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Juliane Schallau

It is a peculiarity of the German language that it can express the state of *innocence* (“*Unschuld*”) only as an *absence* of guilt (“*Schuld*”) (Buschmeier 38). Yet on further reflection, the coupling of those two words is indicative of the fact that there is no innocence without guilt, or, in other words, that the notion of innocence would be meaningless without its opposite. The (linguistic) impossibility to think one concept without the other might also be connected to the idea that *being* as such is inherently ‘guilty’. In his fundamental work *Being and Time* (1927), Martin Heidegger addresses the question of what *being* [*Dasein*] as such actually means, or in other words, what it means *to exist*. This question precedes traditional problems of philosophy concerned with the question *whether* something exists.¹ Heidegger approaches his question by means of his notion of *Dasein*. As Magda King argues in her *Guide to Heidegger’s Being and Time*, *Dasein* may be understood in a “threefold unity.” She notes that on the one hand, *Dasein* “understands itself first and foremost in its own being. This being is called by Heidegger existence (*Existenz*).” On the other hand, *Dasein* “understands itself as being in the world,” which is essential for its existence. These ways of understanding, she further states, enable *Dasein* “to meet other beings,” whether they are fellow men or things in the strict sense of the word, “within the world and disclose them in their being” (25 ff.).

¹For Heidegger, the very question of being poses a problem, for “when we ask, ‘what is ‘being’ [‘*Sein*’]?’ we stand in an understanding of the ‘is’ without being able to determine conceptually what the ‘is’ means” (4). Therefore, he distinguishes between the being [*Sein*] of a possible being [*Seiendes*] and that possible being (in the sense of something/someone existent), itself. This distinction involves a difference between the ontical and the ontological, the former referring to a perceptible phenomenon, the latter to a more primordial understanding of being. In this context, Heidegger argues that “[a]ll ontology, no matter how rich and tightly knit a system of categories it has at its disposal, remains fundamentally blind and perverts its innermost intent if it has not previously clarified the meaning of being sufficiently and grasped this clarification as its fundamental task” (10).

As these premises show, Heidegger's main concern is the existence of human beings. What distinguishes these human beings from non-human or inanimate things, as mentioned by King, is their ability to think about and reflect upon their Dasein. One of the conditions of this Dasein to be noticed, as Heidegger argues in the second part of his second division of *Being and Time*, is the idea of guilt. For Heidegger, "guilty" turns up as a predicate of the 'I am,'" which leads him to the question whether "what is understood as 'guilt' in inauthentic interpretation possibly lie[s] in the being of Dasein as such, in such a way that it is also already guilty in that it actually, factically exists" (270).² As with the concept of Dasein, Heidegger assumes a primordial state of guilt as distinguished from an everyday notion of it. Recognizing the latter, however, leads us directly to the "essence" or the "primordial, existential meaning of 'guilty'" (270), which Heidegger here transcribes as *I am guilty*. Thus, he further argues, beings "can not only burden themselves with factual guilt, but they *are* guilty in the ground of their being" (274). In his essay "Reinterpreting Division I of *Being and Time* in the Light of Division II," Hubert L. Dreyfus states that

[o]ntological guilt in *Being and Time* does not mean what guilt normally takes on to mean. It is not a sense of having done something wrong but rather a structural characteristic of all human beings. Guilt is defined as the fact that one is indebted to the norms of one's culture, but that one can't get behind this cultural thrownness so as to make these norms explicit and justify them. (146)

Human beings, who did not choose to live or, in Heidegger's terms, to be "thrown" into the world, cannot change the way their culture works, but are capable of accepting it.

Like Dreyfus, Stephen Mulhall also points out the ontic and ontological dimensions of guilt and hints at the (im)possibilities of redemption: "Excuses or acts of reparations might eradicate the ontic guilt of a specific action, but ontological guilt, being a condition of human existence, is originary and ineradicable" (142). Hence, existential guilt cannot be overcome but has to be accepted. This is an actual choice that human beings have. Mulhall further argues that

[a] readiness to take on responsibility in this way, to be indebted to oneself, amounts to a willingness to be appealed to by the voice of conscience—a readiness to make existential decisions in the light of one's ownmost, authentic potentiality for Being-guilty. It amounts, in short, to choosing to have a conscience as opposed to repressing it. (142)

²Translated by Joan Stambaugh.

The distinction between ontic and ontological guilt as well as between the respective solutions of atoning for the former and accepting to face the latter by choosing a conscience becomes complicated once factual and existential guilt blur into each other. This is the case when an actual crime is perceived as irreparable, so that it not only haunts the victim(s) and perpetrator(s) involved, but also their future generations. This kind of guilt is obviously a societal or collective one, which can be approached morally as well as legally and is, thus, still distinguishable from Heidegger's fundamental philosophical concept. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that the *perception* of this guilt as inherent bears resemblance to what Heidegger calls an "existential condition" (274).

In Germany, the idea of "being born" into a state of guilt takes on a whole new meaning in the context of the Holocaust and the atrocities committed by the Nazis before 1945. The remembrance of these unique crimes against humanity is a significant aspect of German national identity and the state's commemorative culture. Aleida Assmann, whose works on collective memory have significantly contributed to the way Germans remember the Holocaust, describes this remembrance as Germany's "negative origin myth" (*Unbehagen* 67).³ She notes that by now, the third and fourth generations have been socialized to German commemorative culture, and that the remembrance of the Holocaust by means of memorials, monuments, and anniversaries has become part of their cultural environment (67).

