



## Poetry Appendix

### Chapter Two: Connection / Removing Boundaries

**Grete Salus, 'Du oder ich?' (p.253)**

London, Wiener Library (WL), Grete Salus: Poems, 1237-1

**Orli Reichert, 'Kameradin, wenn du traurig bist' (p.253)**

Archiv KZ-Gedenkstätte Ravensbrück (AKGR), 25/347. Also printed (as author unknown) in *Mitten in tiefer Nacht. Gedichte aus Konzentrationslagern und Zuchthäusern des deutschen Faschismus 1933-1945*, ed. by Hanna Elling (Frankfurt a.M: Verlag für Akademische Schriften, 1990), p.88

**Alfred Kittner, 'Einem Gefährten' (p.254)**

*Schattenschrift. Gedichte* (Aachen: Rimbaud, 1988), pp.40-41

**Grete Salus, 'Nach Auschwitz...' (pp.254-255)**

WL, 1237-2

**Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz, 'Ein Pole' (pp.255-256)**

*Kette der Tage* (Stuttgart and Calw: Gerd Hatje, 1946), p.29

**Ferdinand Römheld, 'Ein Morgen' (p.256)**

*Kunst hinter Stacheldraht: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des antifaschistischen Widerstandskampfes*, ed. by Wolfgang Schneider (Weimar: Nationale Mahn- und Gedenkstätte Buchenwald, 1973), p.160

**Anna Lessner, 'Viele Menschen gehen in der Welt' (p.257)**

AKGR, V 909 F1

**Franz Hackel, 'Die Ballade vom Konzentrationslager Buchenwald' (pp.257-258)**

KZ-Gedenkstätte Buchenwald (AKGB), 9-95-21. Also printed in *Kunst hinter Stacheldraht*, pp.168-170

**Author unknown, 'Sie ist nicht mehr' (pp.258-259)**

AKGR, V 926 F1, Slg CJ 1-31

**Alfred Kittner, 'Danklied des Verbannten' (pp.259-260)**

*Schattenschrift*, pp.49-50

**Armin Freudmann, 'O, Beeren' (pp.260-261)**

*So sang zu mir der Stacheldraht: KZ-Gedichte* (Edition Katzenschwanz at Smashwords, 2012), Kindle edition

**Maria Grollmuß, 'Der Heidestrauß' (p.261)**

AKGR, Slg CJ/5-51

**Karl Adolf Gross, 'Hymnus auf die Bibel' (pp.261-264)**

*Sterne in der Nacht. Lieder und Reime eines Ausgestoßenen* (Munich: Neubau, 1946), p.66-70

**Karl Adolf Gross, 'In Dir!' (p.264)**

*Sterne in der Nacht*, p.15

**Heinrich Steinitz, 'Wo bist Du, Gott?' (p.264)**

*Noch mehr: Sonette eines Häftlings in Buchenwald* (Vienna: gratis und franko, 1988), p.7

**Emil Alphons Rheinhardt, 'Freundin, die mein Herz so innig kennt' (pp.264-265)**

„*Meine Gefängnisse*“: *Tagebücher 1943 - 1945*, ed. by Dominique Lassaigue, Uta Schwarz, and Jean-Louis Georget (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), pp.188-189

**Emil Alphons Rheinhardt, 'Im Auf- und Ab der Käfigenge' (pp.265-266)**

„*Meine Gefängnisse*“, p.231

**Fritz Löhner-Beda, 'Deingedenken' (p.266)**

*Kunst hinter Stacheldraht*, p.171

**Fritz Löhner-Beda, 'Du magst dich drehen' (p.266)**

*Kunst hinter Stacheldraht*, p.173

**Anna Stiegler, 'Anklage und Versprechen' (p.267)**

AKGR, 25/355. Also printed in Elling, p.112

**Alfred Kittner, 'Traumferne' (p.267)**

*Schattenschrift*, p.37

**Emil Alphons Rheinhardt, 'Weihnachtsmorgen: strahlender Sonnenschein' (p.268)**

„*Meine Gefängnisse*“, pp.199-200

**Hasso Grabner, 'Essenausgabe' (pp.268-270)**

*Fünfzehn Schritte Gradaus: Gedichte von Hasso Grabner* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1959), pp.25-29

**Author unknown, 'Warum nicht so?' (p.270)**

AKGB, 9-95-33-43

**Heinrich Steinitz, 'Tischlerwerkstatt' (p.271)**

*Noch mehr*, p.10

### **Grete Salus, 'Du oder ich?'**

Schon wieder gehst Du neben mir, Fremdling –  
Sprich nicht zu mir, rühr mich nicht an.  
Schon [sic] dass du da bist, ach, so dicht bei mir  
ist hart, ist schwer – schon beugt es mich  
bald wird es mich zerbrechen.

Und immer bist Du da –  
still, stumm und doch wie schreit es –  
warst Du es – bin es ich –  
Wie quälst Du mich gar grausam.

Schau mich nicht an mit diesen geisterhaft  
vertrauten Blicken  
schau mich nicht an-  
ich bettle, flehe –  
Du aber hörst mich nicht  
Du schaust mich an – still – unentwegt.

Was willst Du von mir, woran mahnst Du mich.  
Kein bisschen Freude, sanfte Ruhe  
nichts bleibt mir, alles wird gar schal und abgestanden.  
Denn immer bist Du neben mir  
so stark in Deiner stillen Nähe – Fremdling.

### **Orli Reichert, 'Kameradin, wenn du traurig bist'**

Kameradin, wenn du traurig bist,  
denk daran, Dein Leid ist nicht verloren,  
denn aus tausend ungeweinten Tränen erst  
wird ein Herz, ein starkes Herz geboren.

Kameradin, wenn du müde bist,  
laß Dich tragen, fasse unsere Hände.  
Denk daran: Nur noch eine kurze Frist,  
und der lange Weg ist dann zu Ende.

Kameradin, halt die Augen offen,  
schau Dich um: Du bist hier nicht allein:  
alle, die mit Dir vom selben Leid betroffen,  
wollen mit Dir kämpfen, wollen Deine Schwestern sein.

Kameradin, Kampf ist unser Ruf!  
Kämpfen kann man nur mit hartem Herzen.  
Wenn Dir Kampf und Leid die Freiheit schuf,  
heilt der neue Tag Dir alle Deine Schmerzen.

Kameradin, schau, die Sonne strahlt,  
und die Erde fängt schon an zu beben,  
purpurrot hat sich der Osten angemalt,  
Sturm bricht los – es kommt ein neues Leben.

### **Alfred Kittner, 'Einem Gefährten'**

Mann vor mir, du bist allein geblieben:  
Frau und Kinder haben sie erschossen.  
Weiter wirst du nun mit uns getrieben,  
Trottest mit im Zug der Leidgenossen.

Warum wirfst du nicht mit Zorngebärde  
Dich zu Boden, daß man dich erschieße,  
Daß gemeinsam in die fremde Erde  
Dein Blut mit dem Blut der Deinen fließe?

Ich verstehe dich: wir leben weiter,  
Mögen stündlich wir vor Schmerz auch sterben,  
Und wir ziehn, mitunter sogar heiter,  
Immer tiefer hin in das Verderben.

Stöhnend taumelst du in unserer Mitte,  
Morgen wirst du vielleicht wieder lachen,  
Wirst mit uns im gleichen Wanderschlritte  
Manchmal seufzen, manchmal Späße machen.

Keinen sah ich um den Tod noch bitten,  
Jeder muß sein hartes Schicksal tragen.  
Ach, du siehst nicht hinter deinen Tritten  
Köter an den jungen Leibern nagen!

*Lager Demidowka, Dezember 1942*

### **Grete Salus, 'Nach Auschwitz...'**

Da kauerst Du Mensch, ein Häuflein Unglück –  
nackt und bloss.  
Versunken in sich selbst, in den eig'nen Schmerz,  
hingegen Gedanken, die erfüllt sind von Leid.

Du wirfst Dich zur Erde nieder, umklammerst sie,  
willst Trost von ihr und Wärme.  
Sie gibt nicht Trost, nicht Wärme,  
ist selber nackt und arm und bloss.  
Beraubt des Lebens, jeder Freude –  
nicht Schmerz, nicht Leid kann sie mehr rühren –  
Erstarrt, erkaltet wie Dein eigen Angesicht.

So liegst Du da, in tiefster Einsamkeit.  
Du siehst nicht, hörst nicht –  
keines Menschen Stimme dringt zu Dir.

Hebe Dein Antlitz, öffne die Augen,  
lass die ungeweinten Tränen fließen  
und schaue um Dich –  
Menschen ziehen an Dir vorüber,

mit Gesichtern, die zerfurcht sind von Gram.  
Menschen mit Händen, die tasten – die greifen wollen  
einen Reichtum, der ihnen längst entglitten.  
Menschen mit Augen, die grässliches gesehen. –  
Ein Mutterantlitz – Kinderlippen – Männertränen  
Gebeugte Nacken – müde, müde Leiber.

Erwachend aus der Einsamkeit des eig'nen Schmerzes  
erfühlst Du das Leid der anderen.  
Es greift nach Dir, hebt Dich empor  
zieht Dich zu sich hinüber.  
Du erfasst die Hände, die sich Dir entgegenstrecken  
und schreitest langsam ein in ihre Reihen.

Du schmiegst Dich dankbar in die Menschenwärme  
die Dich umhüllend sanft erfasst.  
Da gehst Du nun Einer von ihnen mit Ihnen –  
Gemeinsam tragend, das grosse Leid, Verzweiflung, Kummer.  
Ein Schicksal voll wuchtiger Schwere zwingt uns  
Gemeinsam zu gehen –  
Gemeinsam zu tragen  
Gemeinsam zu warten –

### **Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz, 'Ein Pole'**

Was ist geschehen – wem hat man geschlagen  
die Faust ins Gesicht und in den Magen –  
wen hat man getreten wie ein Vieh,  
daß er so laut und so gräßlich schrieh?-

Scheu schaun sie sich um und sehn sich vor –  
es geht ein Flüstern von Ohr zu Ohr; -  
doch dann erlischt jeder Teilnahme Spur,  
sie zucken die Achseln: „Ein Pole nur.“ –

Was ist geschehen – wer schwankt da einher,  
tiefliiegend die Augen, den Blick so leer,  
gesunken die Wangen, nur Haut und Bein? –  
Es kann nur ein Halbverhungertes sein. –

Scheu schaun sie sich um und sehn sich vor –  
leis geht es fragend von Ohr zu Ohr; -  
doch dann erlischt jeder Teilnahme Spur,  
sie zucken die Achseln: „Ein Pole nur.“ –

Was ist geschehen, wer liegt denn dort,  
rührt sich kaum mehr, lallt nur noch ein Wort? –  
Aus seinem Munde da quillt es rot –  
geht nicht mehr hin – der Mann ist ja tot! –

Scheu schaun sie sich um und sehn sich vor –  
leis geht es fragend von Ohr zu Ohr; -  
doch dann erlischt jeder Teilnahme Spur,



sie zucken die Achseln: „Ein Pole nur.“ –

### **Ferdinand Röhild, 'Ein Morgen'**

Die Nacht war kalt, und der Regen rann,  
Der Sturmwind peitschte die Wälder.  
Mit eisigen Schauern der Tag begann,  
Gegen Morgen ward es noch kälter.

Das Pfeifen schreckte die Müden auf  
Und jagte sie in die Nässe.  
Man trieb sie zu Frühsport und Dauerlauf –  
Und die Windsbraut zog orgelnde Bässe.

Dann trotteten sie auf den zugigen Plan  
Und standen in frierenden Reihen.  
Das gewohnte Furioso des Tages hub an  
Mit verrohtem Gebrüll und mit Schreien.

Die Kapelle mit Affenfräckchen am Tor  
Mimt' Geschmetter der Janitscharen,  
Und mit schwerem Tritt stampften sie empor –  
Und der Junge war unter den Scharen.

Ein langsames Sterben in fruchtloser Müh',  
Wie Lämmer in Geierkralle.  
Ich dacht' an ihn und dachte an sie;  
Denn ich liebte in einem sie alle.

Im Magen ein Täßchen voll Morgentrank,  
Dürre Leiber in nassen Klamotten,  
Zur Arbeit gepeitscht ohne Lohn und Dank –  
Man hielt sie ja nur zum Verschrotten.

So schufteten sie nun schon Jahr um Jahr  
Mit den Händen, den schwieligen, klammen,  
Mit Augen, der Hoffnung und Freude bar.  
Wie zog es das Herz mir zusammen!

Ich war im Warmen und leidlich satt –  
Und die vielen frieren und darben!  
Wozu das Schicksal verschont mich hat,  
Daß ich lebe, wo Bessere starben?

Und es brennt in mir als ein zehrender Schwur,  
Und ich weiß um den Sinn all der Leiden.  
Bleibe wach, mein Herz! Bleich wach, mein Herz!  
Und reife die Frucht dieser Zeiten!

*Frühjahr 1942*

### **Anna Lessner, 'Viele Menschen gehen in der Welt'**

Viele Menschen gehen in der Welt,  
Die mir einmal auf dem Weg begegnet,  
Den die gleiche Sonne hat erhellt,  
Den der gleiche Regen hat beregnet.  
Alle hat die Zeit vorbei geschnellt.  
Aber alle haben mich gesegnet.  
Wurden meiner Seele Form und Nahrung  
Und des ewigen Strömens Offenbarung.

Viele Menschen gehen in der Welt,  
Und schon viele in der dunklen Runde  
Bleiben meiner Einsamkeit gesellt  
In der Tiefe auf dem Brunnengrunde.  
Bleiben Samenkorn und Ährenfeld,  
Bleiben Feiertag und Alltagsstunde  
Bleiben immer in mein Ich geboren.  
Alle gingen, keiner ging verloren!

Viele Menschen gehen in der Welt.  
Jeder geht zu einem andern Ziele.  
Waren einmal nah zu mir gestellt,  
Leidgefährte mir und Mitgespiele.  
Wie das Blatt, das bald vom Baume fällt  
Und zu Humus wird im Erdgewühle,  
Sind sie in mein Leben eingebettet,  
Sie in mich und ich in sie verkettet.

### **Franz Hackel, 'Die Ballade vom Konzentrationslager Buchenwald'**

Und wenn ein Tag zu Ende geht,  
Da werden jene, die man erschossen, erschlagen –  
Ein guter Kumpel ist heut dabei –  
Von Genossen ins Lager getragen.

Wir schleppen uns hungrig  
Tag um Tag durch das Lagertor;  
Kahlköpfig, die Mütze in der Hand,  
Den Drohruf der Schergen im Ohr.

Und über dem Tor steht groß und breit  
Und stiert uns an eiskalt:  
„Recht oder Unrecht – mein Vaterland“ –  
Das Wahnwort von Buchenwald.

Des dunklen Tores gähnendes Maul  
Verschlingt Menschen – ein ganzes Heer –  
Und viele Tausend, die das Tor verschlingt,  
Die sehen Weib und Kind nicht mehr.

Sie gehen im Lagerdschungel zugrund,  
In einer gesetzlosen Welt,

In der man das Recht auf eine Stufe  
Mit dem Unrecht gestellt.

Wir gehen Tag um Tag  
Den gleichen Gang;  
Aus dem nahen Gebüsch  
Tönt keines Vogels Gesang.

Es flogen die Vögel davon;  
Sie flohen vor Blut und Mord,  
Wie sollten die Vögel singen  
An diesem Schadenort?

Wir gehen nicht allein;  
Es gehen immer Tote mit;  
Und schleppend, bleiern schwer  
Ist unser aller Schritt.

Und Tote stehen um uns her  
Und schicken ihren Sterbeschrei  
Hinaus in eine taube Welt  
Von diesem Berg von Tyrannei.

Und wir sind sie... Und unser Tag  
Ist nah dem Tod...  
Und unsre Nacht  
Ist eine Nacht der Not...

Noch trinkt des Lagers Erde  
Unsern Schweiß und unser Blut;  
Und noch sind wir ein Sklavenheer  
Und doch der Zukunft Vorderhut.

