

Weimar between Light and Darkness

Weimar, the cultural city of poets and thinkers, located in the German Federal State of Thuringia, and the district of Buchenwald with its concentration camp on the Ettersberg mountain, can confront the visitors with the entire range of human possible deeds, which can lead to the highest heights in thinking as well as to the deepest demonic abyss in action. Being there I set myself the task of taking on both extremes, bringing them to my attention and also trying to endure them.

„O Weimar! You had a special fate
Like Bethlehem of Judah, small and great...“

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Goethe lived in Weimar for over half a century and accomplished his universal spiritual achievements, which till to our days influenced the European culture and made Weimar famous throughout the world. If you follow the history of Weimar you will find real testimonies in each epoch, which testify the development of mankind and its culture history in this rather narrow space:

As early as 975 A.D., Emperor Otto II called a princely assembly in the castle of the Count of Weimar, which indicates that Weimar was already a well-known place in spiritual turmoil of that time. (Emperor Coronation Otto I, as the beginning of the new Roman Empire of German Nation since 962). Melanchthon († 1560) and Luther (†1546) were in Weimar and preached in the present „Herderkirche“. There you can also wonder at the famous altarpiece of Lucas Cranach the Elder († 1553 in Weimar). The regents of Weimar always made an impressive effort to promote art and culture. Duke Wilhelm Ernst (†1728), for example, called Johann Sebastian Bach to Weimar as a concertmaster and for eight years it sang and sounded „as if the eternal harmonies was talking to itself“, as Goethe expressed himself 100 years later about J.S.Bach music. The baroque castle Bellevue (1748) was built close to the town and the „Weimar Classicism“ was already preparing itself. Duke Constantine, grandson of Wilhelm Ernst, married the Princess Anna Amalia, a niece of Frederick the Great († 1786), but became unfortunately a widow at the age of 19 and through thus the regent. She was the founder of „Anna Amalia Bibliotheca“ which we can still admire today in her baroque style. Her free unconventional thinking, her fine sense of art and her clever activities made Weimar the famous intellectual centre of Europe.

She appointed Christoph Martin Wieland to Weimar as a teacher for the heir to the throne, called Karl August. Wieland († 1813) was one of the most important writers of the „Enlightenment“ in the German speaking area and he brought profound knowledge of foreign intellectual wealth (for example about Shakespeare), art and social community of interests to Weimar.

Duke Karl August on the other hand, brought Goethe into his government, from Frankfurt a. Main at the age of 26. Goethe in turn moved Herder to Weimar, whose „Ideas on History of Philosophies of Mankind“ decisively promoted the spiritual development of Europe.

In 1787 Schiller († 1805) also arrived in Weimar. In the further development Goethe and Schiller joined in 1794 together to form a selfless association based on free thinking. This association has impressed its seal for half a century and still works today. With this „Aesthetic Alliance“ Schiller and Goethe created the classical art movement that made Weimar world famous. The Goethe-Schiller Archive was founded in 1889. Before that, Grand Duchess Sophie of Saxony-Weimar had drawn up a plan for a complete edition of Goethe's work that would include written estate: the Sophia Edition. In 1886 the committee proposed that Rudolf Steiner († 1925), who has already emerged as the editor of Goethe's scientific writings, should come from Vienne. Rudolf Steiner agreed to contribute to the Sophia Edition. The question, he asked himself, was: would his estimation of Goethe's scientific significance, which he had already set out in 1886 in his own book „Baselines of an Epistemology of Goethe's world view“ be confirmed by the newly discovered testimonies? At that time he had admiringly stated: „The full and pure human seemed to me to prevail in everything that Goethe created, contemplated and vitalized to the world.“

When Goethe came 1775 from Apolda to Weimar, he had the valley, in which Weimar lies, open in front of him: to its right the straight edge of the Ettersberg, to its left the wooded heights around Belvedere.