Naturally, such collective assignments of (irreparable) guilt and a national identity based on negative memory sometimes meet with resistance. Hence, debates about how to approach and commemorate the years between 1933 and 1945 have always been contentious in Germany. First of all, it is difficult to speak of a coherent German discourse due to the division of Germany between 1949 and 1990. The German Democratic Republic (GDR) understood itself as inherently antifascist and put special emphasis on communist resistance to Nazism. While the state praised resistance fighters, it forgot victim groups like Sinti and Romani people, homosexuals, and other minorities (Danyel 190). Questions of guilt and responsibility of Nazi crimes were usually shifted to West Germany completely, whereas the GDR considered itself the better Germany. In West Germany, a majority of people tried to deny and shuffle off any responsibility for both the war and the war crimes by casting the blame entirely on Adolf Hitler in the immediate aftermath of the war. Nevertheless, the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) was the legal successor of Nazi Germany and took over responsibility for its crimes. Thus, it was involved in legal processes, reparation and compensatory payments, and the foundation of the *Institut für Zeitgeschichte* ("Institute for Contemporary History") in 1949. But still, a majority of people and politicians refused to debate the nation's Nazi past other than in legal terms well into the late 1950s. In this

³If not indicated otherwise, all translations from German are mine.

context, members of the movement of 1968 are often considered as the first who broke the silence of their ancestors and brought up questions of the latter's complicity in Nazi crimes. They publicly demanded explanations from their families, as well as the denazification of academia and the judicial system. However, historians are still divided over the actual role that generation played for German *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* ("coming to terms with the past").⁴

In 1986 and 1987, the question of how historiography should treat the Holocaust was debated during the so-called *Historikerstreit* ("Historians' Dispute"). In its course, conservative and leftist academics discussed the singularity of the Holocaust and the responsibility of German citizens. The cause of the dispute was an article by historian Ernst Nolte, published in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* in June 1986, titled "Vergangenheit, die nicht vergehen will" ("A Past That Will Not Pass").⁵ From Nolte's point of view, the National Socialist past follows different rules of temporality, as its impact neither declines nor becomes less besetting, but instead functions as a dread which makes it even more vivid and powerful (39). Moreover, he relativizes the exceptionalism of the Holocaust and presents it as a consequence of former genocides and the Soviet Gulag system: Nolte claims that actions of National Socialists—like mass deportations or executions, torture, death camps, exterminations of groups based on a distortion of objective criteria, and demands for the killings of millions of innocent people who were considered as enemies—had already happened before. The solitary exception, he argues, was "the technical process of gassing" (45). As he proceeds, he insinuates that the Soviet labor camps were more primordial than Auschwitz; he also argues that the Bolsheviks' *Klassenmorde* ("class murders") during the Russian Civil War logically and factually preceded the Nazis' *Rassenmorde* ("racial murders") (45). In an article published in the weekly newspaper *DIE ZEIT* in July 1986, German philosopher and sociologist Jürgen Habermas strongly criticized Nolte and other neo-conservative historians who felt encouraged to draw on Nolte's version of historical revisionism. Habermas accused them of deemphasizing and denying the singularity of the Nazi crimes by interpreting them as a reaction to (ongoing) Bolshevik extermination threats. Thus, Habermas argued, they try to reinvigorate a national conservative conception of history. He further criticized Nolte in particular for the crudity of reducing Auschwitz to a "technical innovation" (71).

⁴Due to the limited scope of this paper, it is impossible to discuss concrete political actions and public debates on how to account for the German past that took place in West Germany between 1949 and 1990. The same holds true for the demands of the movement of 1968. For a detailed overview of the history of debates and discussions about National Socialism after 1945, see Fischer and Lorenz. For a discussion of the role of the movement of 1968 for Germany's accounting for the past, see Jarausch.

⁵In the course of this paper, I will draw on Nolte's notion of a "past that will not pass," which serves as a powerful characterization of the haunting legacies which are analyzed here. This borrowing, however, is by no means a consent to his reactionary propositions relativizing the singularity of the Holocaust.

German commemorative culture as we know it today has arisen, as Assmann notes, from critical resistance (*Unbehagen* 68). Just before German Reunification in 1990, a petition was filed in order to build a Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe. The project was realized between 2003 and 2004 in Berlin. According to Assmann, German commemorative culture took a new line after the memorial was built: it became politically accepted and was underpinning the state. Furthermore, the German Reunification Treaty states the care and support of historical memorial sites as a governmental task (*Unbehagen* 69).

Whereas the violent past was mostly repressed during the aftermath of the war, German post-war writers began to account for this past long before historians did (Müller 23). They were trying to articulate something which seemed to be beyond words. In this context, Theodor W. Adorno's often-quoted and often misread dictum about the barbarity of writing poetry after Auschwitz served as a conceptual starting point for many writers. Adorno's criticism was directed not against art in general, but against mass art, which he assumes to be complicit with the "culture industry." In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, he and Max Horkheimer assert that

[t]he great artists were never those who embodied a wholly flawless and perfect style, but those who used style as a way of hardening themselves against the chaotic expression of suffering, as a negative truth. The style of their works gave what was expressed that force without which life flows away unheard. (1115)⁶

In terms of writing after Auschwitz, this criticism of mass art as nothing but style seems to reject any form of writing which was designed simply to entertain or sensationalize, and thus preserve the status quo. From Horkheimer's and Adorno's point of view, this kind of art is unable to criticize society—for example a society tolerating or approving the Nazis' crimes—because it is entangled in the "culture industry." This coinage indicates a contradiction between the autonomy of art and the commercial production of works of art. The art of modernism, on the other hand, is considered by Horkheimer and Adorno as autonomous, and its "great artists" as capable of revealing the world and its evils for what they are. For these modernists, style is not used as an end in itself, but answers the purpose of art. In this sense, Adorno's dictum should not be interpreted as prohibition, but rather as a demand to return to true art. When German post-war writer Günter Grass gave a lecture called *Schreiben nach Auschwitz* ("Writing After Auschwitz") in February 1990, he alluded to this distinction. In the talk, he retrospectively analyzes the misunderstanding of Adorno's "categorical imperative" as a "prohibition sign" (qtd. in Müller 23). For him, as he further explains, it was clear back then that "Adorno's dictate

⁶Translated by John Cummings.

was refutable—if at all—only by means of writing.” However, he immediately poses the question: “But how? And learning from whom and resting on which tradition?” (qtd. in Müller 23).