Denn ob uns Stacheldraht  
Und Turm und Mauer auch umringt –  
Wir glauben an die Kraft,  
Die Turm und Mauer zwingt.

Wir hoffen auf den Tag  
In einer künftigen Welt,  
Wo man das Recht nicht mehr auf eine Stufe  
Mit dem Unrecht stellt.

Wir wissen, dass ein Morgen kommt  
Nach der Nacht in dieser Zeit;  
Dann flammt hell – das Drei-Sonnen-Licht:  
Friede, Freiheit, Menschlichkeit!

### **Author unknown, 'Sie ist nicht mehr'**

Sie ist nicht mehr  
Ein dumpfer Schrei:  
Gerechtigkeit –

Dann war's vorbei –  
Beim 1. Sirenschrei

Sie ist nicht mehr  
Ein Morgen kwehr  
Ein Schornstein noch –  
Wie wird mir zu Mut  
Bei dieser Glut?!?

Sie ist nicht mehr  
Das Auge bricht  
Ein Funke erlischt –  
– Ein Platz ist frei  
Was rennst Du vorbei?

10 andere her  
Es wächst das Flammenmeer

Sie ist um uns her  
ein lieber Geist  
Er verfolgt uns schier  
Zum Kampf gereizt –  
- Auch wir –  
- Dank Dir –

Du lieber Geist.

### **Alfred Kittner, 'Danklied des Verbannten'**

Es mag ein Krug sein oder eine Flasche,  
Ein Handtuch oder eine Einkaufstasche,  
Im kleinsten Gegenstände offenbart  
Die Schönheit sich in neuer Eigenart.

Zuweilen finde ich noch ihre Spur  
In einer ausgefransten Wäscheschnur,  
Um die ich, daß sie keinen Schaden leide,  
Behutsam eine Unterhose breite.

Nun flattert sie, ein blitzendes Fanal,  
Durch meine rauchige Stube weiß und schmal,  
Und ihre Heiterkeit bringt jetzt dem Späher  
Das Glück der kleinen Erdendinge näher.

Vor eines Kochtopfs plumper Knechtsgestalt  
Erfasst michs oft mit plötzlicher Gewalt,  
Und stets erfreut mich, jenseits ihrem Zweck,  
Durch ihren Anblick schon die Schwarte Speck.

Wer wird, wenn ich den Blick zum Brennholz senke,  
Verargen mirs, daß ich an Wälder denke  
Und seinem würzigen Harzduft dankbar bin,  
Lenkt er zu Sommerträumen meinen Sinn?

Des Wassers Frische lockt mich aus der Schüssel,  
Humor erweckt in mir der krause Schlüssel,  
Und wenn ich wieder einmal Trübsal blase,  
Zeigt mir der Spiegel die gerümpfte Nase.

Ihr kleinen Erdendinge, habet Dank,  
Solang ihr um mich seid, wird mir nicht bang,  
Ihr seid, so ists im Sinn der Welt beschlossen,  
Des armen Daseins schlichte Spielgenossen.

Ihr habt auch mich, der fern der Heimat weilt,  
So oft von Unmut und von Trotz geheilt,  
Und euer Anblick hat zu diesem Leben  
Auch dem Verbannten neuen Kraft gegeben.

*Lager Obodowka, 6. Februar 1943*

### **Armin Freudmann, 'O, Beeren'**

O, Beeren, Beeren! Sonnenrote Beeren,  
Hell leuchtend aus dem grünen Waldesgrund!  
Der ganze Wald ist voll von Fichten, Föhren  
Und süßen Beeren, rot und reif und rund.

O Beeren, Beeren! Sommerrote Beeren,  
Die freigebig uns die Natur erschuf.  
Wo ist das Herz, das könnt der Hand verwehren,  
Zu folgen eurem kecken *Pflückt-uns!*-Ruf?

Und doch, Ihr Beeren, purpurrote Beeren!  
Es gibt solch Herz, so hart wie Felsenblock.  
Es quillt daraus ein Strom von Blut und Zähnen  
Und hüllt sich fröstelnd in den grauen Rock.

O Beeren, Beeren! Lippenrote Beeren!  
Wie liebt Euch die, die mir so teuer ist.  
Bleicht auch der Gram die zarten Lippen, deren  
Blaßrosig Fleisch ich leuchtendrot geküßt?

O Beeren, Beeren! Dunkelrote Beeren!  
Am Wegrand wuchernd überüppigreich.  
Wir dürfen uns um Stock und Stein nicht scheren;  
Uns bricht das Herz schier, treten wir auf Euch.

O Beeren, Beeren! Reiferote Beeren!  
Verfault, verdorrt, zertreten ungepflückt.  
Ihr könnt uns heut nur das Gemüt beschweren  
Und hättet doch so gerne uns beglückt.

Doch übers Jahr, Ihr hoffnungsroten Beeren,  
Wenn sich der rauhe Zeitsturm ausgetobt,  
Da wollen froh und frei wir wiederkehren  
Und bis dahin sei Hoffnung unser Trost.

O Beeren, Beeren, flammendrote Beeren!  
Rot wie die Fahne, die zum Kampfe mahnt.  
Die Welt ist schön, und sie muß uns gehören  
Und schöner werden, als der Kühnste ahnt.

### **Maria Grollmuß, 'Der Heidestrauß'**

Episode aus Deinem Leben.

Einmal, in bangen schweren Schicksalstagen  
Da waren unsre Herzen nicht mehr eins  
Deines voll Glauben u[nd] voll Zweifel meins  
Dennoch – der gleichen Liebe haben sie geschlagen

Da gingst Du hin in einer dunklen Nacht.  
Zum Bergeshang in einen kl[einen Wald]  
Und Deine Finger streichelten die teure Erde  
Was sollte Deine zärtliche Gebärde  
Hast Du gefühlt, das Bittre kommt nun bald?  
Hast Du sie trösten wollen, zart u[nd] sacht?

Da, aus dem Tannendickicht trat ein Mann

...

Er sah Dich – u[nd] hielt an  
Er sah Dich – u[nd] verstand  
Und dann griff seine schwere Hand  
Nach der Laterne, um Dir zu leuchten  
Und in der Nacht, der kühlen, feuchten  
Ging noch ein Licht auf zum Licht der Sterne.

Im Lichtstrahl, den der fremde Kamerad  
Zu Dir gesandt in jener düstren Nacht  
Erbühte hell, in Moos u[nd] fahles Gras gedrückt ein Büschel Heidekraut  
Ihr habt es still gepflückt u[nd] eure beiden Herzen hielten Wacht.  
Dann ging ein jedes wieder seinen eignen Pfad,  
Du heimwärts u[nd] auf Posten d[e]r Soldat

Gruß, Blume, Mahnung aus dem teuren Land  
Am Tag darauf hast Du sie mir gesandt

...

Und Liebe wieder sich zu Liebe fand

### **Karl Adolf Gross, 'Hymnus auf die Bibel'**

Komm wieder, liebe Bibel,  
Der Gottesweisheit Fibel,  
Strahl aus der Ewigkeit!  
O kommt, ihr heil'gen Blätter,  
Zeugt mir von unsrem Retter,  
Wie seid ihr doch so weit, so weit!

Wie muß ich euch entbehren,  
Ihr wonniglichen Lehren  
Aus unsres Königs Mund!  
Es schwinden Tag und Jahre,  
Allein das wunderbare  
Buch bleibt mir ferne Stund um Stund.

Ich möchte wieder lesen,  
Wie es dereinst gewesen,  
Da ER zur Erde kam.  
Die Worte will ich wissen,  
Nicht eines darf ich missen  
Von allem, was ER auf sich nahm.

O möchten zu mir treten  
Apostel und Propheten,  
Des Königs Boten sie,  
Des Evangeliums Kündler,  
Der Hölle Überwinder –  
O Chor voll reiner Harmonie!

Denn wie am fernen Orte  
Der Sohn die Mutterworte  
Im Briefe bebend liest:  
Die Silben will er küssen,  
Die Buchstaben, sie müssen  
Die Liebe steigern, die genießt.

So möcht' ich wohl mit Tränen  
Des Danks und heißem Sehnen  
Öffnen das Bibelwort,  
Dem Klang der Offenbarung  
Zur innersten Bewahrung  
Auf Knien lauschen fort und fort.

Wann naht sich mir die Stunde,  
Da mir die Himmelskunde  
Wird wieder aufgetan?  
Du Banner der Befreiung,  
Du Feuer der Verneuerung,  
Du Fackel mir auf finstrer Bahn!

Du fester Wall der Wahrheit  
In diamantner Klarheit,  
Der Sünder Arznei!  
Du Rosenstrauch aus Eden,  
Voll Wohlgeruchs für jeden,  
Dein Duft macht uns des Irrtums frei.

O Pfeil aus Gottes Köcher,  
Frohbotschaft für die Schächer,  
Des Geistes Medium!  
O Jubel der Bedrückten,  
O Friede der Beglückten,  
Des Weltenmai Präludium.

Urkunde der Vollendung,  
Ende der Gottesschändung,  
Ruf zur Gerechtigkeit!  
Urlicht der Auferstehung,  
Fanfare der Erhöhung,  
Des Sohnes Atem in der Zeit!

Choral in Pilgerzonen,  
Du Schrecken der Dämonen,  
Des Heilands Händedruck;  
Wegweiser der Verirrten,  
Stimme des guten Hirten,  
Der Ausgestoß'nen goldner Schmuck!

Du Siegeschrei der Väter,  
Du Trutzburg aller Beter,  
Der Liebe Erdenspur;  
Des Rätselwerks Entschleirung,  
Des Endgerichts Beteuerung,  
Du Zeiger an der Weltenuhr.

Geschliffnes Schwert der Kämpfer,  
Der Satanslüste Dämpfer,  
Bollwerk im Todesstreit!  
Zuflucht der Magdalenen,  
Anwalt der Kindertränen,  
Du Herold der Geistleiblichkeit!

O Führung ohne Fehle,  
Befreiungsbrief der Seele,  
Der Kirche Lehrerin;  
Mysterium der Erwählten,  
Kompaß der Mutbeseelten,  
Der Völkerwelt Erzieherin!

Ach, sieh auf uns herunter,  
Hilf, Gott, tu deine Wunder,  
Zerreiß die Wolkenwand!  
Ja, fahre selbst hernieder,  
Zeig dich den Deinen wieder,  
Beweise deine starke Hand!

Du lenkst der Fürsten Herzen,  
Läßt nimmt mit dir scherzen,  
Bei deinem hohen Fluch!  
Entwinde ihren Fäusten,  
Den gierigen und dreisten,  
Den Raub, dein teures Bibelbuch!

So wollen wir dir danken  
Mit Treue ohne Wanken  
Im Dienst ohn' Ziel und Zeit.  
O komm, du liebe Bibel,  
Der Gottesweisheit Fibel,



Du Strahl aus lichter Ewigkeit!

### **Karl Adolf Gross, 'In Dir!'**

In Dir, Herr,  
Bin ich ganz vollkommen,  
Der Du der Gottheit Fülle bist,  
Du Morgenlicht, dem Licht entglommen,  
Allheiliger Mittler, Jesu Christ!  
Des Allherrn ewge Weisheitsschätze  
Verborgnen liegen tief in Dir;  
Nach Deines Reiches Grundgesetze  
Teilst Du der Krone Gut mit mir.

In Dir, Herr, bin ich ganz geheiligt,  
Altar und Opferlamm bist Du!  
Du hast mich priesterlich beteiligt  
An Deiner Heiligkeit, ich tu  
Das Herz weit auf, daß Du es füllest,  
Mit Deiner Schönheit Strahlenschein  
In Gottes Wohlgefallen hüllest;  
Denn Du bist mein und ich bin Dein.

### **Heinrich Steinitz, 'Wo bist Du, Gott?'**

Die Räder rollen. Eisen knirscht auf Eisen.  
Was ist, ist geisterhaft, Alpdruck, Vision.  
Sind wir noch Menschen, sind wir Tote schon,  
In denen trüg noch die Gedanken kreisen?

Hier stirbt ein Kind, mit einem hilflos leisen  
Gewimmer. Gott, und Du, Du trügst den Hohn,  
Wie tausendfach gekreuzigt wird Dein Sohn,  
An dem sich Deine Liebe sollt' beweisen?

### **Emil Alphons Rheinhardt, 'Freundin, die mein Herz so innig kennt'**

Freundin, die mein Herz so innig kennt  
Heut' ist alles Leben Dein Gedenken.  
Durch den halben Erdteil von Dir getrennt  
Schick ich meine Barke mit Geschenken  
Segelhell ins liebesblaue Element.

Nicht viel Neues kommt zu dir in meiner Fracht.  
Ich belade sie aus unserem Vergangenen:  
Römische Tage und südliche Sommernacht  
(Was fände ich sonst im Elend des Gefangenen!)

Mit einem Mittelmeerstrauß bin ich heut erwacht  
Den üppigen Strauß vertrau ich meinem Liebesboot'  
Das ich belade von jener Glücksterasse

Freiesienduftend mit bougainvillearot  
Mispelherbstlich und narzissenblasse  
Toscanaabende und Provence – Liebesnot

Alles Alte, aufgeblüht in neuer Zärtlichkeit  
Will ich jetzt zu Dir nachhause senden  
Damit Du es bergest aus der Häftlingszeit  
Und es uns bergest mit Deinen Händen,  
Liebesgut aus Liebe heimgeführt!

Ich schicke Dir, wie wir toll gewesen sind  
Und wie unwissend wir glücklich waren  
Tagverloren und schicksalsblind  
Und was ich Dir alles war in diesen Jahren  
Geliebter, Herr und Höriger und Dein Kind.

Und ist Dir manch Gewächsstock unbekannt,  
Schwesterherz, im heutigen Gebinde  
So nimm auch das traurige Blühen in Deine Hand  
Dornen aus Dachau und die Compiègner Linde  
Und was ich in den Kerkerhöfen fand.

Und riechts Dir bitter in all den Süden hinein  
So sinds die schwarzen Lilien der Qualen  
Die blut- und tränengedüngten Akelein  
Die Vergißmeinnicht aus dem Lande „Sehr-Allein“  
Die aus dem Marterkeller mit der Farbe von Wundermohn,  
Die setz mir sorgsam im Liebesgarten ein.

Sie werden demütig sanft abseits stehn  
Zum drängenden Wachsen und Treiben –  
Und wenn wir zu heftig wieder durch den Garten gehn  
Werden sie in unseren Blicken bleiben.

So fahr in den Geburtstag hinein  
Mein zärtliches Boot mit den Liebesstandarten  
Bring der fernen Freundin die Spezereien  
Die ich ihr ernte in dem vereinsamten Garten  
Fahr hin mein Boot in den Süden hinein  
Bring der Lieben all mein Warten  
Und die des Heimwehs, wieder in ihr geborgen zu sein!

### **Emil Alphons Rheinhardt, 'Im Auf- und Ab der Käfigenge'**

Im Auf- und Ab der Käfigenge  
Bleibt mir ein Weg aus der Einsamkeit  
Die ganze bunte traurige Länge  
Der einmal Dein gewesenen Zeit.

Sie haben uns Alles fortgetragen  
Uns selber fort aus der Welt.  
Sie haben mir alles Heute erschlagen  
Und mir das Morgen entstellt.

Sie haben mich mit Trotteln und Dieben  
Zu einer Masse gemacht  
Und dennoch bin ich so übervoll Ich geblieben  
In meiner langen Vergangenheitswelt.

### **Fritz Löhner-Beda, 'Deingedenken'**

Was immer auch geschehe,  
Ich bin in deiner Nähe,  
Mein Denken ist bei dir!

Es will dich vor Gefahren  
Und allem Leid bewahren,  
Daß du heimkehrtest bald zu mir!

Ich kann dich nimmer missen,  
Ich möchte immer wissen,  
Was jetzt mein Liebstes tut.

Um mich ist bange Leere,  
Mir ist es so, als wäre  
Mein bessres Ich  
In deinem jungen Blut!

