

From the Guest Editors

A special issue on Heimrad Bäcker's *nachschrift* seems timely. Dalkey Archive Press will publish an English translation of Bäcker's book in 2009; this will be the first Bäcker work to appear in English, and only the second Bäcker translation into any language, after Erhan Altan and Selda Saka's 2004 Turkish translation of *nachschrift*. The Dalkey translation will make Bäcker's work accessible to a new readership as well as to a broader range of literary critics and Holocaust scholars. This special issue thus occupies a liminal position, as the last collection of essays in what could be considered the first generation of Bäcker criticism and as the first collection in a new stage of critical engagement with Bäcker's works.

In his essay, Thomas Eder proposes new directions for research on Bäcker and presents the existing focal points of scholarship on *nachschrift*: the book's documentary qualities, its relation to concrete poetry, and its contribution to the understanding of the Shoah. The contributions to this issue engage with these concerns, examine some of Bäcker's critics' presuppositions, and indicate some new perspectives for reading Bäcker. Sabine Zelger is the first to examine in depth Bäcker's place in the history and literature of bureaucracy. Henry Pickford's article breaks new ground by examining *nachschrift* in light of philosophical theories of quotation. His analysis complements Florian Huber's and Erhan Altan's original contributions to discussions of Bäcker's decision to quote historical works on the Holocaust together with texts by perpetrators and victims. Altan and Huber also interpret the complex relations between Bäcker's text and his sources. Heidrun Kämper's article is exemplary in its close readings of *nachschrift* and its linking of Bäcker's text to larger political and historical issues. She identifies and investigates Bäcker's two central methods—*isolation* and *serialization*—as literary techniques with inherent semantic content, and she closes her article with a discussion of *nachschrift* as a timely and untimely contribution to the postwar *Schulddiskurs*.

Kämper's conclusion resonates with Pickford's interpretation of some of Bäcker's entries in *nachschrift* as "untimely"; these are elements of Bäcker's text that, Pickford claims, "only make sense in the future." The untimely aspect of *nachschrift* lies in these utterances spoken by the living that become meaningful only after their death, as well as in the book's *nachträgliches* echoing of its sources. And Bäcker's untimeliness appears in an additional aspect: in its potential for future imitation by other poets. Zelger emphasizes this possibility at the end of her essay, where she identifies Bäcker's technique as a method for political critique. In this way, the special issue points out future directions for Bäcker criticism and also to future uses of Bäcker's methods. The articles and notes in this special issue emphasize the untimeliness of Bäcker's texts but also their enduring timeliness, their relevance for discussions of the Holocaust, and literature's ability to foster historical and critical consciousness.

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Todesstiege in Mauthausen, Heimrad Bäcker.