Among the writers whose works and style were capable of providing the inspiration Grass was asking for in his lecture is William Faulkner. For where else could German post-war writers find a comparable legacy of violence and guilt, a struggle with an unresolved past, than in the U.S. American South with its memory of the “peculiar institution” of slavery? And who else had ever written as achingly and obsessively about this region’s heritage, this “deep South dead since 1865 and peopled with garrulous outraged baffled ghosts” (*Absalom, Absalom!* 6) than Faulkner?⁷

Heinrich Böll, whose works such as *Wo warst du, Adam?* (“*And Where Were You, Adam?*”) or *Billard um halb Zehn* (“*Billiards at Half-Past Nine*”) rate among the most influential German post-war literature, even argued that one cannot understand the latter “without knowing how important Faulkner has been to us” (qtd. in Müller 26).⁸ And for post-war writer Alfred Andersch, Faulkner’s saying “The past is never dead. It’s not even past” from *Requiem for a Nun* posed an “enormous priming charge for the [writer’s] mind” (qtd. in Müller 23).

Despite such clear statements, (German) Faulkner criticism has devoted little attention to William Faulkner’s influence on German post-war literature so far.⁹ One detailed monograph investigating that topic was published in 2005 by Ute Müller. In *William Faulkner und die deutsche Nachkriegsliteratur* (“William Faulkner and German post-war literature”), she not only compiles an extensive overview of the difficult situation of Faulkner’s reception in both West and East Germany, she also investigates

⁷Hereafter cited as AA.

⁸As further influential writers, Böll counts Hemingway, Camus, Sartre, and Kafka.

⁹Faulkner’s influence on other regional writers and national literatures, however, has been noted. Emron Esplin, for example, discusses the impact Faulkner had on Latin American writers of the Latin American Boom. Interestingly enough, Faulkner’s works seem to have influenced these writers for similar reasons as in the case of German post-war writers. As Esplin notes, Carlos Fuentes argued that “only Faulkner, in the closed world of optimism and success, offers a common image to the United States and Latin America: the image of defeat, of separation, of doubt, of tragedy” (270). Takako Tanaka treats Faulkner’s influence on Japan and Japanese readers and writers in light of the French reception of Faulkner, but she also emphasizes the thematic links between Faulkner and Japanese writers such as “the condition of the defeated” (281). Hosam Aboul-Elä, on the other hand, discusses how far Faulkner’s works are pervaded by postcolonial aspects and the region called the “Global South.” André Bleikasten is one among the many to point out Faulkner’s substantial reception in Europe which preceded his American reputation, as it “was already fairly high in the late 1930s.” In France, for example, his novels “won recognition [...] and [were] admired by Malraux and Sartre [...] long before they were taken seriously in Faulkner’s own country” (76). Faulkner’s influence on the French Caribbean and on Édouard Glissant in particular is discussed by Hugues Azérad, who argues that Faulkner’s writing “progressively exposed the flawed foundations upon which western cultures asserted their domination, the U.S. South being one among many other avatars of European colonization” (166). For recent discussions and a recontextualization of Faulkner’s topics in terms of Latin American, Arab, and Asian literatures, see Saldivar and Goldberg. “The Faulknerian Anthropocene” as well as Boyagoda, Randy. “Reading Faulkner in and Beyond Postcolonial Studies.”

central narrative themes, motifs, and techniques of Faulkner, which she claims had a strong impact on the works of several German post-war writers. Additionally, she provides detailed comparative studies of particular works by these authors and Faulkner. Even if some of her comparative studies might overstate the case, Müller's work is especially relevant as it provides a coherent survey of how Faulkner's works have been received in both parts of Germany, as well as the German writers' (verbatim) responses to Faulkner. Crucially, her basic assumption of a resembling *structure* of narratives coming to terms with the past in Faulkner's works as well as German post-war literature is convincing: "In Faulkner, children and adolescents discover that their family history is inextricably linked with the social institution of slavery, whereas children characters in German post-war literature are faced with fascism, which has left its marks in family histories" (Müller 178). Peter Nicolaisen, in an essay titled "Faulkner and Southern History: A View from Germany," draws a similar comparison. He notes that in Faulkner's works, Uwe Johnson and other German readers "could at once recognize a form of painful questioning that strongly resembled their own, for the most pressing question for any sensitive German after the war was how to cope with a burdened past: how to go on living with the knowledge of what had happened and live with a heritage that was deeply tainted" (34). Ultimately, there seems to be a common access point which Faulkner's works provided for several German post-war writers. Without intending to do so, Faulkner left a literary legacy which could help them deal with their violent and guilt-ridden past. He "fathered" a generation of "sons" whose texts contributed greatly to the formation of German commemorative culture and to the "sons" admission of the collective guilt of their fathers in German post-war society.

As I am particularly interested in narrative strategies that negotiate the sense of guilt that collectives as well as individuals share after such inhumane atrocities as the Holocaust and slavery, this essay focuses on two literary characters who I argue represent certain coping mechanisms of people confronted with a "past that will not pass." Faulkner's Quentin Compson of *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!* as well as Günter Grass's Oskar Matzerath of *The Tin Drum* share, as I will argue in this paper, a particular sense of guilt toward their ancestors' past, which narratively manifests itself in their peculiar relationship to temporality. Such a comparison is not meant to deny the singularity of the Holocaust or to determine one crime as worse or more inhumane than the other. It is rather a suggestion of a *structural* resemblance of the violence of both the Holocaust and slavery (structural in that both were based on dehumanizing a specific group of people in order to legitimize their systematic exploitation and/or murder), as well as a comparative look at the respective aftermaths. However, this is less a comparative study of the two writers' works than an investigation of the narrative means which help express a feeling as haunting and permanent as intergenerational guilt.

Among German post-war writers, Günter Grass (1927–2015) is often considered *primus inter pares* (“first among equals”) (Honsza 185). Norbert Honsza even goes as far as to say that without Grass, “German post-war literature would have been inconceivable” (185). Moreover, his novel *The Tin Drum* (1959) was an international success and a showpiece of German contemporary literature in the 1950s (Honsza 185).

The Tin Drum is the first of three parts of Grass’s *Danzig Trilogy*. The eponymous Polish city of Danzig (Gdańsk) has been of major importance for Grass, who was born and raised there, and for his work in general. The city’s history, the details of its foundation as well as the ethnic identity of its first settlers, is an unresolved argument especially among German and Polish historians. Since the second half of the nineteenth century, both sides have tried to prove territorial claims to the region based on systematic excavations and archeological collections (Loew 16ff.).