### **Fritz Löhner-Beda, 'Du magst dich drehen'**

Du magst dich drehen, du magst dich wenden,  
Du magst dich wehren mit Füßen und Händen.  
Der möcht' es segnen, der möcht' es fluchen,  
Der eine fliehen, der andere suchen.  
Ganz gleich, das große Geschehen spricht:

Die Welt bekommt ein anderes Gesicht!

Wie damals, als mit Schwertern und mit Spießen  
Landhungrige Völker zusammenstießen,  
Römerpaläste vom Blute troffen,  
Barbarenpferde am Tiber sofften,  
So funkelt und zuckt das magische Licht:

Die Welt bekommt ein anderes Gesicht!

In allen Ecken schwelt das Feuer,  
Es rieselt deutlich im alten Gemäuer.  
Es kommt, es kommt in tausend Gestalten,  
Es kommt, es kommt und läßt sich nicht halten.  
Die alte Form des Daseins zerbricht:

Die Welt bekommt ein neues Gesicht!

### **Anna Stiegler, 'Anklage und Versprechen'**

Ob auch die Stunden verrinnen,  
ob auch die Jahre vergehen,  
es soll euch nicht gelingen,  
uns schwach und verzagt zu sehen!

Und droht uns auch Tod und Verderben –  
gar viele schon gingen zur Ruh –  
ihr decket ihr mutiges Sterben  
mit neuen Verbrechen zu.

Wir rächen euch, ihr Brüder,  
ihr Schwestern ohne Zahl!  
Schon winkt aus der Ferne die Freiheit  
und neuen Kampfes Signal.

Dann bauen wir euch ein Denkmal,  
doch nicht aus kaltem Stein –  
wir bauen ein neues Deutschland  
und das soll unser sein.

### **Alfred Kittner, 'Traumferne'**

Was wir zurückgelassen, ist nicht viel:  
Ein Buch zum Träumen und zum Traum ein Spiel,  
Ein Fenster noch vielleicht, durch das wir blickten,  
Wenn die Akazien ins Zimmer nickten.

Von allen Wegen rings um unser Haus  
Lockte nicht einer in die Welt hinaus,  
Sie führten nur nach kurzem Wanderglück  
Uns wieder in den stillen Kreis zurück.

Da wir zum erstenmal den Heerweg sahn,  
Fing unser Hungermarsch ins Elend an,  
Zugvögel rauschten über uns nach Süden,  
Der Herbststurm heulte um die Wandermüden.

Wir waren Tausende, und unser Zug  
Hielt eher nicht als vor dem Lauf des Bug;  
An seinen Ufern schlummern viele Leichen,  
wir aber durften unser Ziel erreichen.

Der Steinbruch, den man uns zur Wohnstatt gab,  
Wird bald ein schneebedecktes Wintergrab,  
Und alle Rufe, die wir heimwärts sandten,  
Verhallten unerhört im Unbekannten.

Was wir zurückgelassen, gilt nicht viel,  
Wer denkt heut noch an Buch und Traum und Spiel?  
Nur wenn wir träumen, sehn vor unsern Blicken  
Wir noch Akazien ins Fenster nicken.

## Emil Alphons Rheinhardt, 'Weihnachtsmorgen: strahlender Sonnenschein'

Weihnachtsmorgen: strahlender Sonnenschein,  
aber 10° unter Null. –  
Ich habe die heilige Weihnachts-Nacht  
Recht unheilig verbracht  
Denn der Kerl im zweiten Bett  
Hat die ganze Zeit laut seinen Unflat gesprochen  
Zwischendrein gröhlt er, als ob er den Topf nötig hätt  
Zwar hab ich mich unter die Decke verkrochen,  
Aber es ist mir wenig Schlaf und Sammlung gelungen  
Kaum wars ein bißchen Freude geworden,  
Da hat er laut was vom Scheissen gesungen  
Dann rief einer von oben „Den soll man ermorden!“  
„Ta gueule, maudit chien! [*Schnauze, verdammter Hund*]!“  
Und derweil ist drüben einer unterm Bett krepirt.  
Und jetzt morgens haben sie uns schon das heutige Nachtmahl gegeben  
Eine dünne Schnitte Wurst. Und doch Gottlob, wir sind noch am Leben  
Und Einer hat mir doch eine Weihnachtsfreude gemacht.  
Ein junger Freund hat mir ein Päckchen Zigaretten gebracht.  
War er der Einzige der gestern an mich gedacht.  
Wie viele sind unser, an die Keiner mehr denkt.  
Gott sei gedankt: der Junge hat mich sehr beschenkt!  
So mach ich mein Weihnachten mit neuem Vertrauen.  
Und denke Euch all meine Liebe zu, Ihr zwei lieben Frauen.  
Gott sei uns gnädig, uns Armen in dem Weltgeschehen,  
Er gebe uns Mut und ein baldiges Wiedersehen!

## Hasso Grabner, 'Essenausgabe'

Täglich sind sie am Stacheldraht  
zum Essenfassen.  
Links ein Kamerad,  
rechts ein Kamerad,  
und sie lassen  
einen dritten  
in ihrer Mitten  
nicht allein.  
Aber während sie bitten,  
es möge nicht zu wenig sein  
von der schönen Suppe,  
mischt der sich nicht ein,  
als sei es ihm schnuppe,  
ob er sie frißt,  
weil es ja doch nur  
Kohlrübenwasserbrühe ist,  
was sie hier kochen.

Wenn sie sich dann zum Gehen wenden,  
ihre drei Näpfe in den Händen,  
schleift er so merkwürdig seine Knochen  
hinterher.  
Aber den Napf hält er ganz fest,

wie jemand die Zügel führt,  
er scheint ihm  
weder heiß zu sein noch schwer.  
Er hatte auch keine Miene gerührt  
und nicht gestöhnt,  
als ihm der Kalfakter die heiße Brühe  
über den Daumen spülte,  
als ob er nichts fühlte.

Wahrscheinlich ist er Gießer,  
so einer gewöhnt  
sich mit einiger Mühe  
und nach einiger Zeit  
an das Heiße,  
konnte man denken.  
Doch dieser  
erwarb sich die Unempfindlichkeit  
auf andere Weise.

Vor einigen vierzehn Tagen  
hörten die zwei den dritten sagen:  
„Ich werde sterben“,  
und haben dazu genickt.  
Anderswo ist das sicherlich ungeschickt  
und ohne Pietät.  
Aber hier war es schon ein Trösten,  
nicht zu widersprechen, wenn einer weiß,  
daß er in der Erlösten  
Ruhe eingeht,  
denn was kann er hier schon noch erben?  
Und außerdem dachte von beiden jeder:  
Ich auch, nur etwas später.  
So lehrte sie die Erfahrung.  
Und das schwiegen sie sich  
ins Gesicht,  
denn die Stimmbänder  
brauchen auch ein wenig Nahrung,  
und die hatten sie nicht.

Dann begann der dritte wieder:  
„Tote haben steife Glieder,  
aber mit glasigen Augen  
haben sie keine Ruh,  
bitte drückt mir die Augen zu.“  
Die beiden senkten die Lider  
zu einem „So sei es“.  
„Und noch eins“, sprach die Stimme,  
„Maria, verzeih es!  
Gebt mir den Eßnapf in die Hand,  
solange sie warm ist,  
ganz fest,  
den Daumen über den Rand,  
die Finger an den Boden gepreßt,  
und dann winkelt den Unterarm empor,  
haltet ihn, daß er sich nicht bewegt,

so eben!“  
Dann spielt er ihnen die Szene vor,  
wie einer einen Eßnapf trägt,  
sein erstes Theaterspiel im Leben.

„Legt mich in die Ecke im Zelte.  
Und seid nicht bange,  
bei dieser Kälte  
halte ich mich lange.  
Bei der Essenausgabe nehmt ihr mich dann,  
aber ihr dürft mich nicht fallen lassen,  
und einer sagt: Essen für drei Mann.  
So kann ich jeden Tag  
für euch einen Schlag  
mit fassen.“

Und als er so spricht,  
steht in seinen Augen beinah ein Rausch,  
in dem vergnügliche Lichter zucken.  
Aber die andern wissen nicht  
wohin mit dem Schlucken.  
Jetzt schien ihnen doch der Tod zu frühe  
und ein allzu verzweifelt Stück  
der Tausch,  
der ihnen hier empfohlen:  
Tägliches Entsetzen gegen Kohlrübenwasserbrühe.

Aber der,  
der ihnen mehr  
als das letzte Hemd anbot,  
legte den Kopf zurück.  
„Grüßt Polen“  
und war tot,  
als müßt es so sein.

Täglich sind sie am Stacheldraht,  
dem dornigen Gitter.  
Links ein Kamerad,  
rechts ein Kamerad,  
aber ein Dritter  
läßt sie nicht allein.

### **Author unknown, 'Warum nicht so?'**

Ich lobe mir den Kumpel,  
Der zwar die Binde trägt,  
Doch niemals zum Tyrann wird,  
Der brüllt und tobt und schlägt.  
Der ruhig und gelassen  
Sein Handeln überlegt  
Und der den Arbeitskumpel  
So wie sich selberpflegt.

## Heinrich Steinitz, 'Tischlerwerkstatt'

Ich tischl're jetzt, mit etwas plumpen Händen.  
Oft muß der Meister mich zur Seite schieben.  
Er liebt sein Holz, denn Kennen heißt ja Lieben,  
Und nicht ein Stückchen darf man hier verschwenden.

Doch wenn wir abends spät die Arbeit enden,  
Erklärt er mir, was so ins Holz geschrieben,  
Und lauscht mir oft, dem noch die Kraft geblieben,  
Das Wort zu formen und so Trost zu spenden.

Das größte Wunder ist der Mensch – wir leben,  
Und Freundschaft wächst uns auf. Wir fühlen beide,  
Den Reichtum, den wir uns einander geben,  
Ist stolzer Überwinder allem Leide.  
Ich hass' die Wächter, wie ich nie gehaßt.  
Doch vor dem Mitleid selbst der Haß verblaßt.



## Chapter Three: Distance / Establishing Boundaries

### **Gösta Durchham, 'Der Winkel' (p.275)**

*Ich hasse nicht: Dichtungen aus Buchenwald* (Vienna: Österreichischer Bundesverlag, 1945), pp.7-8

### **Gösta Durchham, 'Steinbruchkaleidoskop' (pp.275-280)**

*Ich hasse nicht*, pp.43-53

### **Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz, 'Laufschritt' (pp.280-281)**

Archiv KZ-Gedenkstätte Dachau (AKGD), 3336/1-06-3-7

### **Franz Hackel, 'Buchenwald' (pp.281-282)**

AKGB, 9-95-21. Also printed in *Kunst hinter Stacheldraht*, p.157

### **Franz Hackel, 'Wer geht weiter' (pp.282-283)**

AKGB, 9-95-21

### **Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz, 'Israel' (pp.283-284)**

AKGD, 3336/1-06-3-7

### **Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz, 'Sieben Türme' (pp.284-285)**

AKGD, 3336/1-06-3-7

### **Fritz Löhner-Beda, 'Kindermärchen' (p.285)**

*Kunst hinter Stacheldraht*, p.171

### **Fritz Löhner-Beda, 'Sonett auf das Revier im KZ-Buchenwald' (p.285)**

*Kunst hinter Stacheldraht*, p.152, p.154

### **Georg von Boris, 'Hunger' (p.286)**

AKGD, 23.486

### **Maria Günzl, 'Ravensbrück' (pp.286-287)**

*Mitten in tiefer Nacht*, pp.94-95

### **Bruno Apitz, 'Krematorium Buchenwald' (p.288)**

*Kunst hinter Stacheldraht*, pp.177-178

### **Gösta Durchham, 'Transportabler Galgen' (p.289)**

*Ich hasse nicht*, p.17

### **Gösta Durchham, 'Einem deutschen Polizisten' (pp.289-290)**

*Ich hasse nicht*, pp.21-22

### **Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz, 'Der Capo' (p.290)**

*Kette der Tage*, p.30

### **Author unknown, 'Den Blockältesten in Stammbuch' (pp.290-291)**

AKGB, 9-95-33-43

### **Author unknown, 'Auch ein Kapo' (p.291)**

AKGB, 9-95-33-43

**Author unknown, 'An die "Politischen"' (p.291)**

AKGB, 9-95-33-43

**Gösta Durchham, 'Einem Kapo' (p.291)**

*Ich hasse nicht*, p.20

**Author unknown, 'Nachruf für einen Kapo' (pp.291-292)**

AKGB, 9-95-33-43

**Author unknown, 'Vergesse nie!' (pp.292-294)**

AKGB, 9.48-58 (49)

**Franz Weber, 'An meine "schwachen Amtsbrüder"' (pp.294-295)**

AKGD, 42.163

**Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz, 'Der Marterpfahl' (p.295)**

*Kette der Tage*, pp.14-15

**Alfred Kittner, 'Die Irren' (p.296)**

*Schattenschrift*, pp.35-36

**Armin Freudmann, 'Der Muselmann' (pp.296-298)**

*So sang zu mir*

**Antonia Bruha, 'Manchmal fährt weit draußen ein Zug' (p.298)**

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**Herbert Morgenstern, 'Wenn dann der wilde Flieder blüht' (p.299)**

*Kunst hinter Stacheldraht*, p.139

**Fritz Löhner-Beda, 'Ich bin im Wald gesessen' (p.299)**

*Kunst hinter Stacheldraht*, p.138

**Fritz Löhner-Beda, 'Apokalypse' (pp.299-300)**

*Kunst hinter Stacheldraht*, p.159

**Hasso Grabner, 'Appellplatz Buchenwald' (p.300)**

*Fünfzehn Schritte Gradaus*, p.30

**Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz, 'Typhus' (pp.300-301)**

*Kette der Tage*, p.23

**Ferdinand Römhild, 'Der Flüchtling' (p.301)**

*Kunst hinter Stacheldraht*, p.154

**Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz, 'Gestreiftes Kleid' (p.302)**

AKGD, 3336/1-06-3-7

**Heinrich Steinitz, 'Goethe' (pp.302-303)**

*Noch mehr*, p.6

**Karl Feuerer, 'Goethe und der Buchenwald' (pp.303-304)**

*Augenzeugenbericht des Häftling Nr. 738 im KZ Buchenwald 1937-1945. Die Leben des Buchenwaldhäftlings Alfred Bunzol 738*, ed. by Alfred Michael Andreas Bunzol (Bad Langensalza: Rockstuhl, 2013), pp.157-159

**Author unknown, 'Neue Jahr 1944-5' (p.304)**

Washington D.C., United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Kulisiewicz Collection, RG 55.002 M\*28

**Armin Freudmann, 'Wanderlied' (p.305)**

*So sang zu mir*

**Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz, 'Wir schreiben' (p.305)**

*Kette der Tage*, p.38

**Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz, 'Invaliden – nach 1941' (pp.305-307)**

*Kette der Tage*, pp.31-33

## **Gösta Durchham, 'Der Winkel'**

Wir tragen unsere Winkel,  
die leuchten blutigrot,  
wir tauschten dafür alles,  
was uns das Leben bot.

Wir gaben unsre Freiheit  
und was uns teuer war,  
sie bringen Not und Leiden,  
vielleicht den Tod sogar.

Man gab sie uns zur Schande,  
doch wir sind stolz darum,  
wir tragen sie in Ehren  
und wissen auch warum.

Wehn einst die roten Fahnen  
der Freiheit stolz im Wind,  
dann wißt, daß sie gefertigt  
aus tausend Winkeln sind.

Und jeder ist geworden  
aus rotem heißen Blut,  
geopfert für die Menschheit  
und für ihr höchstes Gut.

Zerschlagen wird die Knechtschaft,  
die Tyrannei und Not,  
der Freiheit brach die Gasse  
der Winkel blutigrot.

Wir tragen ihn in Ehren  
und wissen auch warum!  
Für uns ist er geworden  
Symbol und Heiligtum.

## **Gösta Durchham, 'Steinbruchkaleidoskop'**

Klick-klack, Hammerschlag,  
klick-klack, Jammertag. –  
Sklavenseelen, Elendsknochen,  
dali, und den Stein gebrochen!

