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Religion and Canon Formation  
in 1950s West German  
Writing

Laura Ann Marwood

Thesis submitted for the  
Degree of Master of Arts by Research

Durham University  
School of Modern Languages and Cultures  
Department of German  
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# Religion and Canon Formation in 1950s West German Writing

Laura Marwood, Durham University

## Abstract

The central questions to be explored in this study are religion and canon formation in 1950s West German writing. These discussions are centred on four post-war West German novels: Elisabeth Langgässer's *Märkische Argonautenfahrt* (1950), Heinrich Böll's *Wo warst du, Adam?* (1951), Wolfgang Koeppen's *Der Tod in Rom* (1954) and Günter Grass' *Die Blechtrommel* (1959).

Following the collapse of Nazi Germany in May 1945, the subsequent phase of German political, social and economic strife has come to be known as one of the greatest periods of instability in the nation's history. The collapse of Nazism is sometimes referred to as a *Stunde Null*, for it denotes the point at which the clock of German history was turned back to zero. Drawing on the sense of flux and unpredictability that characterised the early post-war years in Germany, combined with the wave of secularisation that intensified throughout the 1950s, this study will focus on the centrality of these four novels' thematic concern with Catholicism. It will look at the divergent representation of religious themes in post-war fiction and contemplate why some of the selected writers ardently championed a Christian revival in Germany, whilst others assumed a distinctly more sceptical and contemptuous stance. As its second focus, the thesis will consider the process of literary canonisation and will question why some of the works analysed in this study remain commercially and critically successful, whilst others are vastly less read and less celebrated.

This thesis anticipates finding a highly divergent set of reactions to four novels that offer conflicting responses to the socio-political circumstances of the post-war era. By viewing literature as a response to social reality, an analysis of these four West German works whose publication dates encompass a whole decade (1950-1959) provides a privileged perspective by throwing light, obliquely, on the wider social problems of the 1950s.

## Table of Contents

Abstract	i
Table of Contents	ii-iii
Statement of Copyright	iv
Acknowledgements	v
Introduction	1
- Germany at ‘Zero Hour’	1
- <i>Die Schuldfrage</i>	2
- The Guilt Debate within the Catholic Church	5
- Literature at ‘Zero Hour’	9
- A look forward at this work	14
Chapter 1: Elisabeth Langgässer	18
1.1) Struggles as a novelist and poet	18
1.2) Reactions to Langgässer’s fiction	22
1.3) <i>Eine christliche Thematik</i> in 1950’s Germany	26
1.4) <i>Märkische Argonautenfahrt</i>	30
1.5) Conclusion	42
Chapter 2: Heinrich Böll	45
2.1) Heinrich Böll and literary canonisation	45
2.2) Days of Youth	53
2.3) <i>Wo warst du, Adam?</i>	57
2.4) Conclusion	69
Chapter 3: Wolfgang Koeppen	71
3.1) <i>Der Einzelgänger</i>	74
3.2) <i>Die Gruppe 47</i>	77

3.3) Wolfgang Koeppen and Modernism	79
3.4) Contemporary criticism	82
3.5) Church and faith in <i>Der Tod in Rom</i>	85
3.6) Conclusion	98
Chapter 4: Günter Grass	101
4.1) Grass and the public domain	105
4.2) <i>Die Blechtrommel</i>	110
4.3) Germany's culpability	117
4.4) Indictment of the Catholic Church	120
4.5) Conclusion	122
Conclusion	125
Bibliography	135

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## INTRODUCTION

This study explores the questions of religion and canon formation in 1950s West German writing by critically examining the fiction of the four post-war West German writers Elisabeth Langgässer (1890-1950), Heinrich Böll (1917-1985), Wolfgang Koeppen (1906-1997) and Günter Grass (1927-). Acknowledging the wave of secularisation that swept across Germany in the aftermath of the Second World War, this thesis will look at the divergent representation of Catholic themes in post-war fiction and contemplate why some of the selected writers became staunch advocates of a Christian revival in Germany, whilst others assumed a distinctly more distrustful and cynical stance. As its second focus, this study will explore the canonisation of each of the four novels, and will question why some works have remained celebrated whilst others have faded into obscurity, paying particular attention to aesthetics, narrative themes, linguistic expression and the representation of faith in this regard. Ultimately, this dissertation addresses the relationship between literature and society. By viewing culture as a response to social reality, the public reactions surrounding the four literary responses to socio-political circumstances examined in this thesis sheds new light on wider social problems of post-war Germany.