Reflecting on such debates and contradictory narratives may help clarify the significance of the city of Gdańsk over the course of the twentieth century. Questions of territorial claims were not only raised in terms of the city’s prehistory, but they also informed the battles of what Peter Oliver Loew calls a “torn century” (11). Thus, in all its forced vicissitude, Gdańsk is symbolic of the European upheavals of that era. In 1919, the city was separated from Germany (Weimar Republic) due to the Treaty of Versailles. Between 1920 and 1939, it existed as the semi-autonomous Free City of Danzig. With the Invasion of Poland in 1939, the city was annexed by Germany. As a result of the Potsdam Conference (July 17 to August 2, 1945), Gdańsk became part of Poland. The so-called *Potsdam Agreement*, passed by the Soviet Union, the United States, and the United Kingdom at the end of the conference determined territorial changes of Germany’s borders as well as the expulsion of Germans from Eastern and Central European countries. Hence, about 250,000 Germans from Gdańsk were displaced: they either fled from the Red Army or had to leave the city (Loew 250). Grass’s parents were among them, whereas the writer himself saw the end of the war in a military hospital and was taken prisoner of war afterwards. The family met again in 1946. Grass’s hometown, however, was lost.

Grass cited the experience of that loss as one of the main reasons why he began to write in the first place:

Thus, my lost homeland gave rise to an obsessive memory, that means to writing as an obsession. Something that had been lost forever and had left a void, which could not be filled with the surrogate of one or another substitutional home, should be remembered on white paper, sheet by sheet, conjured, captured, and if distorted, caught like on broken fragments of a mirror. (qtd. in Neuhaus 44)

Writing became Grass’s means to evoke a place to which he knew he could never *physically* return, for not only had his family been forced to leave

Gdańsk, but the city as such had ceased to exist, had become an entirely different city from the one he grew up in. Grass's notion of loss and of writing as an autotelic process is reminiscent of the kind of experience Faulkner describes in his "Introduction to *The Sound and the Fury*, 1933." When Faulkner wrote *The Sound and the Fury*, he "had no plan at all. I wasn't even writing a book" ("Introduction" 292). Instead, he was calling to mind the figure of a little girl: "I did not realise then that I was trying to manufacture the sister which I did not have and the daughter which I was to lose" (293). Faulkner's infant daughter Alabama died in 1931, which means that the personal testimony of the introduction was written in light of this tragedy, whereas the novel was not. Nevertheless, Faulkner orchestrates the death of his daughter as a turning point by which the writing process of *The Sound and the Fury* has been prospectively affected: Caddy Compson, he seems to say, symbolizes the daughter he was about to lose in the future. Without giving in to the notion of Faulkner having intuited his future loss, one can deduce the motif of a void that should be filled by means of writing from this evocation of his personal grief.

The personal testimonies of both Grass and Faulkner emphasize an irreversible loss that could be captured only on paper. Thus, Grass reconstructed his lost home, whereas Faulkner invented Caddy Compson. But Faulkner's introduction mentions another kind of loss which, like Grass's, is also spatial. Contrasting the US South from cities like Chicago or New York, he states that "the South [...] is dead, killed by the Civil War. There is a thing known whimsically as the New South to be sure, but it is not the south" (291). By claiming an inconsistency between the antebellum South and the postbellum South, Faulkner seems to suggest that he, or any Southerner, has been deprived of his home after the end of the Civil War. The description of this experience is also reminiscent of one of Grass's comments on his loss of Gdańsk: in a conversation with Heinz Ludwig Arnold, he describes the city as something which is gone, and notes that "modern-day Gdańsk bears no relation [to the former], is subject to an entirely different convention" (qtd. in Platen 188). While the experiences of both writers might resemble each other—both belong to a nation that started a war in order to defend or enforce a violent ideology; both these wars were lost and cost the respective parties their homes as they knew them—the dimensions of loss differ. Grass was *materially* dispossessed of his home, as he was unable to return to the actual region until 1958. Faulkner, on the other hand, was born and raised on the very spot whose death he mourns. Although the political circumstances changed, as in the case of Grass's Gdańsk, the Southerners who had lost the war remained on site. Faulkner's spatial loss is thus metaphorical. This metaphor, however, functions as a starting point not only for his writing, but also for the works themselves. As John T. Matthews has pointed out, "[t]he openings of Faulkner's novels frequently demarcate sites of loss. The narratives often need to register an absence in order to get under way" (59).

Despite the differences discussed above, Grass himself has compared himself and his city to Faulkner and his recreation of the US South: "Between the valley of the Vistula and the hills of Kashubia, in the city of Gdańsk and its suburb of Langfuhr, at the beaches of the Baltic Sea [...] is my American South, there I have lost my Dublin, there stretches my Kyr-gyz steppe" (qtd. in Neuhaus 43). Grass writes himself into a literary tradition of writers whose home informed their writing process as Gdańsk has informed his.¹⁰ The significance Grass gives to a place in terms of literary creation distinguishes him from his German contemporaries. As he personally remarked, he "deliberately wrote against the tendency of German post-war literature which considered itself placeless and timeless" (qtd. in Honsza 185).

The characters of the *Danzig Trilogy* come from the lower middle class. As Grass critic Volker Neuhaus makes clear, it was the members of this class who mainly supported National Socialism, although they were not active in politics hitherto. Through his portrayal of them during the period between the First and Second World Wars, Grass was able to depict the rise and establishment of the Nazi regime (Neuhaus 45). Some theories of fascism explain the lower middle class' support by referring to the threat that industrialization and modernization posed for their economic situation during the interwar period.¹¹ According to Neuhaus, Grass refused to accept an economic crisis as well as the sense of being socially downgraded as an excuse for the aggressive behavior of the members of the lower middle class. He refused to depict perpetrators of specific crimes as victims of circumstance. Therefore, *The Tin Drum* does not paint individual characters who have followed the inhuman ideology of the Nazis sympathetically, but rather depicts their actions in a direct, unsanitized way: the baker Alexander Scheffler and the trumpeter Meyn, for example, expels a toy dealer from the graveyard simply because he is Jewish. Such outright depictions of specific characters and concrete situations enabled Grass to reveal a social class which failed politically, because it deemed itself unpolitical (Neuhaus 45ff.).