Klick-klack, Hammerschlag,  
klick-klack, Jammertag. –  
Dünne Suppe, wenig Brot,  
groß der Hunger, groß die Not,  
keine Kraft in Arm und Beinen. –  
Klage deine Not den Steinen!

Klick-klack, Hammerschlag,  
klick-klack, Jammertag. –

Sieh nur dort den Jammerlappen  
winselnd um die Steine tappen.  
Klatsch, er liegt auf allen Vieren,  
doch der Hund will nicht krepieren!

Klick-klack, Hammerschlag,  
klick-klack, Jammertag. –  
Drüben an der Postenkette  
knallt es lustig um die Wette.  
Einen brachten sie zur Strecke  
und nun liegt der Mann im Drecke.

Weidmanns Heil, ihr braven Jäger!  
Halali! – He, Leichenträger!

Klick-klack, Hammerschlag,  
klick-klack, Jammertag. –  
„He, du Vogel, deine Mütze!“  
Patsch, da liegt sie in der Pfütze,  
dort beim Baum, bei Posten vier.  
„Vorwärts, Bursche, hol’ sie dir!“  
Und das dumme Aas, das rennt,  
weil das Spiel es noch nicht kennt. –  
Krach, ein Schuß – ein Todesschrei. –  
Lustig ist die Hitlerei!

Klick-klack, Hammerschlag,  
klick-klack, Jammertag. –  
Seit den frühen Morgenstunden  
wird gerackert und geschunden,  
mittags eine kurze Rast. –  
Friß, wenn du zu fressen hast!  
Hast du nichts, hilft auch kein Klagen,  
Jammern füllt dir nicht den Magen. –  
Müdigkeit drückt bleischwer nieder  
und es schmerzen alle Glieder,  
blutig sind auch schon die Hände.  
Nimmt der Tag denn gar kein Ende?

Klick-klack, Hammerschlag,  
klick-klack, Jammertag. –  
Werken, schaufeln, schufteten, schaffen,  
alle Kraft zusammenraffen  
und zum äußersten sich zwingen,  
sterbensmüd noch Lieder singen  
und in Todesnot noch lachen,  
um nur ja nicht schlapp zu machen.

Klick-klack, Hammerschlag,  
klick-klack, Jammertag. –  
Bis dann doch die Kraft versagt.  
Aus! – Was ist auch viel gewagt?  
Besser ist’s den Tod zu finden,  
als sich weiter noch zu schinden,  
Sklave sein für diese Brut. –

„Heda, Posten, schieße gut!“

Klick-klack, Hammerschlag,  
klick-klack, Jammertag. –  
Tausende sind so gestorben,  
Tausende an dir verdorben,  
Tausenden wirst du noch sein  
früher Tod, verfluchter Stein.  
Klick-klack, Hammerschlag,  
klick-klack, Jammertag. –  
Doch auch der Tag nimmt ein Ende,  
morgen ist die Schicksalswende!  
Klick-klack, Hammerschlag,  
klick-klack, Jammertag. –

Hussa, hussa, schaufle,  
lad' den Karren voll!  
Was, du willst verschnaufen?  
Kerl, bist du toll?

Vorwärts, du Halunke,  
Karren Nummer zwei!  
Ist der nicht bald fertig,  
Schlag' ich dich zu Brei!

Blasen auf den Händen?  
Ach, das wird bald gut.  
Geht die Haut in Fetzen,  
kommt hernach das Blut.

Tempo! Tempo! – Fertig?  
Meinst jetzt bist du frei?  
Daß ich doch nicht lache!  
Karren Nummer drei!

Links, zwei, drei! Links, zwei, drei!  
Zieht, ihr Hunde! Links, zwei, drei!  
Vorwärts, Schweine! Links, zwei, drei!  
Lustig ist die Kumpanei!  
Schufte ihr, spißt eure Ohren!  
Vorwärts, vorwärts mit den Loren!  
Was, du Drecksack, kannst nicht mit?  
In den Arsch hast einen Tritt!  
Siehst du, wie es geht, du Schwein?  
Haut man nicht, dann schläft ihr ein!  
Dali, dali, he du Schnecke,  
schneller, sonst liegst du im Drecke!  
Links, zwei, drei! Links, zwei, drei!  
Zieht, ihr Hunde! Links, zwei, drei!  
Vorwärts, Schweine! Links, zwei, drei!

---

Keuchend, ächzend, schwitzend hängen

Menschentiere an den Strängen,  
Sklaven, die verflucht, zu fronen  
wie zur Zeit der Pharaonen. –  
Ach, es wird an deutschem Wesen  
einmal noch die Welt genesen.  
Freut euch, Menschen! Links, zwei, drei!  
Zieht, ihr Schweine! Links, zwei, drei!

---

Es rattert der Brecher tagaus und tagein,  
er rattert und rattert und bricht das Gestein,  
zermalmt es zu Schotter und Stunde auf Stund'  
frißt Schaufel auf Schaufel sein gieriger Mund.  
Und die, die ihn füttern mit Mühe und Fleiß,  
sie schaufeln und schaufeln, gebadet in Schweiß.  
Sie wissen, er frißt nur, doch satt wird er nie,  
erst frißt er die Steine und dann frißt er sie.

---

„He Kapo, beim Haufen dort drüben die zwei  
und dort bei der Bude am Wege die drei  
und der, der soeben den Karren gebracht,  
mehr Tempo, mehr Tempo und – fertiggemacht!  
Den Langen am Brecher, den nimm noch dazu.  
Verstanden? – Die Sieben. – Denn sonst bist es du!“

---

„Verstanden, in Ordnung!“ So ist es ihm recht,  
der Kapo versteht ja sein Handwerk nicht schlecht. –  
„Komm her da, du Vogel, und nimm einen Stein!  
den großen dort drüben, hier der ist zu klein.  
Und vorwärts! Im Laufschrift im Kreise herum,  
doch lustig, verstanden? Sonst schlag' ich dich krumm!“

---

Mit Hussa beginnt nun die fröhliche Jagd,  
bergauf und bergab, bis der Atem versagt.  
Mit fliegenden Lungen und keuchender Brust,  
so jagt er dahin, seines Loses bewußt,  
getreten, geprügelt, voll Dreck und voll Blut,  
doch fehlt ihm, das Letzte zu wagen, der Mut.  
So jagt er noch zweimal im Kreise herum,  
doch nun wird dem Kapo die Sache zu dumm,  
er stellt ihm ein Bein, daß er stürzt. – Dann ein Schrei,  
ein Tritt auf den Schädel und es ist vorbei. –

---

Und jetzt noch die andern! Doch dreie verstehn  
und ziehen es vor, in die Kette zu gehn.  
So ist es viel leichter, bei einigem Mut,

und manches Mal treffen die Kugeln auch gut.  
Und nun noch die zwei in Bewegung gefetzt.  
Sie werden mit Hussa zu Tode gehetzt.

---

Das wäre erledigt. Schon liegen sechs Mann,  
jetzt kommt noch der Lange am Breche daran.  
Doch der ist gewappnet und sieht sich nicht um  
und schaufelt und schaufelt verbissen und stumm.  
Der Brecher, der rattert und bricht das Gestein,  
der Mann am Motor schaltet Hochtouren ein.  
Mit Ächzen und Poltern, Gebrumm und Geschnauf,  
rast nun das Getriebe in doppeltem Lauf.  
Es stöhnt die Maschine, auch ihr wird es schwer,  
um wieviel dem Menschen dort oben erst mehr.  
Ein hartes, gewaltiges Ringen fängt an,  
ein seltsames, zwischen Maschine und Mann.  
Mit wechselndem Glück geht der Kampf hin und her,  
es stöhnt die Maschine, der Mann atmet schwer.  
Und wenn die Maschine das Doppelte schafft,  
so schaufelt der Mann dort mit dreifacher Kraft.  
Der Kapo sieht's staunend und läßt es geschehn,  
daß gaffend die Leute den Brecher umstehn.  
Noch keiner im Steinbruch sah je einen Mann,  
der so eine Arbeit wie dieser getan,  
der eisernen Willen mit Klugheit verband  
und selbst der Maschine zu trotzen verstand.  
Doch einmal versiegt auch die wildeste Kraft,  
die Muskeln erlahmen, der Wille erschläfft,  
zermürbt von des Brechers gleichmäßigem Takt  
und wie das Gestein dort zerstampft und zerhackt.  
Schon fällt er im Tempo allmählich zurück  
und schon scheint besiegelt des Mannes Geschick.  
Da spannt er die Muskeln zum Äußersten an,  
noch einmal versucht er's. – Umsonst war's getan.  
Und gibt er verzweifelt das Letzte auch her,  
es ist die Maschine doch stärker als er. –  
Da plötzlich ein Knirschen in Kette und Spill,  
ein Ächzen, ein Stöhnen – der Brecher steht still. –  
Es hat sich ein Stein im Getriebe verklemmt  
und damit den Lauf der Maschine gehemmt.  
Ein Zufall? Ein Zeichen? – Mag sein wie es will,  
die Tatsache bleibt: die Maschine steht still.  
Es staunt selbst der Kapo. Da steht er und lacht:  
„Jetzt hat er den Brecher gar fertig gemacht.  
Ein tüchtiger Kerl, um den wär' es schad.  
Zum Teufel, so sei heute krumm mal gerad!  
Komm her da, du Langer! He, sag' was du bist?  
Ein Bauer? Ein Bergmann?“ – „Ich? Nein. Journalist.“  
Der Kapo lacht auf und verzieht das Gesicht.  
„Ein Zeitungsmensch? – Leider! – Den brauche ich nicht.  
Doch halt, du, da fällt mir gerade etwas ein,  
ich brauch' einen Schreiber und der kannst du sein.“  
Geh dort in die Bude und warte auf mich,



ich habe noch andere Arbeit für dich. –

---

Es rattert der Brecher tagaus und tagein,  
er rattert und rattert und frißt das Gestein,  
zermalmt es zu Schotter und Stunde auf Stund'  
frißt Schaufel um Schaufel sein gieriger Mund.  
Und die, die ihn füttern mit Mühe und Fleiß,  
sie schaufeln und schaufeln, gebadet in Schweiß.  
Sie wissen, er frißt nur, doch satt wird er nie,  
erst frißt er die Steine und dann frißt er sie. –

Klick-klack, Hammerschlag,  
klick-klack, Jammertag. –  
Doch auch der Tag nimmt ein Ende,  
morgen ist die Schicksalswende.  
Klick-klack, Hammerschlag,  
klick-klack, Jammertag. –

### Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz, 'Laufschritt'

Kolonnen mit schweren Schubkarren ziehn,  
im Laufschritt, tagaus und tagein, –  
in harter Arbeit die Kräfte verglühn  
und die Capos schlagen darein, –  
es schreit der SS-Mann, sein Stiefel tritt,  
dazu gibt gemeinen Fluch er uns mit:  
„Ich brech dir die Knochen, schlag krumm dich und wund! –  
Laufschritt ! –  
Laufschritt !! – –  
Laufschritt !!! – – – du Hund ! –“

Den Schubkarren schiebt wer jung und wer alt,  
wer zart ist und wer ein Athlet; –  
der Knüppel regiert, die Terror-Gewalt  
und es stirbt wer um Gnade fleht. –  
Es schreit der SS-Mann, sein Stiefel tritt,  
dazu gibt gemeinen Fluch er uns mit:  
„Ich brech dir die Knochen, schlag krumm dich und wund! –  
Laufschritt ! –  
Laufschritt !! – –  
Laufschritt !!! – – – du Hund ! –“

Er schwanket so müde, er geht so schwer,  
es keucht sein Atem so heiss, –  
schon flimmert es ihm um die Augen her,  
dem achtzigjährigen Greis. –  
Es schreit der SS-Mann, sein Stiefel tritt,  
dazu gibt gemeinen Fluch er ihm mit:  
„Ich brech dir die Knochen, schlag krumm dich und wund! –  
Laufschritt ! –  
Laufschritt !! – –

Laufschrift !!! – – – du Hund ! –“

Da schwanket er weiter mit schnellem Schritt,  
die Angst gibt ihm doppelte Kraft, –  
er fürchtet den Schlag der SS, den Tritt,  
zermurbt von der zu langen Haft, –  
er fürchtet den Schlag, er zittert davor,  
entfernter schon klingt es nun an sein Ohr: ....  
„Ich brech dir die Knochen, schlag krumm dich und wund! –  
Laufschrift ! –  
Laufschrift !! – –  
Laufschrift !!! – – – du Hund ! –“

Er schiebt den Schubkarren, beladen mit Sand,  
der Schweiss rinnet ihm vom Gesicht, –  
die Kraft verlässt seine zitternde Hand  
und plötzlich zusammen er bricht. –  
Da kommt der SS-Mann, sein Stiefel tritt,  
dazu gibt gemeinen Fluch er ihm mit:  
„Ich brech dir die Knochen, schlag krumm dich und wund! –  
Laufschrift ! –  
Laufschrift !! – –  
Laufschrift !!! – – – du Hund ! –“

Der Greis bleibt liegen, er rührt sich nicht mehr,  
sein schönes Gesicht blickt entstellt, –  
die Augen werden ihm gläsern und leer,  
sehn nichts mehr von Lager und Welt. –  
Da flucht der SS-Mann, sein Stiefel tritt:  
„Steh auf du Schwein, sonst schleif ich dich mit! –  
Ich brech dir die Knochen, schlag krumm dich und wund! –“  
Dann sagt er enttäuscht: „Schon verreckt ist der Hund. –“

### **Franz Hackel, 'Buchenwald'**

I.  
Kein Vögel pfeift  
Im toten Wald;  
Und Nebel streift  
Durchnaßt uns kalt.  
Die Nacht ist blind;  
Der Tag ist grau.  
Wo ist ein Kind?  
Wo eine Frau?

Im schwarzen Buchen  
Heult und höhnt der Wind...

II.  
Um Weimars Hügel tanzt der Schnee im Sturm.  
Es grinst der schwarze Tod vom Wächterturn.

Zwölftausend Männer frieren beim Appell;

Im Mikrophon lärmt eine Stimme grell.

Zwölftausend Männern bellt der Ruf ins Ohr:  
Sofort die Leichenträger an das Tor!

Um kahle Schädel tobt der Wintersturm.  
Es grinst der schwarze Tod vom Wächterurm.

III.

Kein Mitleid fällt uns an.  
Woher auch Tränen nehmen  
Auf diesem Berg  
In dieser Zeit?

Um dunkle Buchen  
Kahl wie Besen  
Treibt der Sturm  
Nebelfetzen.  
Beim Appell werden Nummern verlesen,  
Keine Namen.  
Und wer am Morgen noch da war –  
Ist am Abend vielleicht schon  
Vergessen, gewesen.

Von diesem heißt es:  
Ging über den Rost;  
Von jenem:  
Im Steinbruch erschossen.

Kumpel! Genossen!  
Wir sind vergessene Leute  
-Eine Stunde von Weimar-  
In diesem heroischen Heute.

### **Franz Hackel, 'Wer geht weiter'**

Von Hitlers Schergen, Himmlers Mördern bedroht  
stürz ich zur Erde –  
Wer geht weiter,  
Die Hände zu Fäusten geballt –  
Wer trägt die Fahne der Freiheit  
Zum Sturm  
Gegen Lüge, Gemeinheit, Gewalt?

In Dachau fraß mir die Kälte das Fleisch von den Knochen;  
In Sachsenhausen schlug man mir das Aug aus der Höhlung;  
Ein Schuss in den Rücken legte mich in Buchenwald um;  
Doch zuvor zertrat mir ein schwerer Stiefel den Hoden;  
Und dies alles war möglich in Deutschland,  
Und dies alles geschah und noch viel mehr  
Auf vaterländischem Boden.

Von Hitlers Schergen, Himmlers Mördern bedroht

Stürz ich zur Erde –  
Wer geht weiter,  
Die Hände zu Fäusten geballt –  
Wer trägt die Fahne der Freiheit  
Zum Sturm  
Gegen Lüge, Gemeinheit, Gewalt?