The Buchenwald concentration camp (KZ) was built by the National Socialists on the Ettersberg, only 10km from the city centre. And it became the gruesome counter-image of the classic city. It was the largest concentration camps on German soil with an area of 40 hectares and was operated between

1937 to 1945 as a labour camp for men. The camp commander Karl Otto Koch (A German SS leader and camp commander of various German Concentration camps.) And also Ilse Koch, wife of the camp commander, (In the post-war period she became internationally known as the „Witch of Buchenwald“), signed responsible for all what happened in the KZ. A total of 270.000 people at least from almost all European countries were imprisoned there during this period. At first the camp was intended for all German political opponents of the Nazi regime (largest group) and for previously convicted criminals but also for homosexuals and non-Germans. It was not an extermination camp like Auschwitz, but the prisoners were ruthlessly exploited, especially for the arms industry. Many prisoners died of inhuman working- and living conditions. For example in the quarry, where the prisoners had to work 14 hours without enough water and food and also without appropriate clothing. The gate building with the detention cells was a murder and torture site of the camp. Commander Koch had prisoners but also SS-members who refused to join the regime, arrested here. They all were tortured to extort confessions and information's.

Between 1943 and 1945 the number of permanent detainees rose from 11.000 to over 110.000.

Probably more than 56.000 people died in Buchenwald in the most terrible ways.

Completed in 1940, the crematorium had a dissection and pathology, right next to the combustion chamber, in which medical experiments were carried out on humans. In addition there was an installation for shots in the back of the neck that was used in secret and underhandedly. Under the pretext of a medical examination, in which the size of the person was to be measured, the rifle was pointed directly at his neck through an opening in the next room. Over 8.000 prisoners were executed. They were politicians, Jews, members of the intelligentsia and former state-, party- and economic officials of the Soviet Union.

Outside the actual camp, fenced in barbed wire with electric fence, there were isolation barracks and the so-called Falconer's House, used for prominent inmates. For example Rudolf Breitscheid, Fritz Thyssen and Dietrich Bonhoeffer were interned here.

After the assassination attempt on Hitler on July 20.1944, SS members, officers and politicians as well as their families were imprisoned here. The former Prime Minister of French Peoples Front government, Leon Blum and also Paul Reynaud were here.

South the gate to the „protective custody camp „stood the SS barracks with 16 buildings, arranged in a semi circle. These were the „Group of a hundred – building“ of the SS- skull and crossbones troop Thuringa. Today there are still three buildings to be seen. Here lived 4.000 young men, who were trained and became special sculptors.

In 1945 the concentration camp Buchenwald was liberated by the United States of America.

After the liberation however, the Soviet Bolshevik Military Administration took over the entire camp and used it from 1945 to 1950 under the name „Special Camp N.2“ as an internment camp for its own prisoners of the war. The misery continued in the same way as before. Over 7.000 people died during this period.

In this field of tension between the work of an unprecedented abundance of people with an outstanding spirituality for an promising future in the „Goethe era“ and the apocalyptic work of people work especially in the 12 years of Nazi rule in Germany, who carried out the evil produced by the will from Human Beings to an extent that is no longer conceivable, one's own experience tense – provided one gives oneself to it in a perceptive way.

The highest noble light of ideas – committed to truth, love and virtues as the reality of the good – on one hand. And on the other side the absolute demonic darkness, combined with an abyssal hatred for everything that comes from the true spiritual to serve the development of mankind.

And the „I AM“ is standing in middle, free to decide which way the innerst heart will choose! So I am sure that the heart-thinking will always lead you to right reacting and to act for the good in a selfless way.

Goethe's expressed it in these words:

„ I have come to the frightening conclusion that I am the decisive element. It's my personal approach that creates the climate. It's my daily mood that makes the weather.

I possess tremendous power to make a life miserable or joyous.

I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration. I can humiliate or humor, hurt or heal. In all situations, it is my response (!) That decides whether a crisis is escalated or de-escalated, and a person humanized or dehumanized.“

Inga Jäger