The attempt to abdicate one's (political) responsibility is a central theme in *The Tin Drum*. In the novel, the protagonist and (partly unreliable) narrator Oskar Matzerath, whose mental development was complete at birth, decides to stop growing on his third birthday so as to avoid becoming a politician or following in his father's footsteps as a grocer. But he is aware of the necessity to provide an explanation for his cessation of growth: "It was clear to me from the beginning: grown-ups won't understand you, they will call you retarded if they can't see you grow, they'll

¹⁰In addition to Faulkner, Grass also refers to James Joyce and the Kyrgyz author Chinghiz Aitmatov in order to emphasize the importance of a certain place for the literary work of a writer, and to position himself in literary history.

¹¹For a detailed analysis of the role of the lower middle class in the rise of National Socialism, see Roger Griffin's chapter on "German Fascism," pp. 85–115.

drag you and their money to scores of doctors in search of an explanation, if not a cure, for your disorder" (*The Tin Drum* 50).¹² Therefore, he flings himself down the basement stairs and pretends to have fallen on his head. In the years to follow, he devotes himself to playing the tin drum he got for his third birthday, which is painted red and white in Poland's national colors. This tin drum turns out to be his main tool in order to remember and recount his past; it also forms the basis for the narrative situation of the novel, which begins with the famous words: "Granted: I'm an inmate in a mental institution" (*TD* 3). By the early 1950s, Oskar is almost thirty years old and narrates his life during the Nazi era and the post-war years in Germany. Thus, the events described in the course of the novel give an account of the successive stages of Hitler's and the NSDAP's (*Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei*)¹³ rise in Germany, like the November Pogroms in 1938, or the beginning of the Second World War with the Defense of the Polish Post Office in Danzig and the Invasion of Poland in 1939. The narrative also illustrates the increasing hostility and violent attacks on Jews during the years before the war. In addition to Meyn expelling the toy dealer Sigismund Markus from the graveyard because he is a Jew (*TD* 152), Meyn also beats four cats to death, but because they are still alive when he puts them in the trash, he comes before the court and is expelled from the "Sturmabteilung" (SA), which accuses him of "inhuman cruelty to animals" (*TD* 185). Meyn's actions are considered too atrocious even for a system which categorized people as *Untermenschen* ("subhumans") in order to legitimize their extinction. The narrator notes that

[e]ven the conspicuous bravery [Meyn] demonstrated during the night of the ninth to the tenth of November thirty-eight, which later came to be known as Kristallnacht, when he joined others in torching the Langfuhr Synagogue on Michaelisweg, and his active participation the following morning in emptying several shops that had been carefully marked in advance, all his zeal could not prevent his expulsion from the Mounted SA. (*TD* 185)

This emphatic passage is sharply ironic, as it reveals the vile ideology of the Nazis when they separated those worthy and those unworthy to live. Hundreds of Jews were murdered, and thousands of Jewish institutions destroyed during the November Pogroms, here referred to as "Kristallnacht." Alluding to the Nazis' rendition of the events, the attacks are depicted as brave actions to which Meyn is said to have made an outstanding contribution. He is given credit for an act of terrorism. On the other hand, his animal torture is condemned strongly and inevitably leads to his expulsion from the SA.

¹²Hereafter cited as *TD*.

¹³"National Socialist German Workers' Party"

In contrast to Meyn, Oskar considers himself isolated from such actions, as his cessation to grow shall keep him away from the adult world. But as the narrative arrangement of the novel illustrates, with its retrospective account of history, the very situations Oskar tried to stay out of turn out to be the most haunting in his later life. For as he looks back, he realizes that he cannot make a difference anymore. He suffers from a guilty conscience, which is narrated by means of temporality.

Temporality, or what Müller calls the “Zeit- und Uhrenmotiv” (196), (“the motifs of time and clocks”), is one of the most central common features of *The Tin Drum* and of Faulkner’s works. It is fair to say that both Quentin in *The Sound and the Fury* and Oskar are obsessed not only with the concept of time, but also with the little instruments which people use to measure it. In fact, both seem to try to escape time by destroying a clock. At the beginning of the second chapter of *The Sound and the Fury*, Quentin breaks the watch his father gave him (938). In *The Tin Drum*, Oskar also destroys a clock in the living room of his parents by means of a scream. The crystal shatters, and his father cries out: “The clock is broken!” (55).

A close reading of the two novels reveals that the characters’ anger is not directed against the respective watch models, but rather against the experience of time which the clocks force upon them. After having destroyed the clock, or, to be precise, only the crystal, Oskar muses about the relation between people and time:

grown-ups have a strange and childish relationship to their clocks, childish in the sense in which I never was a child. Yet the clock may well be the grown-ups’ greatest achievement. Be that as it may: to the extent that grown-ups can be creative [...], they become creatures of their own epoch-making inventions the moment they create them. (TD 55)

The clock may be considered the ultimate triumph of humankind over time, because by dividing time into ever smaller units, it provides people with a structure for their everyday lives. For Oskar, on the other hand, people eventually fall victim to the very tool they have created, as the clock henceforth dictates the rhythm of life. Thus, it is time that triumphs over humanity.

Quentin particularly suffers from this kind of experience, as he is constantly aware of the passage of time: he deduces the time from the position of the shadows on the curtains and finds himself “in time again, hearing the watch” (*The Sound and the Fury* 935).¹⁴ Although his father gave him his grandfather’s watch precisely “not that you may remember time, but that you might forget it now and then for a moment and not spend all your breath trying to conquer it” (*SF* 935), he cannot stop listening to the watch:

¹⁴Hereafter cited as *SF*.