### **Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz, 'Israel'**

Die Juden ziehn so müde dahin,  
verbraucht von Hunger und Fron, –  
trotstlos die Herzen, trostlos der Sinn,  
wie einstens in Babylon. –

Ihr Schritt ist matt, ... ein Schleichen ...  
und gespenstergleich schwanken sie im Gehn, –  
aus den, wie bei Leichen,  
wachsähnlichen, bleichen  
Gesichtern verzweifelte Augen sehn,  
die wunden Tieren gleichen. –

Der Davidstern leuchtet gelb hervor, –  
seit Deutschlands Volk Treu und Recht verlor  
trägt ihn Israel auf der Brust. –

Die Juden ziehn so müde dahin,  
verbraucht von Hunger und Fron, –  
trotstlos die Herzen, trostlos der Sinn,  
wie einstens in Babylon. –

Ihr Tag ist hart, – ist Plage, –  
sie dulden grausames Unrecht und Leid,  
dulden ohne Frage,  
dulden ohne Klage, –  
Fremdlinge in grau grauem Häftlingskleid,  
Kulturvolk alter Tage. –

Der Davidstern leuchtet gelb hervor, –  
seit Deutschlands Volk Treu und Recht verlor  
trägt ihn Israel auf der Brust. –

Die Juden ziehn so müde dahin,  
verbraucht von Hunger und Fron, –  
trotstlos die Herzen, trostlos der Sinn,  
wie einstens in Babylon. –

Sie kennen ihre Strafe:  
sie werden nie wieder in Freiheit sehn, –  
sie werden verderben,  
hier langsam hinsterven, –  
stündlich treibt man sie in den Tod hinein,

... wie eine Herde Schafe. –

Der Davidstern leuchtet gelb hervor, –  
seit Deutschlands Volk Treu und Recht verlor  
trägt ihn Israel auf der Brust. –

Die Juden ziehn so müde dahin,  
verbraucht von Hunger und Fron, –  
trotlos die Herzen, trostlos der Sinn,  
wie einstens in Babylon. –

Man hat sie hingemeuchelt,  
als den Sündenbock für der Deutschen Schmach,  
man hat sie ungezählt  
getötet und gequält, –  
die Guten war'n es zu hindern zu schwach,  
... oder sie haben geheuchelt. –

Der Davidstern leuchtet gelb hervor, –  
seit Deutschlands Volk Treu und Recht verlor  
trägt ihn Israel auf der Brust. –

Die sie schlagen, die sie treten,  
zu dem Gott der Liebe beten, –  
die sie morden, schinden, quälen,  
sich als bessere Menschen zählen, –  
sie verachten ihre Listen,  
aber ihre Hand ist rot. –  
Ach, sie nennen sich: die Christen –  
und sie quälen sie zu Tod. –

Menschheit, höre meine Klage! –  
Deutsches Volk die Brust dir schlage:  
Juda hast du umgebracht, –  
Israel, das Volk der Sage .. –,  
das bringt an nicht fernem Tage  
dich in schwere, schwarze Nacht. –

Israel, Du Volk der Sage, –  
hör, ich wein um Dich, ich klage! –  
Israel ....., ich wein um Dich ....

### **Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz, 'Sieben Türme'**

Sieben Türme stehn um das Lager her,  
sie sind aus fühllosem Stein,  
auf jedem sind zwei Maschinengewehr,  
die blicken mit finsternen Läufen her  
und lassen uns fügsam sein. –

Sieben Türme stehn um das Lager her,

es sind fünf Wachen darin,  
zwei stehen stets am Maschinengewehr  
und die Munition wird gar niemals leer,  
drum hat das Fliehn keinen Sinn. –

Sieben Türme stehn um das Lager her,  
im Zaune von Stacheldraht –  
und oft fallen Schüsse so dumpf und schwer  
und sie bellen über das Lager her  
wenn einer dem Drahte naht. –

Sieben Türme stehn um das Lager her,  
die fesseln uns in die Not, -  
wird einem von uns das Leben zu schwer  
dann wirft er den Leib einem Turme her  
und der Posten schießt ihn tot. –

### **Fritz Löhner-Beda, 'Kindermärchen'**

Er hatte immer Hunger  
Und fraß die ganze Stadt.  
Fraß Länder auf und Völker  
Und wurde doch nicht satt.

Er hat von früh bis abends  
Gefressen und geschmatzt.  
Doch bei dem letzten Bissen  
Ist er am Erd' zerplatzt.

### **Fritz Löhner-Beda, 'Sonett auf das Revier im KZ-Buchenwald'**

Da liegen sie in ihren weißen Betten,  
Ein leises Atmen geistert durch den Raum,  
In scheuen Augen glänzt ein schwerer Traum.  
Was träumen sie? Von Brot und Zigaretten!

Von fernher klingen nur des Tages Ketten,  
Des Lagers Schrei ebbt an des Hauses Saum.  
Durchs Fenster blinzelt ein verschneiter Baum.  
Zeitweilig schlägt der Tod die Kastagnetten.

Der Mann in Weiß, der seine Kranken pflegt,  
Geht durch den Saal mit freundlichen Gebärden.  
Unsichtbar ist die Bürde, die er trägt.

Ward solches Schicksal je gelebt auf Erden?  
Da liegen Fiebernde, von Schmerz zersägt,  
Und zittern angstgepeitscht, gesund zu werden!

### **Georg von Boris, 'Hunger'**

Es reitet der Tod  
Durch die Reihen.  
Verzweifelte schreien:  
So nimm mich doch.  
Und er gelassen:  
Warte noch.  
Das können wir nicht fassen.  
Der Tod lässt uns leben,  
Das ist es eben.  
Doch der Hunger macht uns zum Tier.  
Sind wir noch Menschen? Wir,  
Es ist zum Erbleichen,  
Wir fressen an Leichen.

### **Maria Günzl, 'Ravensbrück'**

Warum hat man heut wohl so zeitig geweckt?  
Uns so früh vom Lager aufgeschreckt?  
Es war noch nicht Zeit zum Zählappell.  
Fürchterliches Hundegebell  
sagte uns, es gibt Gefahr.  
Doch welcher Art, war nicht klar!  
Da wurden an die Mauer wir kommandiert,  
Nun wußten wir, was wieder passiert!  
Um die grauenvollen Mauern  
schleicht der Tausenden Beschauern  
entsetzliches, tiefes Trauern  
um die entstellte und entseelte,  
gemarterte und gequälte  
tote Kameradin!

Geschundene Frauenherzen stöhnen,  
verworrene Klagelaute tönen  
zu den Ohren der Quäler und Befehler.  
Ihr Wutgeschrei  
reizt die kläffenden Hunde  
und von beider Munde  
Zornschaum speit!  
Doch all ihr Geschrei  
die Ohren der Gequälten  
nicht erreicht!  
Vor solchen Todes  
Angezicht  
die Herzen stocken  
und erschrocken  
manche hier zusammenbricht!

Da plötzlich setzte ein  
der Sturm  
und vom nahen Kirchenturm  
die Glocken jetzt

herüberklagen –  
lindernd dieses Todesbängen  
der Häftlinge von Ravensbrück!

Leise kehrt Hoffnung zurück  
in die gequälten Frauenherzen.  
Nach den letzten bängen Stunden  
Schmerzen heißer jetzt die Wunden,  
Züge und Gebärden  
der Leidenden sich verhärten!  
Mit geballten Fäusten  
stehen sie jetzt: Zählappell!

Jedes Antlitz geprägt  
vom Übermaß an Qual und Leid  
ist Anklage dieser Zeit –  
und ihrer Höllenrotte,  
die da spottet jedem Gotte.  
Die Frauenseelen  
scheinen zu sterben  
in diesem Verderben  
und finstre Blicke  
schießen wie Blitze  
auf ihre Peiniger nieder.

Leichenfeldschauern  
zieh'n her von den Mauern  
und quälen die Herzen.  
Stechende Schmerzen  
dringen zum Hirn  
und netzen die Stirn  
mit eiskaltem Schweiß!  
Wieviele schon wurden  
in solchen Tod gestoßen?  
Wieviele noch  
von unseren Genossen  
werden diese Schurken fassen?  
Wann endlich wird nahen der Tag,  
an dem der Hölle Vorgemach  
ein Ende wird gemacht?

Es schreit das Blut zum Himmel.  
Wann deutsches Volk  
hörst du aus diesen Höllentiefen,  
daß dich gequälte Frauen riefen,  
zu enden und zu wenden  
Deutschlands S c h a n d e!

(1940)



## Bruno Apitz, 'Krematorium Buchenwald'

Mögt ihr uns zu Staub vernichten,  
Mögt ihr uns zu Asche glühen,  
Doch den kommenden Gerichten  
Könnt ihr nimmermehr entfliehen!

Auf zum Himmel steigt die hohe  
Glut in unser dumpfes Schweigen.  
Eure mörderische Lohe!  
Doch die Nacht ist voller Zeugen...

Keine Funken gehn verloren,  
Die aus euren Öfen sprühen;  
Tausend Augen, tausend Ohren  
Sehen, hören Brand und Glühen...

Die verräterischen Funken,  
Die in Nacht und Schweigen stieben,  
Sind uns tief ins Herz gesunken,  
Und das Feuer ist geblieben.

Glimmt in vielen tausend Herzen  
(Noch bedeckt von unsren Händen).  
Licht von diesen Totenkerzen  
Wird die Nacht einst überblenden.

Aufbricht dann das wilde Feuer!  
Und wir tragen diese Kette  
Wie ein heißes Ungeheuer  
Durch die Länder, durch die Städte!

Aus der Totenöfen Rachen  
Reißen wir die lohen Brände:  
Flammenfackel! Und entfachen  
Brand an jenem Weltenende!

Und dann ist sie aufgebrochen,  
Unsrer Toten heilige Glut!  
Wohin Mörder sich verkrochen,  
Bricht des Feuers heiße Wut.

Und mit zischender Gebärde  
Jagt die Flamme euch heraus!  
Ist zu klein für euch die Erde!  
Alle Länder spein euch aus!

Jede Flammensäule kündet  
(Seele unsrer toten Brüder):  
„Ihr seid's, die uns angezündet!!!“  
Und die Toten kehren wieder...

## **Gösta Durchham, 'Transportabler Galgen'**

Galgenholz auf Rädern  
zieht von Ort zu Ort,  
heute hängt hier einer,  
morgen einer dort.

Fröhlich sind die Henker,  
lechzend vor Begier,  
halten reiche Ernte,  
haben viel Pläsier.

Siehst du sie nicht schaukeln  
lustig dort im Wind?  
Heute ist's ein Alter,  
morgen ist's ein Kind.

O du Volk der Denker,  
was ersannst du nur?  
Galgenholz auf Rädern,  
Gipfel der Kultur!

Aber, großer Henker,  
hänge immerzu,  
heut' bin ich am Galgen,  
morgen, da hängst du!

## **Gösta Durchham, 'Einem deutschen Polizisten'**

### **(Kriminalkommissar Schott)**

Du nanntest mich den größten Lumpen  
und schlugst mir heute ins Gesicht.  
Du durftest ungestraft es wagen,  
denn wehren konnte ich mich nicht.  
Nur eines konnt' ich: dich verachten,  
da ich doch wußte, was du bist:  
ein Feigling und ein Scherge Hitlers,  
Herr Schott, ein deutscher Polizist.

Was du getan, das tun sie alle.  
Mein Gott, was liegt denn auch daran?  
Ohrfeigen, die erträgt bald einer,  
was ist das schon für einen Mann?  
O nein, Herr Schott, es liegt doch anders,  
denn hier stimmt deine Rechnung nicht!  
Ich bin kein Lump! Und heute schlug mir  
durch dich dein Deutschland ins Gesicht.

Was in mir noch an deutschem Fühlen,  
durch diesen Schlag ward es dahin.  
Ihr Deutsche habt mir eingehämmert,  
daß ich ein Österreicher bin.

Unüberbrückbar ist geworden  
die Kluft, die mich von Deutschland trennt,  
denn niemals werde ich vergessen  
den Schlag, der im Gesicht mir brennt.

### **Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz, 'Der Capo'**

Wer Capo ist mit gelber Binde,  
der hat zu allem Recht,  
hat Recht, daß schlage er und schinde,  
genug: hat er die gelbe Binde,  
hat er zu allem Recht.

Ist das ein Häftling? – wie geht er so stolz! –  
Was soll in der Hand ihm der Knüppel von Holz? –  
Wie – er tritt die andern in gleichem Gewand? –  
Wer ist dieser Häftling mit schlagender Hand? –  
Wer gibt ihm das Recht, sich so zu benehmen? –  
Er müßte sich vor sich selbst doch schämen,  
daß er, der den roten Polit-Winkel trägt,  
Sklavenvogt der SS Kameraden schlägt! –

„Sei still, Kamerad, das ist unsre Schmach –  
und ihr zu begegnen sind wir zu schwach;  
der gestern Kam'rad war, der gestern noch litt,  
schwingt heute den Knüppel und schlägt uns und tritt! –

Wer Capo ist mit gelber Binde,  
der hat zu allem Recht,  
hat Recht, daß schlage er und schinde,  
genug: hat er die gelbe Binde,  
hat er zu allem Recht.“ –

### **Author unknown, 'Den Blockältesten in Stammbuch'**

Für die Ordnung in den Blöcken  
Sind die „Ältesten“ erspriesslich,  
Weil so manches Lager-Zebra  
Äusserst bockig, was verdriesslich.  
Doch wenn Häftlings-Ordnungshüter  
Selbst nach Strich und Faden flegeln  
Und die Betten, Spinde, Brocken  
Wütend durcheinander kegeln,  
Husten wir auf solche Kumpels,  
Denn wo ist der Unterschied  
Zwischen diesen Blockvandalen  
Und dem SS-Mordgeblüt?  
Auch der Älteste des Blockes  
Ist ein Häftling, und nur d a s!  
Aber scheinbar weiss das Rindvieh  
Nichts von Achtung und von ... Hass.  
Weiss auch nichts von jener Stunde,

Da uns die Befreiung schlägt,  
Die SS- und Block-Tyrannen  
Fort und ins Vergessen fegt.

#### **Author unknown, 'Auch ein Kapo'**

Wie er sich spreizt und wie er rülpst  
Wenn er durch's Lager tobt  
Und dort den „Mut“ an dem Skelett  
Der schwachen Kumpels probt.  
Er ist fürwahr SS-Lakai,  
Selbst für den Strick zu schlecht  
Und wünscht nicht, dass die Stunde kommt,  
Da sich sein Opfer rächt.

#### **Author unknown, 'An die "Politischen"'**

Dein Winkel verpflichtet, begreife das!  
Drum werde uns nicht noch frecher  
Als jene Sorte von Gangster-Format:  
Der Schandfleck des Lagers: Verbrecher!

#### **Gösta Durchham, 'Einem Kapo'**

Du trägst wie wir den roten Winkel,  
nennst dich politisch, so wie wir,  
doch besser denk' ich, als der rote,  
stünd' wohl der grüne Winkel dir.

Denn Mord und Totschlag macht dir Freude,  
bar bist du jeder Menschlichkeit  
und um des kleinsten Vorteils willen  
zu jeder Schurkentat bereit.

Viel Blut klebt schon an deinen Händen  
und die bekommst du nie mehr rein,  
politisch aber heißt vor allem  
ganz sauber und ein Mensch zu sein.

Politisch sein heißt auch bekennen,  
doch du bist nur ein feiger Wicht.  
Wohl trägst du einen roten Winkel,  
jedoch ein Roter bist du nicht!

#### **Author unknown, 'Nachruf für einen Kapo'**

„Politisch“ wolltest Du stets sein,  
Dein Winkel glühte rot,  
Doch wo Du gingst und wo Du standst,  
War Raub, Gewalt und Tod.

Du hast des Häftlings Ehrenkleid  
Besudelt und verreckt  
Und bist, als Du gen Himmel stankst,  
Geheimnisvoll... verreckt!

**Author unknown, 'Vergesse nie!'**

(„Die Völker=Weltstadt“ -Buchenwald-)

Dunkelste Nacht  
über weite Weiten - - -  
schwärende Dünste entsteigen den Tälern,  
vernebeln die Berge und Wälder .....

Dem aber zum Trotz  
züngeln blutdurchtränkte Flammen  
aus hohen Essen,  
riesengleichen Schlangen,  
weithin leuchtend von den Bergen  
in alle Lande  
und –  
künden von Leiber

der Kinder – Greise – Männer und Weiber,  
die geschunden, geschlagen,  
zerquält in Nächten und vielen Tagen,

halbtot – halblebendig,  
aus allen Blöcken, Baracken, Häusern und Zelten,  
zusammengefahren,  
zusammengetragen  
zu jenem Ort,

wo die gierigen Flammen  
schlingen und schlingen  
in einem fort

T a u s e n d e - ....zigtausende,

fauchend und heulend  
Tag und Nacht – Nacht – Nacht –

bis einst alles Elend –  
die Schändungen –

Raube und Morde –

vollbracht.....

–

Doch –  
zur Völker=Welten=Stadt

werden weiter getrieben  
noch und noch,  
getrennt von den Lieben,

die Kinder – Greise – Männer und Weiber

auf steinigen,  
moorschlammigen Strassen,  
damit sie dorten –

ihr Leben lassen,

in M a s s e n – M a s s e n – M a s s e n.....  
.....

In dieser Völker = Welten = Stadt  
schleichen umher

zerquälte G e r i p p e,

durchhungerte,  
vermarterte Leiber,

Verirrte,

Idioten,

Ächzende,

Ringende,

Blökende,

Brüllende,

Blöde seit Jahren - - -

..... auch – wachsame M e n s c h e n,  
die alles Leid bisher ertragen  
und nimmer starben,

a u f r e c h t e K ä m p f e r = N a t u r e n ,

gezeichnet von vielen Qualenspuren,  
die einst werden künden  
das Tun ihrer Feinde  
und

f o r d e r n –

V e r g e l t u n g

und –

R a c h e ! – R a c h e ! – R a c h e !

= . = . = . = . =

Die östliche Morgenröte tagt.....

Verenden muß die dunkelste Nacht  
Mit all ihren Mächten und Schrecken.....

Ein n e u e s ,  
ein f r e i e s –

L e b e n –

..... erwacht! –

===== ! =====

23.2.1945

### **Franz Weber, 'An meine "schwachen Amtsbrüder"'**

Mein Leben lang muß' ich mich plagen  
Drum lebt' ich für mich ganz apart;  
Euch kannt' ich nur vom Hören-sagen  
Als Menschen von besondrer Art.

Wie hab' ich doch so oft im Leben  
Vertrauensvoll Euch angeschaut;  
Wie war ich Euch so treu ergeben,  
Wie hab' ich fest auf Euch gebaut.

Nun hat das Schicksal uns zusammen-  
gekettet in gar langer Haft.  
Es bleiben nur die Liebesflammen?  
Wo bleibt die vielgepries'ne Kraft?

Wie seid Ihr doch so tief gefallen:  
Verzagt, gebrechlich und so schwach.  
Warum greift Ihr mit gier'gen Krallen  
Nach fremden Gut, Euch nur zur Schmach?

O Schande! Schicksal! O der Bürde.  
Weh' mir, daß ich zu spät errat,  
Je höher einstmals war die Würde,  
Je tiefer nun der Fall, - Verrat!

Zwar könnte man die Augen schließen,  
Und nicht gewahren Eure Tat;  
Doch müssen andre für Euch büßen –  
„Das ist die Ernte Eurer Saat“! !

Darum verzeiht, wenn ich im Namen

der Gutgesinnten Euch nun sag':  
„Nun aber machet Schluß und Amen  
Und gebet keinen Grund zur Klag'!“

### **Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz, 'Der Marterpfahl'**

„Baum“ nennen sie jenen Marterpfahl,  
dran hilflos das Opfer hängt,  
die Arme hinten, zu größrer Qual,  
hängt er so herab vom Marterpfahl,  
Kopf und die Stirne gesenkt. –

Des Körpers schweres, ganzes Gewicht  
zerrt an dem verrenkten Arm,  
Schweiß rinnt herab, bedeckt das Gesicht –  
der SS-Mann grinst dazu und spricht:  
„Na, Hund, wird's dir endlich warm?“

Der Schweiß rinnt in Strömen, rinnt und rinnt;  
es schmerzt, daß viele laut schrein,  
wie Tiere, die am Verenden sind –  
die Schmerzen machen sie toll und blind,  
sie können nur stöhnend schrein. –

Und die Folter dauert in Ewigkeit; -  
der SS-Mann raucht vergnügt. –  
Wer ermißt diese lange Spanne Zeit? –  
Eine Stunde – zwei Stunden – Ewigkeit –  
Es scheint, daß das Zifferblatt lügt. –

Wenn einem die Sinne geschwunden sind,  
sein Kopf auf die Brust ihm bricht,  
sieht es der SS-Mann, stürzt hin geschwind,  
schlägt ihm die Faust ins Gesicht –  
und er zerrt an dem Körper und schaukelt ihn,  
freut sich, wenn ihn neue Schmerzen durchglühn –  
das heißt in Dachau: „Gericht“. –

Wenn von den Händen die Stricke gelöst,  
so sinken sie schlaff herab –  
sie sind wie gestorben, nicht wie erlöst,  
und man fühlt es nicht, wenn man an sie stößt –  
ganz fremd hangen sie herab. –

Zehntausende hingen am Marterpfahl,  
zehntausend litten die grässliche Qual,  
zehntausend schrieen gequält wie ein Tier,  
Zehntausende haßten die Welt dafür... -  
die Welt? – O nein, Deutschland haßten sie nur,  
höhnten: „Das also ist Deutschlands Kultur?“ –  
Und sie spieen hoch im Bogen aus  
auf das, was einstens ihr Vaterhaus:  
auf Deutschland. –



### **Alfred Kittner, 'Die Irren'**

Vor unseren Augen werden sie verrecken,  
Wir blicken nicht mal hin, auch wenn sie schrein.  
Sie haben nichts, die Blöße zu verdecken,  
Das Grauen wehrt dem Ekel nur, zu spein.

Denn ihre Leiber sind besät mit Schwären,  
Der Aussatz sprießt aus ihrem kranken Blut;  
Sie gehn vorbei, wir lassen uns nicht stören,  
Doch nahn sie uns, geraten wir in Wut.

Wir sehn sie in der prallen Sonne hocken,  
Die ihre Haut an das Gerippe schweißst;  
Sie rutschen winselnd nach verfaulten Brocken,  
Die ihnen einer in den Rachen schmeißt.

Die Bärte sprossen stachlig um die Wangen,  
Nach Läusen suchen sie im schorfigen Hauf  
Des wirren, filzigen Haars. Mit ihren langen  
Krallnägeln reißen sie die Pusteln auf.

Gell schreckt uns in den Nächten ihr Gezeter  
Aus unsrem dumpfen Schlaf; es mahnt uns schrill  
Mit Jammerlauten, daß ein irrer Beter  
Verhungernd seinen Tod umarmen will.

*Lager Steinbruch am Bug, August 1942*

### **Armin Freudmann, 'Der Muselmann'**

Gestern müd und heute müder.  
War die Arbeit denn so schwer?  
Schwer zumindest sind die Glieder.  
Aufsteh'n müßte ich nun wieder.  
Doch – bei Gott – ich kann nicht mehr.

Ach, ich kann nicht liegen, stehen.  
Wenn ich doch bloß sitzen könnt!  
Müßte mich jetzt waschen gehen  
Und den Riß im Rock vernähen,  
Reinigen mich vom Zement.

Niemals noch, wie heut, so ungern  
Stellt ich mich ums Essen an.  
Werd heut nicht um Nachschlag lungern.  
Werd auch ohne nicht verhungern.  
Käme ohnedies nicht dran.

Darf die Fassung nicht verpassen.  
*Kamerad, geh sei so nett,  
Auch für mich gleich mitzufassen.  
Kannst das Zeug dort liegen lassen.*

*Geh doch auch schon gleich zu Bett.*

*Schlafengeh'n!* Nur ich blieb hocken.  
Längst schon ist der Ofen kalt.  
Rauchig ist die Luft und trocken.  
Ob ich heute Nacht nicht Socken  
Und Pullover anbehalt?

Sollt ein Aspirin noch schlucken.  
Längst doch schläft der Arzt auch schon.  
Wie die Läuse plötzlich jucken.  
Bin zu faul, jetzt nachzugucken.  
Laufen mir ja nicht davon.

Stimmt: Muß mir das Brot noch holen!  
Wohin legte er es bloß?  
Nicht mehr da! Geklaut! Gestohlen!  
Morgen heißt es – Gott befohlen! –  
Nüchtern an die Arbeit los.

Diese Nacht hat mich zerbrochen.  
Kaum macht ich ein Auge zu.  
Hunderttausend Läuse krochen  
Und es hat nach Schweiß gerochen.  
Und der Magen gab nicht Ruh.

Was ich tu, man schimpft heut drüber.  
Was ich sag – man flucht und schreit.  
Rast ich mal, schreit schon der Schieber:  
*Steh nicht, Aas, und wasch dich lieber.*  
*Kratz dich nicht die ganze Zeit!*

Immer schlimmer wird die Schwäche.  
Kann das selber nicht versteh'n.  
Nun, ich hacke, schippe, steche  
Fort, bis ich zusammenbreche.  
Mag, was will mit mir gescheh'n!

Ach mir ekelt vor dem Essen.  
Nicht einmal das Brot mir schmeckt.  
Laßt mich schlummern und vergessen!  
Komm, o süßer Schlaf, aus dessen  
Arm kein Weckruf mich mehr schreckt!

*Hat denn keiner was zu rauchen?*  
*Habe noch mein ganzes Brot.*  
*Meine kranken Nerven brauchen*  
*Etwas, um zu übertauchen*  
*Jene Krise, die mir droht!*

Sonderbar, die Zigarette  
Widert heute mich fast an.  
Wenn ich einmal Zeit doch hätte,  
Auszuholen mich im Bette!  
Schnell erholte ich mich dann.

Kaum zehn Schritte kann ich machen,  
Fall ich strauchelnd in den Kot.  
Schlagen sie nicht gar, verlachen  
Mich die Stärkern, die mich Schwachen  
Nicht versteh'n und meine Not.

Vor zwei Wochen kräftestrotzend  
Noch, ich heut kaum kriechen kann.  
Mancher, der mich heute protzend  
Höhnt, wird, nicht dem Schicksal trotzend,  
Morgen selbst zum Muselmann.

\*

Kopf gestützt aufs Schaufelende,  
Schlief er ein und fiel er um.  
Bald schon schleiften derbe Hände  
Den Kadaver ins Gelände  
Vor dem Krematorium.

### **Antonia Bruha, 'Manchmal fährt weit draußen ein Zug'**

Manchmal fährt weit draußen ein Zug,  
weit draußen, wo Menschen, frei leben,  
die Vögel, schneiden den Himmel im Flug,  
Baumwipfel siehst du im Winde wehn.

Ganz weit, hinter Draht und Mauer –  
Draht und Mauer, und du bist tot.  
Fühlst du's nicht? Es ist ungeheuer,  
und weit ist das werdende Morgenrot.

Ich weiß alles, was du willst sagen:  
„Durchhalten! Kopf hoch, es geht doch vorbei!  
So kurz vor Schluß willst du verzagen?  
Mal über Nacht werden wir frei!"

Du bist tapfer, groß ist dein Mut,  
doch ich hab' blutende Hände;  
heute schleppe ich Steine am Gut,  
hab' Hunger und seh' gar kein Ende!

Mein Mann ist erschossen, das weißt du genau,  
frei sein ohne ihn hat für mich keinen Sinn,  
da wäre der schönste Himmel nicht blau.  
Du siehst, wie mutlos ich bin.

Ich habe im Kampf mein Teil getragen,  
doch dieses Warten, habe ich satt!  
Man möchte ihr vieles, ja vieles noch sagen,  
doch früh lag ihre Leiche am geladenen Draht.

### **Herbert Morgenstern, 'Wenn dann der wilde Flieder blüht'**

Wenn dann der wilde Flieder blüht  
Und unsere Sehnsucht mit leichten Schwingen  
Im Land der Träume heimwärts zieht,  
Dann spüren wir ein leises Klingen,  
Wie wenn die Nacht dem Tag entflieht.  
Der Frühling kommt wieder,  
So war es schon immer,  
So will es das Leben,  
Der Mensch ändert's nimmer;  
Das Weltenrad dreht sich,  
Sein Drehen heißt Zeit,  
So wird es auch bleiben  
In Ewigkeit.

### **Fritz Löhner-Beda, 'Ich bin im Wald gesessen'**

Ich bin im Wald gesessen  
Im Mittagssonnenschein  
Hab' alle Welt vergessen  
Und war so recht allein.

Die Bäume ringsumher,  
Die sanften Stunden rannen,  
Die Zeit war süß und leer.  
Ich habe nichts gefühlt  
Als Duft und tiefe Ruh' –  
Die Sonne hat gespielet,  
Und Blätter schauten zu.

Und unsere Sehnsucht mit leichten Schwingen  
Im Land der Träume heimwärts zieht,  
Dann spüren wir ein leises Klingen,  
Wie wenn die Nacht dem Tag entflieht.  
Der Frühling kommt wieder,  
So war es schon immer,  
So will es das Leben,  
Der Mensch ändert's nimmer;  
Das Weltenrad dreht sich,  
Sein Drehen heißt Zeit,  
So wird es auch bleiben  
In Ewigkeit.

### **Fritz Löhner-Beda, 'Apokalypse'**

Die Wolken möchten weinen.  
Der Teufel mit dem Schnabelschuh  
Drückt ihre Tränendrüsen zu  
Und läßt die Sonne scheinen.

Am Himmel grünt der letzte Mond,

Den Bösen stimmt das heiter,  
Er wittert geil am Horizont  
Den ersten seiner Reiter.

In starrem Schweigen liegt die Welt,  
Es dröhnt vom Huf der Pferde,  
Der Embryo des Hungers bellt  
Im Bauch der dürren Erde.

Nun rast die blut'ge Konsequenz,  
Die Zeit ist nicht zum Spaß.  
Der dritte Reiter Pestilenz  
Wird sich nicht bitten lassen.

### **Hasso Grabner, 'Appellplatz Buchenwald'**

Marsch durch den Lehm,  
Und Takt, Kameraden!  
Und wenn uns der Dreck  
In die Stiefel läuft.  
Haben wir Buchenwald-Soldaten  
Andere Dinge schon in uns ersäuft.

Seitenrichtung und  
Links, Kameraden!  
Tuchföhlung ist  
Viel mehr als ein Wort.  
Alles Zaudern und alle Taten  
Pflanzen sich in der Tuchföhlung fort.

Die Augen links,  
Durchzähl'n, Kameraden!  
Zahl ist Masse,  
Und Masse ist Schritt.  
Vor die Weltgeschichte geladen,  
Zählt die Masse zum Wollen mit.

Arbeitskommando weg,  
Kameraden!  
Arbeitskommando  
Am großen Ziel.  
Marsch, ihr Buchenwald-Soldaten!  
Zehn für einen jeden, der fiel!

### **Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz, 'Typhus'**

1943  
Er schleicht durch das Lager und haucht dich an,  
sein Kuß läßt die Stirne erglöh'n. –  
Hüt dich vor ihm, ja hüt dich, Mann,  
ich sah den Tod mit ihm ziehn! –

Der Typhus kam – wie Gewitter hing  
er über dem Lager her. –  
Und als der Typhus wieder ging,  
waren 200 Betten --- leer.

1945

Er schleicht durch das Lager und haucht dich an,  
sein Kuß läßt die Stirne erglühn. –  
Hüt dich vor ihm, ja hüte dich, Mann,  
ich sah den Tod mit ihm ziehn! –

Der Typhus kam – wie Gewitter hing  
er über dem Lager her. –  
Und als der Typhus wieder ging,  
waren 12000 Betten --- leer.