Hearing it, that is. I dont suppose anybody ever deliberately listens to a watch or a clock. You dont have to. You can be oblivious to the sound for a long while, then in a second of ticking it can create in the mind unbroken the long diminishing parade of time you didn't hear. (SF 935)

Here, Quentin tries to put into words how he experiences time: it has *always already* passed when he perceives it, it passes him by before he can relate to it. This is why he is unable to distinguish past from present, like when he gets into a fight with his fellow student Gerald Bland while thinking he is hitting the seducer of his sister Caddy.

Jean-Paul Sartre addresses this perception of time in his famous essay "On *The Sound and the Fury*: Time in the Work of William Faulkner." He notes that "Quentin can say, 'I broke my watch,' but when he says it, his gesture is *past*" (89). The temporalities of Quentin's attempts to verbally express his actions and of those actions themselves are not in harmony: once he is able to put what happens into words, it does not belong anymore to that which Quentin experiences as his present. Sartre uses his trenchant image of someone looking backwards in a car in order to describe this notion of time:

At every moment, one draws a line, since the present is nothing but a chaotic din, a future that is past. Faulkner's vision of the world can be compared to that of a man sitting in an open car and looking backwards. At every moment, formless shadows, flickerings, faint tremblings and patches of light rise up on either side of him, and only afterward, when he has a little perspective, do they become trees and men and cars. (89)

For Sartre, this narrative depiction of time is a distortion. As he comments on how several modern writers like Proust, Joyce, Dos Passos, Gide, and Woolf (91) have dealt with time, he states that like Proust, Faulkner has "simply decapitated" time: "They have deprived it of its future—that is, its dimension of deeds and freedom" (91). This is why, as Sartre further argues, "Faulkner's heroes [...] never look ahead" (91).

This lack of a future, or rather the characters' failure to recognize their future, is the reason that Sartre thinks no reader could relate to them: "You will not recognize within yourself Faulkner's man, a creature bereft of possibilities and explicable only in terms of what he has been" (93). Sartre may be right in the sense that any chance of what might be or of what we might become is already an index of the future which defines who we are—and what we do—in the present. Sartre is also right in quoting Heidegger at the end of his essay, stating that "[t]he loss of all hope [...] does not deprive human reality of its possibilities" (93). But Sartre rather jumps

to the conclusion that Faulkner's characters, Quentin in particular, lack this human reality. Because to me, Faulkner's narrative design of time—Sartre calls it Faulkner's "metaphysics" when he states: "I like his art, but I do not believe in his metaphysics"—is a way of expressing a rather different relation to the past: not an everyday notion of "trees and men and cars" that we pass, but an absorption into an overpowering "past that will not pass." Faulkner's works, set in the postbellum South, are characterized by the traumatic experience of slavery and the loss of the Civil War. This guilt-ridden past has neither been accounted for nor put behind. Faulkner attempts to narratively depict an unresolved past and finds a narrative correlate of dwelling on that past. One manifestation of this experience of time is guilt. Quentin, eventually, "overcomes" time by means of suicide, by not-being. In the light of Heidegger, who links being to an existential guilt, one could argue that Quentin, too, perceives the Southern guilt as existential, which is why he seeks the opposite of being.

Grass's Oskar, on the other hand, is conscious of the predominance of time from the moment he was born: "Let me say at once," he states, "I was one of those clairaudient infants whose mental development is complete at birth and thereafter simply confirmed" (*TD* 35). Thus, he knew already that he wanted to, had to, evade time, and that it would have been better had he not been born in the first place. Whereas Quentin's response to the predominance of time is suicide, Oskar "stops the clock" in another way. On his third birthday, he makes a momentous decision: "There and then I decided, there I declared, there I decreed, that I would never be a politician and most certainly not a grocer, that I would make a point instead of remaining as I was—and so I did, remained that size, kept that attire, for years to come" (*TD* 48). Both Oskar's cessation of growth and Quentin's suicide are attempts to break what Grass has called the "absurd force of chronology" (qtd. in Müller 196) the clock forces upon us, reactions to an inexorably passing time to which their characters cannot or do not want to submit.

But why do both fail to forget time or stop trying to conquer it? Why are they so obsessed with it? In order to approach these questions, it makes sense to consider what Mr Compson tells Quentin: "we must just stay awake and see evil done for a little while" (*SF* 1012). This forcefully illustrates that the burden of temporality does not only consist in its incessancy, but even more so in the things we cannot change once they have happened. Quentin and Oskar do not only suffer from the passing time they cannot control, but from *what happens* and *has happened* while they cannot stop its cycle. Their frustration with time is thus only a symptom of their impotence toward history and its evils.

Oskar is well aware of this fact, which is why he suspends his growth and avoids the adult world and its responsibilities. These responsibilities, however, exceed the duty to follow in the steps of his father, which Oskar dreads. Oskar refuses to grow up at a time when National Social-

ism already looms ahead: when the Nazis disrupted democracy step by step, established a totalitarian system, and propagated ideologies like that of Blood and Soil or of an Aryan *Herrenrasse* (“master race”) in order to oppress or eliminate peoples they regarded as inferior. As Oskar meets his future companion, the so-called ‘midget’ Bebra, the latter predicts:

They’re coming! They will take over the festival grounds. They will stage torchlight parades. They will build grandstands, they will fill grandstands, they will preach our destruction from grandstands. Watch closely, my young friend, what happens on those grandstands. Always try to be sitting on the grandstands, and never standing in front of them. (TD 102)

Like Oskar, Bebra is of small stature. He decided to stop growing on his tenth birthday and works as a musical clown. Bebra’s prophecy not only sketches out a bleak and frightening future of Nazi marches and parades for propaganda purposes, it also alludes to the role of artists in Nazi Germany. According to Neuhaus, Bebra represents a rank of artists who despised Hitler and the so-called Third Reich and considered themselves as inner emigration, but worked as “entertainers” for the system at the same time (62). In the passage quoted above, Bebra advises Oskar not to become a spectator, but to remain onstage instead. In the further course of the novel, however, the reader learns that against his own advice, “Bebra [...] had taken his place among the rank and file, even if he continued to perform in the circus” (TD 158), and that “Master Bebra had found his own master in Goebbels, Minister of Propaganda” (TD 159). Neuhaus argues that there is a connection between the characters of Oskar and Bebra, and that the latter’s failure as an artist reflects Oskar’s own failure. After the war, Oskar works for a concert agency where he capitalizes on and thus betrays his art: “the time had come, by means of my drum, to transmute the pre-war and wartime experience of Oskar, the three-year-old drummer, into the pure, ringing gold of the post-war period” (TD 526). Not until he resides in the mental institution does Oskar attempt to face his past by writing a novel. Neuhaus notes that only by writing this novel, Oskar is finally able to atone for his guilt of haughtily having remained in his ivory tower while he knew about the Nazi crimes all along (62). After all, Oskar himself never offered active resistance.