### **Ferdinand Röhild, 'Der Flüchtling'**

Er hatte den Herren viel Ärger gemacht;  
Denn er wollte den Ketten entfliehen.  
Sie hatten ihn bald wieder eingebracht,  
Um ihn vor Gericht zu ziehen.

Wie ein Vogel war er dem Käfig entschlüpft,  
Wenn die Frühlingsdüfte ihn grüßen.  
Man sagt, er werde nun aufgeknüpft  
Und sollte am Galgen büßen.

Und man fand der entrüsteten Worte viel;  
Denn er hatte dazu noch gestohlen.  
Er besaß so wenig Ehrgefühl,  
Sich Essen und Kleider zu holen.

Man riß ihm die Lumpen vom Leib herab  
Und band seine Hände mit Riemen,  
So kühlte man an ihm die Wut erst ab  
Und peitschte ihm blutige Striemen.

Denn er hatte den Herren viel Ärger gemacht,  
Er hatte sie bitter beleidigt.  
Er hatte ihr Herrenrecht mißacht'  
Und seine Freiheit verteidigt.

Sie schlugen ihn ohne Bedenken wund  
Und taten bedenkenlos richten.  
Er war ja viel weniger als ein Hund,  
Ein Geschöpf, kaum wert zu vernichten.

Und als die Nacht, die friedvolle, kam,  
Vernahm sie ein hilfloses Stöhnen.  
Da rang sie die Hände in schweigenden Gram,  
Und die Sterne glänzten wie Tränen.

## Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz, 'Gestreiftes Kleid'

Gestreift ist unser Kleid,  
geschoren unser Haar,  
wir stehen außerhalb des Rechts, –  
auch wer ein Individuum war,  
ein Künstler oder Denker gar,  
trägt das Gewand des Knechts. –

Gestreift ist unser Kleid,  
geschoren unser Haar, –  
man hat uns nichts gelassen, –  
und alles was uns teuer war,  
das Heim, die Frau, das Kind sogar,  
die haben wir verlassen. –

Gestreift ist unser Kleid,  
geschoren unser Haar, –  
nun will man uns zerbrechen,  
doch in uns leuchtet still und klar  
der Freiheit Siegel wunderbar,  
wenn auch kein Wort wir sprechen. –

Gestreift ist unser Kleid,  
geschoren unser Haar, –  
noch gehen wir mit stolzem Mut,  
wir leben täglich in Gefahr,  
erniedrigt, wie noch keiner war,  
bald trinkt die Erde unser Blut. –  
Dann trägt der Kamerad das Kleid,  
wohl wissend um das grosse Leid,  
das dieser Stoff umschloss. –

Gestreiftes Kleid, gestreiftes Kleid,  
du bist mein höchstes Ehrenkleid,  
denn was ich litt, das viele Leid,  
macht dich unendlich gross. –

## Heinrich Steinitz, 'Goethe'

Auf jenem Pfad seh ich Dich aufwärts schreiten,  
Bedächt'gen Schritts hast Du die Höh' erklimmen,  
Die Deine Jugend leicht im Sturm genommen.  
Jetzt stehst Du da, erfrischt von Herrlichkeiten,

Und deutest Eckermann die fernen Weiten  
Und Bilder, die Dir wie im Reigen kommen  
Und die er heilig festhält, mit dem frommen  
Gefühl des Jungen. Deine Augen gleiten

Jetzt hin zu unserm Lager. Wie? Kein Schrei?  
Nein, nur zu Eckermann ein Flüsterwort?  
Und ruhig geht Dein Aug' an uns vorbei?

Du murmelst nur: „Die armen Menschen dort.“  
Da will nun meine schwerste Träne fließen,  
Seh ich den Gott so gottgleich sich verschließen.

---

Auf jenen Hügeln hast Du oft gefunden  
Aus Waldesrauschen tiefste Melodien.  
Der Wald dort sah Dein Herz für Lilith glühen  
Und Deine Liebe sich zum Werke runden.

Und später, als Olympier mehr gebunden,  
Bedächt'gen Schrittes zu der Höhe ziehen,  
In Weisheit spöttelnd über Idiotien.  
Mir warst Du Gott in vielen Weihstunden.

Und nun? Hier unser Lager! Dringst Du ein?  
Mir ist's, ich hört' zu Eckermann Dein Wort,  
Statt die Empörung laut herauszuschrein,  
Ist's nur ein Flüstern: „Arme Menschen dort.“

### **Karl Feuerer, 'Goethe und der Buchenwald'**

Als Goethe noch stieg auf den Ettersberg,  
Da gab es hier noch kein Gustloffwerk,  
Nicht Sonderbau und DAW  
Aber auch keine Läus' – und Flöh' –  
Fledermäuse schwirrten herum,  
Ohne Bomben und ohne Gebrumm,  
Heute brummen uns die Ohren  
Täglich Vögel mir vier Motoren –  
Motorengestank war unbekannt,  
Als Goethe hier Erholung fand  
Unter der berühmten Goethe-Eiche,  
Sie starb den Tod einer Vogelscheuche.  
Scheissetragen ist sehr beliebt,  
Weil es starke Muskeln gibt,  
Goethe freute sich ohne Frage  
Auch über den Duft der Kläranlage...  
Lagerleben – „lustig“ Leben,  
Nur mehr zu rauchen müsste es geben,  
Ja, mit dem Rauchen wirds immer schlimmer,  
Umso mehr rauchten ringsum die Trümmer.  
Trümmerhaufen könnte Goethe jetzt sehen,  
würde er hier noch spazieren gehen,  
Und – ganz Europa im Buchenwald,  
Aber jetzt kommen die anderen bald...  
Und es wird wieder besseres Wetter,  
Doch bleiben werden die Rubenblätter,  
Selbst für Goethe wär's zu fett,  
Er müsse auch dauernd auf dem Klosett...  
Seht mal an, vor langer Zeit  
Hat Goethe hier Frau von Stein gefreit,



Und jetzt, wie staunt das Publikum,  
Läuft hier ein Haufen Kinder herum...  
Ruhmbedeckter großer Goethe,  
Wenn Du über unsere Nöte  
Schreiben würdest einen Roman,  
Hättest Du auch bald Zebra an...  
An berühmte Goethezitate  
Denke, wenn Du bist im Bade,  
Biete, wie einst Götz so barsch,  
Deinem Feind den nackten Arsch...  
Arm sind wir, doch ohne Bange,  
Denn es dauert nicht mehr lange,  
Macht Euch nicht das Leben schwer,  
Wir haben ja noch die Feuerwehr!  
Wäre Goethe hier im Lager,  
Wie ein Muselmann so mager,  
Er würde allen Gewalten zum Trotz sich erhalten,  
Den Dr. Eisenbart belügen,  
Bloß um Schonung zu kriegen  
Und schmieden ein neues, großes Gedicht:  
Buchenwald, Dich vergesse ich nicht!

**Author unknown, 'Neue Jahr 1944-5'**

De Villevert wurde ernannt  
zum Scheißhauskommandant  
und mit Würde und Geschick  
trägt sie dieses grosse Glück  
Es ist aber bißchen schwer  
und es kommt wohl davon her  
daß kein Mensch kann täglich wissen  
wo wird heute hingeschissen.  
Morgen darf's der Sand nicht sein  
Abends – scheidst man doch hinein,  
einmal geht es zur Toilette  
und dann wieder in das Bette  
Bei Siemens wird mit Feuersmacht  
Der ganze Dreck zur Dunst gemacht  
Nachts hörst du mit großem Bangen  
Deine Bettgenossin fragen:  
„Bitte sehen sie doch nach  
scheidst man heut' vielleicht aufs Dach“  
De Villevert geht dienstbeflissen  
mit der Schaufel die beschissen  
um die Häftlinge zu treiben  
Und die Nummer aufzuschreiben  
von den Damen die geirrt  
und nicht richtig sich geführt  
Und mit diesem neuen Jahr  
ist wohl jedem von uns klar  
dass wir alle uns befleißigen  
und auf's ganze Lager scheißen!

### **Armin Freudmann, 'Wanderlied'**

Leicht wandert sich's mit leerem Magen.  
Und ist auch noch der Brotsack leer,  
Dann hat man nur sich selbst zu tragen.  
Man selber ist zum Glück nicht schwer.

Und glückt es dir, dich durchzuschlagen,  
Und kommst du heim, dünn wie ein Strick,  
Dann kannst du stolz der Mutter sagen:  
*Ich bin's, dein Sohn, dein Hans im Glück.*

*Was ich erwarb auf meiner Reise,  
Bring ich getreulich alles mit:  
Ein Bündel Kleider voller Läuse  
Und einen Riesenappetit.*

### **Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz, 'Wir schreiben'**

Alle vierzehn Tage einen Brief,  
auf grad liniertes Papier,  
alle vierzehn Tage einen Brief  
schreiben wir. –

Was uns betrifft, ist verboten zu sagen,  
weder was wir tun, noch was uns geschieht –  
wenn wir elend sind, wir dürfen nicht klagen,  
nichts sagen von unsern grau-grauen Tagen,  
so schreiben wir immer das alte Lied:

„Meine Lieben – ich bin gesund,  
meine Lieben – es geht mir gut –  
grüßt mir alle, die Mutter, die Tante, den Hund,  
seid unbesorgt, ich bin wirklich gesund –  
und ich hoffe, auch Euch geht es gut.“ –

### **Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz, 'Invaliden – nach 1941'**

Wer krank ist und wer sonst Gebrechen hat,  
soll sich melden zum Abtransport.  
Das ist des Reiches neueste Tat,  
es sorgt für sie der große Staat  
und schickt sie an besseren Ort. –

Es kommen Ärzte vom Militär  
– Gestapo ist auch dabei –  
prüfen der Invaliden Beschwer,  
schreiben sie auf, von Tag zu Tag mehr:  
„Erholung – und dann – geht ihr frei.“

Es drängt sich alles zu solchem Glück,  
jeder sucht Gebrechen hervor:

dem fehlt vom Finger oben ein Stück,  
der andre sieht schlecht, halb blind sein Blick,  
dem dritten bleibt der Atem zurück –  
und sie drängen sich täglich vor. –

Viel hundert Mann sind so ausgesucht,  
sie gehen voll Freude fort,  
für sie scheint es wie geglückte Flucht,  
sie haben sich die Freiheit gesucht –  
im Lagen werden sie abgebucht  
und sie gehen auf Transport. - -

Man läßt ihnen nur ganz dünnes Kleid,  
man zieht ihnen alles aus. –  
Sie fahren in Autos, es friert und schneit,  
sie fahren sehr lange, der Weg ist weit,  
fahren hinein in bessere Zeit,  
denn bald kehren sie nach Haus. –

Die Zeit vergeht, Tag für Tag rollt hin,  
nichts hört man von dem Transport. –  
Uns wird ganz seltsam zweifelnd zu Sinn,  
wir lauschen nach allen Reden hin,  
es heißt, sie sind in Österreich drin,  
an einem schöneren Ort. –

Da kommen Fragen, im Brief gesandt,  
an Vater, an Vetter, versteckt; –  
es schreibt der Mutter zitternde Hand:  
„Wie geht es Karl, der lang nichts gesandt,  
ob irgend etwas von ihm bekannt“ –  
doch die Fragen sind gut versteckt. –

Lang blieb alles dunkel, was denen geschah,  
doch dann kam's von überall her,  
da hörten wir von ferne und nah:  
der soll tot sein und auch dieser da –  
und manchmal in einer Zeitung sah  
man: auch der lebt nicht mehr.

Doch weiter ging Transport auf Transport,  
die Gesichter waren nun bang –  
es sehnte sich keiner mehr hier fort,  
es graute jedem vor dem Transport,  
unheimlich war der geheime Ort,  
unheimlich der dunkele Gang. –

Und wer auch ging, der kam nie zurück –  
man sprach von Kammern mit Gas.  
Der Erstickungstod, das war das Glück - -  
die Menschen gemordet, Stück für Stück,  
wie Vieh, mit kaltem Rechnerblick –  
so sparte man Kleidung und Fraß. –

Was schwach ist, das soll untergehn,

hat Nietzsche schon gesagt. –  
Es wird befolgt – denn täglich sehn  
wir sie in seinen Spuren gehn;  
nur wer stark ist, der darf bestehn:  
weh dem, der schwach und klagt! –

Seither verging gar viele Zeit,  
manch ein Transport verscholl –  
viel Tausende im Häftlingskleid  
sind hingemordet vor der Zeit,  
verschickt in dunkle Ewigkeit –  
manch Tausend ist schon voll.

## Chapter Four: Containment

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## Alfred Kittner, 'Molotschna'

In euren Augen, Brüder, flackern Qualen,  
Versucht ihr, uns stockend auszumalen,  
Was ihr Entsetzensvolles, Unsagbares,  
Erlebt im Winter des vergangenen Jahres.

„Molotschna“, sagt ihr, und mit diesem Worte  
Führt ihr den Lauscher durch die schwarze Pforte  
Des Todes, der euch hier zu Boden stieß  
Und nur die wenigsten entweichen ließ.

Bracht krank zusammen ihr auf öder Stätte,  
Erblicktet ihr um euch noch die Skelette  
Jener, die man vor euch hierher getrieben  
Und niederschoß, weil sie zurückgeblieben.

Als ihr aus Fieberschauern wirr erwachtet,  
Beraubt, verhungert, euch errettet dachtet,  
Da fandet ihr die Füße blau gefroren  
Und hattet, die ihr liebte, längst verloren.

Schon wolltet ihr, zurückgekehrt ins Leben,  
Euch von dem kalten Lehmgrund matt erheben,  
Da spürtet ihr, vor Schreck erstarrt, wie Massen  
Von Läusen euch an Leib und Kleidern saßen.

Ihr saht die Eltern auf dem Schinderkarren  
In Todeszuckungen zur Grube fahren,  
In die man sie mit hundert ihresgleichen  
Noch lebend schmiß auf andre Judenleichen.

Aus euren Worten, Brüder, spricht das Grauen;  
Was müßtet ihr Entsetzensvolles schauen!  
Wohin ihr blicktet, nichts als Tod und Nacht,  
Was haben, Brüder, sie aus euch gemacht?

Ihr wenige, die dem Tod entronnen seid,  
An euch ist es, in einer späteren Zeit,  
Des Grauens eingedenk, das ihr gesehen,  
Als Zeugen und als Rächer aufzustehen.

*für Hermann Jankl*

*Lager Obodowka, Februar 1943*

## Hasso Grabner, 'Morgen'

Es ist noch halbe Nacht,  
und in den stillen  
Gassen des Lagers  
steht ein Nebelmeer.  
Dann tönen Schritte  
und im harten, schrillen

Pfeifen erwacht  
das graue Häftlingsheer.

Zu einem Tagwerk  
monotoner Schwere  
weckt uns die Pfeife  
Morgen um Morgen neu.  
Und Abend für Abend  
sind von unserem Heere,  
Kameraden, Freunde  
hinübergegangen ins Leere,  
Kameraden von allem  
Leben und Leiden frei.

Was weißt du heute schon,  
ob dieser Morgen  
einer von vielen  
oder der letzte ist?  
Wird dir das Leben  
noch ein paar Tage borgen?  
Lohnt es noch,  
um die Klamotten zu sorgen?  
Oder meinst du,  
daß dich der Tot vergißt?

Wie wenig schon kann uns da  
wirklich bewegen.  
Was ist der Wert der Dinge,  
was ein Problem?  
Uns wundert nichts mehr.  
Und wenn einer in dem Regen  
einen schimmernden,  
leicht geflügelten Falter finge,  
wöge er eben so schwer  
wie ein Klumpen Lehm.

Die Sonne scheint nicht mehr,  
daß uns die Blumen leuchten.  
Der Regen fällt nicht mehr,  
daß uns das Korn gedeiht.  
Die Sonne trocknet uns heute  
vielleicht die feuchten  
Kleider am Leib.  
Und zum Zeitvertreib  
bringt uns der Abend  
das Ende der Arbeitszeit.