But how do perpetrators—or their descendants—deal with their guilt-ridden past? How is their guilt narrated? Is it narratable at all? Both Grass’s *The Tin Drum* and Faulkner’s accounts of Quentin reveal similar narrative strategies of approaching this issue. In the South Faulkner portrays, the difficulty to acknowledge the guilt of the past is complicated by the indomitable sense of honor his characters have. In *Absalom, Absalom!*, Faulkner weaves this sense of honor into a veiled *mea culpa*. As he himself has explained, the novel’s “theme is a man who outraged the land, and

the land then turned and destroyed the man's family" (*Selected Letters of William Faulkner* 79). What Faulkner describes here as a principle of cause and effect can, upon closer examination, be considered as a guilt narrative: someone commits a crime ("outraged the land") and is punished ("destroyed the man's family"). This simple sentence also gives some indication of how guilt can be approached narratively: by means of its consequences. And in fact, almost all of Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha novels are set in the postbellum South—that South "dead since 1865" (AA 6). Its deadlock is the devastating effect of the Civil War which the Southerners have, in ideological terms, caused by their insistence on a societal system based on the exploitation of ill-gotten land and enslaved Africans and their descendants. Quentin is a perfect example of the Southern sense of honor. In the Compson Appendix, Faulkner attested him the love of "some concept of Compson honor" (SF 1131), which Quentin saw threatened by his sister's alleged promiscuity. By having this character, who is torn between his reverence and hatred of his home, tell a story of guilt, Faulkner draws attention not only to the narrative sidesteps that are used in order to circumvent an actual confession of guilt, but also to the urge to tell or confess, which comes from a guilty conscience.¹⁵

Sitting together in their Harvard dorm room, his fellow student Shreve McCannon urges Quentin to "*Tell about the South*" (AA 145). In accord with his concept of honor, Quentin could have told a romantic story of the Old South. He does not. He could also have told a story about how his ancestors dispossessed the native inhabitants and enslaved and degraded millions of black people. He does not do that either. Instead, he chooses to tell the story of a person from whom he thinks he can dissociate himself. Because at first sight, Thomas Sutpen is an outsider, someone who is opposed to the Southerners and their presumed aristocratic values. But upon closer examination, it becomes clear that Sutpen embodies a perversion of the Southern value system and that his story is an exact representation of the 'career' of a Southern landowner: Sutpen "*came out of nowhere and without warning upon the land . . . and built a plantation—(Tore violently a plantation, Miss Rosa Coldfield says)—tore violently*" (AA 6).¹⁶ Asked about his home, Quentin chooses to tell a story which, as has

¹⁵In "The Signifying Abstraction," Thadious M. Davis comments on the evasive maneuvers at work when Quentin is faced with uncomfortable truths of his home: "For Quentin and Shreve, it is not slavery alone which accounts for the South's moral deficiency. It is, as well, the white southerner's failure to respond to the black human being; the response instead is to an abstraction—the Negro' myth. [...] Quentin needs the myth of the Negro in order to escape a personal confrontation of complex moral problems, incest and fratricide" (98). Referring to that myth, Quentin dodges the question of his own involvement in the racist structures of his home in the present as well as in the past. Davis further argues that the same avoidance mechanism is mirrored in the very story Quentin narrates: "Sutpen, too, is guilty of a similar evasion of self when he fails to ask where he himself went wrong" (98).

¹⁶For detailed discussions about Sutpen's status as a Southerner, see, for example, Brooks, Kartiganer, and Porter.

been stated above, insinuates the guilt of the past. But apparently, he did so unconsciously, without being aware of the fact that his story could prompt Shreve to assume that Quentin hates the South: "Why do you hate the South?" (AA 311). Maybe he just begins to ask himself whether it is possible that he hates it, and why he hates it. His response, however, is denial: "*I dont hate it* he thought, [...] *I dont. I don't! I dont hate it! I dont hate it!*" (AA 311). Quentin seems horrified by the range of meanings of the story he has just told, and he refuses to face the violent history of his home. In a moment of abstraction, his guilty conscience has forged ahead. Once his attention has been drawn to his conscience, however, he reverts to a state of denial and is unable to acknowledge, let alone directly confess, the guilt of the South. It seems that this guilt demands to be told, creeps into the narratives of those it adheres to, and constantly makes itself heard if in a muted or indirect way.¹⁷ Thus, it works just like the passage of time Quentin is unable to ignore, which dawns on him as soon as he awakes from his sleep.

In *The Tin Drum*, Grass also addresses the intricacy of an admission of guilt. But in contrast to the U.S. South, the post-war Germany Grass portrays seems less obsessed with a sense of honor. In the novel, guilt is therefore much more tangible than in Faulkner's works: firstly, there are scenes in which characters burden themselves with guilt. Secondly, Oskar makes guilt a subject of discussion. However, any actual collective German guilt is also avoided, and Grass brilliantly manages to uncover the attempts of avoidance.

In the chapter "House of Cards," Oskar narrates how he, a German boy, and his Polish uncle and putative father Jan Bronski, seek shelter in a stockroom during the Defense of the Polish Post Office in Danzig in 1939.¹⁸ Eventually, the SS Heimwehr Danzig finds them. As Oskar describes this moment, he draws a distinction between "them" and "us" (TD 228), clearly distancing himself from the Germans invading Poland. He claims to have laughed at the Home Guard, to have been arrested together with Bronski, who waved goodbye to him as they were separated, and who was killed shortly afterwards. Thus, the chapter ends.