Abend und Morgen,  
das sind fast leere Begriffe.  
Alles ist nur ein  
grauer Brei der Zeit.  
Wenn nach dem Morgen-Appell  
einer mal „Abend“ piffe,  
oder die Knochenhand  
uns am Mittag griffe,

das wäre alles eins,  
wir sind immer bereit.

Und weil wir so alle Tage  
bereit sind zum Tode,  
ist uns das Leben  
nahe wie nie zuvor.  
Auf seiner tyrannischen Waage  
entscheidet das rote,  
lebendige Blut  
und hebt die Gewichte empor.  
Wir fragen nicht mehr  
nach irgendeinem Kalender,  
wir fühlen in Tag und Traum  
nur dunkle Nacht  
und wissen:  
Ein Morgen ist aller Nächte Beender,  
und halten für diesen Morgen  
die Nächte Wacht.

### **Georg von Boris, 'Die Schwangere'**

Es trägt ein Weib,  
Die Frucht im Leib,  
Die in dunkelster Nacht ward gezeugt,  
Als ein Mann, sie zum Zeitvertreib,  
Unter die Knute der Macht hat gebeugt.  
Und es schleppt das Weib  
Die gezeugte Last  
In dem Leib.  
Sie hat das Kleid entblösst  
Und sie zeigt es den Brüdern,  
Zeigt es den Schwestern,  
Bis der Mann sie gestern,  
Am Arme fasst  
Und in die Gaskammer stösst.  
Dank Gott, das Weib war erlöst.

### **Georg von Boris, 'Der ewige Schmerz'**

Ich sah ein Kind  
Mit nackten Füßen  
Im Schnee,  
In einer Stunde der Not,  
Eine Rinde Brot  
Küssen.  
Oh, das tat weh.  
Ich sah einen Greis,  
Der lahm und blind  
Im Schnee,  
In einer Stunde der Not.  
Dem Kind,



Gab sein letztes Stück Brot.  
Oh, das tat weh.  
Mehr als alle Wunden  
Schmerzen.  
Brennen jene Stunden  
In dem Herzen.

### **Alice Lesser, 'Wir schleppen schwere Lasten'**

Wir schleppen schwere Lasten,  
die Schulter ist schon wund.  
Die Müden beißt der Hund.  
Nicht jammern und nicht klagen,  
Wir sind nicht, die verzagen.  
Wir wollen trotzig tragen  
eine ungerechte Welt.

Wir klopfen schwere Steine.  
Vom Finger tropft das Blut  
Die Kälte wehe tut.  
Nicht weinen und nicht wimmern,  
Laßt uns die Hoffnung schimmern,  
Wir helfen, sie zertrümmern,  
Eine harte, böse Welt.

Wir schaufeln einen Graben.  
Der Rücken schmerzt so sehr,  
Der Hunger noch viel mehr.  
Es wird ein langer Graben,  
viel Tiefe muß er haben,  
wir wolln darin begraben  
Eine schon verfaulte Welt.

Wir bauen eine Straße,  
verhungert, krank, halbnackt.  
Und wenn es uns auch packt!  
Breit soll die Straße führen  
vorbei an vielen Türen.  
Es soll darauf marschieren  
eine neue bessr Welt!

### **Fritz Leo, 'Die Kolonne'**

Wir haben dem Grauen ins Auge gesehn  
Und das Entsetzen erblickt;  
Mag die Welt sich immer weiter drehn,  
Wir sind dem weit entrückt.

Wir leben in einer anderen Welt,  
Die ihr nie und nimmer versteht,  
Und wenn von uns auch mancher fällt,  
Und wenn auch manch ein Aufschrei gellt,

Voran der Marschtritt geht.

Weiß die Kolonne, wie lang der Weg?  
Endlos die Straße weit;  
Marschieren ohne Pfad und Steg  
Durch die ausweglose Zeit.

Die Kolonne geht, sie wird nicht müd,  
Der Schritte Takt schallt laut;  
Bis die Dunkelheit nach Westen flieht  
Und der Morgen wieder graut.

### **'Kolonnen'**

Kolonnen marschieren im gleichen Schritt,  
Kolonnen - - - Kolonnen.  
Kolonnen Soldaten mit klingendem Spiel,  
Kolonnen von Autos, Kanonen und Tanks,  
Kolonnen Züge, die das Auge kaum fasst,  
Kolonnen von Jugend zum Sterben bereit,  
Kolonnen, die der Vernichtung geweiht.  
Kolonnen kehren heim vom blutigen Krieg,  
Kolonnen verwundet und siech.

Kolonnen in die Fabriken geh'n,  
Kolonnen von Männern und Frau'n,  
Kolonnen, die die Mordinstrumente bau'n,  
Kolonnen sind das der Arbeit, der Tat,  
Kolonnen jetzt müde und matt!

Kolonnen dort vor den Läden stehn,  
Kolonnen sie wollen Brot,  
Kolonnen von Müttern,  
Kolonnen von Kindern,  
Kolonnen hungrig, halbtot!

Kolonnen man treibt sie aus Gefängnissen fort,  
Kolonnen man treibt sie ins Lager,  
Und dort ihr gefang'nen Kolonnen ihr,  
Seht ihr nicht als

Kolonnen - - - - Kolonnen!

Kolonnen zu fünf, Kolonnen zu zehn!  
Kolonnen barfuss zum Appell hier stehn,  
Kolonnen eilen zur Arbeit,  
Kolonnen stehen Strafe,  
Kolonnen stehen zum Essen an,  
Kolonnen stehn vor dem Review,  
Kolonnen man jagt sie wie räudiges Tier.  
Kolonnen stehn dort,  
Kolonnen gehn da,  
Endlose geplagte Kolonnen!

Doch Mut ihr Kolonnen

Bald kommt die Zeit,  
Da wir gehen zum Appell in Kolonnen!  
In Kolonnen frei, in Kolonnen froh!  
In Kolonnen von Menschen  
Befreit von der Qual.  
Befreit von dem Drucke der grausigen Zeit,  
Die die Menschen in Kolonnen zusammentreibt  
In Kolonnen zum Leiden,  
In Kolonnen zum Sterben!

Unsere Kolonnen dem Leben entgegengehn,  
Dem Wohlstandm dem Glück und der Freude.  
Kolonnen f r e i!  
Kolonnen f r o h!

### **Karl Schnog, 'Der Steinbruch'**

Eine Landschaft, wie am Schöpfungstage:  
Sand und Steine. Büsche. Und sonst nichts.  
Graue Gräser. Schreie wilder Klage.  
Ort des Grauens, Tal des Weltgerichts.

Müde Füße, abgewetzte Treppen.  
Alles jagt und hastet, keucht und rennt.  
Schleppen – Schleppen – Schleppen – Schleppen.  
Und erbarmungslos die Sonne brennt.

Schläge klatschen, Menschen fallen nieder.  
Wolken Staubes und dazwischen Blut.  
Fallen – Tragen. Immer, immer wieder.  
Schmerzensschreie, Schreie wilder Wut.

Doch der Tag der Freiheit kommt für jeden.  
Kamerad im Steinbruch, bist noch Knecht.  
Einmal werden die Steine für dich reden.  
Wird der Steinbruch einst an dir gerächt? ...

### **Hasso Grabner, 'Die Häftlingsnummer'**

Sie möchten gern, daß sie den Menschen lösche  
und seinen Namen ins Vergessen trägt,  
verlorner Ruf, der keinen Hall erregt,  
ein grauer Strich auf einer grauen Fläche.

Ein windverwehtes Nichts in seiner Schwäche,  
vom Leben als Karteiblatt abgelegt,  
ein Schatten, wo sich sonst ein Herz bewegt,  
damit das Herz an dieser Zahl zerbreche.

Nichts kann dem dunklen Wollen Sieg verleihn.  
Es nimmt die Nummer jeden an die Hand,  
als einer großen Kette dienend Glied,

als voller Ton in unserm hohen Lied,  
das Millionen unzertrennbar band,  
das Lied: Ich war, ich bin, ich werde sein.

### **Georg von Boris, 'Die Dornenkrone'**

Schimmernde Morgenhelle  
Huscht leis über die Schwelle.  
Ein Scherge ruft in die Zelle:  
Jesus, die Stunde ist da,  
Dein Weg geht nach Golgotha.  
Und ein grimmer Centurione  
Drückt dem Heiland, dem Sohne,  
Die Dornenkrone  
Aufs blutige Haupt.

Wieder huscht schimmernde Morgenhelle  
leis über die Schwelle.  
Ein SS-Mann ruft in die Zelle:  
Pater, die Stunde ist da,  
Dein Weg geht nach Golgotha.  
Und wie Gott und aller Welt zum Hohne,  
Setzt der Mann dem heiligen Sohne  
Eine Dornenkrone  
Auf das Haupt, aus Stacheldraht.

### **Katharina Staritz, 'Als zu der Reinen, Gnadenvollen'**

Als zu der Reinen, Gnadenvollen  
der lichte Bote Gottes trat,  
der seinen leid- und freudevollen  
geheimen Ratschluß ihr verkündigt hat,  
hat sie geneigten Hauptes still gesagt:

Des Herren Wort gescheh  
An seiner Magd.

Wenn Deine Boten  
nun auch mir begegnen,  
in deinen Dienst mich deine Gnade stellt,  
mit Leid und Seligkeiten mich zu segnen,  
dann tu, o Herr, an mir  
wie dir's gefällt.

Laß mich gehorsam deinen Willen ehrn  
Maria gleich:  
Ich bin die Magd des HERRn.

## Heinrich Steinitz, 'Träume'

Papier und Feder sind verbot'ne Dinge.  
Im Wort klang mir des Geistes hohes Walten.  
Nun ist kein Blatt erlaubt, es festzuhalten.  
Es muß verklingen, wie ich selbst verklinge.

Vielleicht, daß darum ich in Träumen singe,  
Daß mir die Nacht aus düster grauen Falten  
Zurückbringt heißgeliebteste Gestalten,  
Damit die Öde mich nicht ganz verschlingt.

O Träume ihr, der Seele stumme Lieder,  
Wenn auch in euch oft die Gestapo geistert,  
Ihr gebt das reine Einst mir dennoch wieder.  
Ihr seid die Dichtung, die mein Leid bemeistert.  
Dann sing dem Leben ich – sing ohne Säumen:  
O Welt, wie bist du schön – ach, nur in Träumen.

---

Papier und Feder sind verbot'ne Dinge.  
Was ich erlebte, wollt' sich mir gestalten.  
Nun darf ich selbst das Tiefste fest nicht halten;  
Vielleicht, daß darum ich in Träumen singe

Und in die Qual zurück die Bilder bringe,  
Die eines gütigen Geschickes Walten  
Mir gab für ewig, daß nicht in den kalten  
Endlosen Nächten mich das Leid verschlinge.

O Träume ihr, nun meiner Seele Lieder,  
Wohl geistern SS drin und Idiotien,  
Zerreißen oft die schönsten Melodien.  
Und doch in euch fühl ich als Ich mich wieder.  
Dann sing dem Leben ich – sing ohne Säumen:  
O Welt, wie bist du schön – nur, ach, in Träumen.

## Heinrich Steinitz, 'Weihnachten 1938'

Christabend ist's. Wir kauern, müd, zerschlagen,  
Am Stroh. Erinnern fließt in unser Weh.  
Ich fühl, wie ich des Nachbars Auge seh,  
Auch mein Blick hat solch' antwortloses Fragen.

Nichts bricht die Stille, Zeit von Zeit getragen,  
Rinnt so vorbei. Mir aber ist's, als steh  
Ein Christbaum leuchtend dort in höchster Höh':  
Und seine Lichter weinen stumme Klagen.

Horch da, Gesang! Vom Wachraum tönen Lieder,  
die sie und ich als Kinder fromm gesungen.  
Kein Fluch hat je mir so als Fluch geklungen!

Wie jenem Baum stürzt mir die Träne nieder.  
Nicht mir, Dir gilt sie Christ: Hallelujah  
Von diesen dort, schmerzt mehr als Golgatha.

---

Wie lange noch? Gewiß, ich werd' Euch sehen,  
Ihr liebsten Lieben, die Ihr mein gedenkt!  
Wie schön war doch, was wir einand' geschenkt!  
Es kann nicht Euch, nicht mir verloren gehen.

O laßt die Kleinen um den Christbaum stehen!  
Und lächelt doch, wenn's Euch zu Tränen drängt,  
Um ihretwillen, denn nur die Freude lenkt  
Ihr Kinderherz zu Wundertraums Geschehen.

Doch mich laßt weinen! Nicht dem eig'nen Los.  
Noch bin ich reich, noch reiht sich gold'ner Glanz,  
Erinnerns voll, in der Gedanken Tanz.  
Doch, Träne, fließ und frag: Wie's möglich bloß,  
Daß jene dort mit blutbefleckten Händen  
Die Lichter zünden und die Menschheit schänden?

---

Wie lange noch? Gewiß, ich werd' Euch sehen,  
Ihr liebsten Lieben, die Ihr mein gedenkt.  
Wie schön war doch, was wir einand' geschenkt!  
Es kann nicht Euch, nicht mir verloren gehen.

O laßt die Kleinen um den Christbaum stehen!  
Und lächelt, wenn es Euch zu Tränen drängt.  
Um ihretwillen, so mit Freude lenkt  
Ihr Herz zu dieses Wundertraums Geschehen!

Doch mich laßt weinen! Nicht dem eignen Los.  
Noch bin ich reich, noch ist ein gold'ner Glanz  
Erinnernsvoll in der Gedanken Tanz.  
Doch fragt die Träne, wie ist's möglich bloß,  
Daß uns're Mart'rer dort das Licht entzünden  
Und's Fünklein nicht in ihrem Herzen finden.

### **Alfred Kittner, 'Alter Brunnen'**

Jenen Brunnen will ich scheu umgehen,  
Denn er weiß von Tiefen, die ich meide.  
Nimmer will an seinem Rand ich stehen,  
Lang ist mir sein Anblick schon zuleide.

Wenn ich an der festgefügtten Kette  
Meine Eimer in den Abgrund sende,  
Faßt ein Schauer mich vor dieser Stätte,  
Und am Schwengel beben meine Hände.

Finstre Lockung schlummert in dem Schlunde;  
Acht ichs nicht und spä in die Tiefe,  
Gibt sie mir von dunklem Zauber Kunde,  
Und mir ists, als obs hinab mich riefte.

Gurgelnd schluckt das Wasser die Gefäße,  
Schäumend brechen sie das schwarze Siegel,  
Wieder kehren sie voll reiner Nässe,  
Und den Abgrund deckt ein blanker Spiegel.

Lange muß ich in die Rundung starren,  
Ich erkenn die eigene Grimasse,  
Selber halt ich unten mich zum Narren,  
Wenn ich oben in das Leere fasse.

Laßt uns diesen alten Brunnen meiden,  
Trug und Wirrnis lauert um die Stelle;  
Folge mir dahin, wo unter Weiden  
Heiter sprudelt eine lautre Quelle.

### **Alfred Kittner, 'Altes Haus'**

Nachts lösche ich die Kerze aus  
Und bin allein mit den Gespenstern.  
Sie wehen ohne Laut durchs Haus  
Und stehn als Schatten vor den Fenstern.

Mein raunend Wort hat sie gebannt,  
Da ich die gilben Blätter wandte;  
Mich trugen Reime in ein Land,  
Das ich aus alten Träumen kannte.

Und fröstelnd spürt ich fremden Hauch  
Zuweilen meine Schläfe kühlen,  
Als stünd wer hinter mir, um auch  
Das Nachtverborgene zu fühlen.

Mit öffnen Augen lieg ich wach  
Und laure auf verschwiegne Laute;  
Ein Schläfer träumt dem andern nach,  
Seit man dies alte Haus erbaute.

Das Haus ist alt. Und fort und fort  
Bröckelt der Kalk von morschen Mauern.  
Birgt diese rissige Mauer Mord?  
Stöhnt Wind, ein Opfer zu betrauern?

Versteintes Leid, verglaste Lust.  
Die Zeit vereist vor meinen Blicken:  
Ich fühle Schattenfinger in der Brust  
Im Würgegriff mein Herz ersticken.

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