¹⁷In *Fictions of Labor*, Richard Godden makes a similar point, arguing that the Sutpen story at the core of *Absalom, Absalom!* contains a "labor trauma" which is concealed in each of the narrative accounts of that story. Godden claims that, with the exception of Shreve, each narrator is implicated in a culture of bound labor which made the Southern accumulation of wealth possible in the first place: "General Compson is a planter (it is he who 'loaned' Sutpen his first seed cotton); his son practices law but does so from a house founded on slave wealth, and it is a portion of these monies, released by the sale of Grandfather Compson's pasture, that sends Quentin to Harvard" (116). Thus, like Sutpen, these characters share the secret of (physically) depending on black laborers, a fact they "can neither ignore nor confess" (136).

¹⁸It is never comprehensively answered whether Oskar's mother's husband, Alfred Matzerath, or her cousin Jan Bronski is Oskar's biological father. Agnes' affair with the latter is an open secret. This ménage à trois is indicative of the political situation of that time, but, as Neuhaus argues, not symbolically, but concretely: Alfred is a German who gets involved in the Nazi party, whereas Jan chooses his Polish identity and works for the Polish post office. Thus, Neuhaus states, Agnes becomes a "Gdańsk citizeness between the German and the Pole" representing "the political tension of a borderland" (65).

The subsequent chapter shows the same situation in an altogether different light. Oskar, while writing his life story, re-reads his account of the Defense of the Polish Post Office, and states: "Even if I'm not satisfied, Oskar's pen has every right to be, for in its succinct summary it has managed, as succinctly summarizing treatises often do, to embellish now and then, if not to lie" (*TD* 229). For the correction of his account, Oskar uses the trenchant expression "stab[bing] Oskar's pen in the back" (*TD* 229). He forsakes the self-protection which his pen, in its function as Oskar's extended arm, provided by telling tall tales, and reports:

no sooner had Jan and I left the mailroom, as ordered by the Home Guard with their 'Rausss!' and their flashlights and carbines, than Oskar, seeking protection, inserted himself between two avuncular and seemingly good-natured members of the Home Guard, put on a show of pathetic weeping, and pointed at Jan, his father, with accusatory gestures, transforming the poor man into a villain who had dragged an innocent child to the Polish Post Office in typically barbaric Polish fashion to use as a human shield. (*TD* 229)

Here, Oskar wants to make the reader believe that he is complicit in the murder of his uncle or father Jan Bronski, and that he confesses it remorsefully. But as Neuhaus reveals, Oskar's confession of guilt concerning Jan Bronski is yet another narrative sidestep. According to Neuhaus, there is no contributory negligence on Oskar's part (85). And in fact, it is hard to believe that Bronski could have been saved if only Oskar had not pointed his finger at him. As Neuhaus argues, Oskar "plays" with imaginary guilt in order to conceal his real guilt (85). He states:

The guilt which drives Oskar into narrating is the guilt of having fled from action as someone who has realized, known and seen through [the Nazis' crimes], it is the guilt of refusing to get involved with a reality which one has recognized as sullied. (85)

This unacknowledgeable guilt resonates in the whole novel. It seems to weigh heavily on Oskar. He muses:

Yet on days when a rude feeling of guilt simply refuses to leave the room and presses me back into the cushions of my hospital bed, I tend, like everyone else, to make allowances for my ignorance, an ignorance that was just then coming into fashion and, like a jaunty hat, still looks oh so good on many a person today. (*TD* 230)

Oskar blames himself and a whole generation of Germans for having failed to act. He also suggests that they try to justify their inaction in hindsight.

From childhood on, he has tried to avoid any responsibility which adults have to accept. There is a tragic irony in the fact that by deliberately turning away, Oskar walks right into the trap all adults walked into in the German post-war era: the false assumption that not-knowing means not being guilty.

But the passage quoted above reveals something else as well: guilt will not vanish, it “refuses to leave the room.” Guilt is a problem of temporality, for it cannot be solved completely once the atrocity has been committed. It can be punished, atoned for or forgiven, but the misdeed as such cannot be undone. There will always remain a stain: once we have burdened ourselves with guilt, we cannot return to a state of innocence. This kind of tie between the past and the present can never be severed, and Faulkner especially seems to have found a literary correlate for this permanent interconnection with what Sartre has called his “metaphysics.” Quentin is well aware of this link between past and present, of the constant repetition of one basic story he considers his heritage. Sutpen’s story “was a part of his twenty years’ heritage of breathing the same air and hearing his father talk about the man; a part of the town’s—Jefferson’s—eighty years’ heritage of the same air which the man himself had breathed between this September afternoon in 1909 and that Sunday morning in June in 1833” (AA 8–9). In the course of *Absalom, Absalom!*, Quentin switches from listening to talking. Having left his home to go to Harvard, the air surrounding him no longer carries the story. But apparently, he has kept it inside himself and gives his own account of it. He is unable to outrun his guilt-ridden past. Like Quentin, Oskar cannot stop talking about his past either. Thus, Grass’s *The Tin Drum* also reveals the nagging presence of guilt as it constantly creeps into the stories of those who have done wrong.

Both Faulkner’s and Grass’s works bring to light two basic principles of guilt: first, that guilt is temporal. And second, that guilt wants to be told. Quentin and Oskar act upon these principles, but their respective narrative accounts of guilt fall short of their ultimate aim. Finally realizing the impact of their inherent guilt, they revert to either denial or evasive maneuvers. They are thrown, in Heidegger’s terms, and indebted to their respective cultures; the guilt of these cultures virtually precedes their own existence. While there is nothing they can do about their thrownness, they are not incapable of action. As Heidegger’s notion of guilt reveals, being “guilty in the ground of [our] being” does not deprive us of options. After all, we *can* choose to have a conscience instead of repressing it. We can confess our ancestor’s crimes, and we can commemorate their victims. If we were to take responsibility in that way, our newly found understanding of what it means to be guilty would perhaps also point the way to an idea of what it actually means to be human.

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