### Germany at 'Zero Hour'

In May 1945 Germany witnessed a cessation of attacks that had brought desolation and ruin to the country for six long years. Inevitably, there was widespread relief that the guns fell silent.<sup>1</sup> As the Germans looked bleary-eyed across their war-torn landscape, they were consoled by the long awaited stillness, a bolstering indicator that marked an end to the atrocities and brutalities carried out during the Third Reich. Yet they were perturbed by the state of flux post-war Germany had found itself in. Aside from the fact that many citizens had come to feel profoundly estranged from the standards of civic life as a result of the lasting collective experience of the front line, air raids, concentration camps, famine,

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<sup>1</sup>Norman Davies, *Europe at War: 1939-1945: No Simple Victory* (London: Macmillan, 2006), p. 193.



homelessness, and the on-going battle for survival, their homeland now lay prostrate before British, American, French, and Soviet occupation regimes.<sup>2</sup> This quadripartite military operation called for Germany's demilitarisation, as was stipulated in the Potsdam Agreement (July 17-August 2 1945), as well as a rigorous break-up of the former German bureaucratic system and its replacement with an 'Anglo-Saxon model of Civil Service Commission'.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, heavy industry was requisitioned in the East, and in the West it became a matter of co-determination by all workers. This move saw many of Germany's old elite stripped of the roles and privileges they had previously enjoyed. Radical changes such as these, combined with Germany's being forced to relinquish governance over its own soil and people to occupying troops, resulted in a situation of profound instability in Germany.<sup>4</sup> As millions of displaced individuals foraged for food and performed menial tasks in the hope of small monetary return, the political, social and economic situation in Germany seemed, possibly for the first time in history, utterly unforeseeable. It is for this reason that the year 1945 is sometimes referred to as a 'Zero Hour' or a *Stunde Null* of European history, for it denoted 'the point at which the clock of Germany history was turned back to zero, the point at which the past ended and an uncertain future began'.<sup>5</sup>

### Die Schuldfrage

One factor that was very much contributory to this widespread sense of foreboding was the 'question of German guilt'.<sup>6</sup> Although many Germans were consumed by their own post-war despair and their desperation to re-establish structure and stability, the issue of individual accountability remained inescapable.<sup>7</sup> It was propelled into public consciousness soon after the collapse

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<sup>2</sup>Jürgen Weber, *Eine Kleine Geschichte Deutschlands seit 1945* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2002), p. 4.

<sup>3</sup>Rebecca Boehling, *A Question of Priorities: Democratic Reforms and Economic Recovery in Postwar Germany* (Providence, RI: Berghahn, 1996), p. 252.

<sup>4</sup>Deborah Dwork, *Voices and Views: A History of the Holocaust* (New York: The Jewish Foundation for the Righteous, 2002), p. 50.

<sup>5</sup>Gareth Pritchard, *The Making of the GDR: 1945-53* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), p. 7.

<sup>6</sup>Karl Jaspers, *The Question of German Guilt*, trans. Ernst Basch Ashton (New York: Dial, 1947).

<sup>7</sup>Stephen Brockmann, *Literature and German Reunification* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 85.

of the Nazi regime by philosophy professor at the University of Heidelberg, Karl Jaspers, who boldly broached the controversial matter in a series of lectures that quickly commanded wide public attention. The purpose of these talks, which were held in the Winter semester of 1945/46, was to warn against ‘evasive apologies and wholesale condemnations’ and to instil the need for a careful assessment of one’s accountability,<sup>8</sup> a process that Jaspers explained in a contentious fourfold schema that differentiated between criminal guilt, political guilt, moral guilt and metaphysical guilt.<sup>9</sup> Yet despite Jaspers’ advocating society’s need to seek truth in full knowledge, widespread denial prevailed. ‘Man darf annehmen’, predicted Theodor Haecker in 1939, in the journal he kept during the Nazi years, ‘dass die Deutschen, bewusst und unbewusst, alles tun werden, um ungefähr alles, was heute gesprochen, geschrieben und getan wird, so rasch wie möglich zu vergessen. Erinnerungen an eine Schuld sind lästig’.<sup>10</sup> Haecker’s predictions turned out to be remarkably accurate. From a judicial perspective, denial and rationalisation were synonymous with many witness statements put forward by defendants at the 1945-46 Nuremberg War Crime trials, many of whom averred passivity and maintained ‘Befehl ist Befehl’ and that they were ‘only following orders’,<sup>11</sup> a defence which, according to Jaspers’ schema, did not entitle Nazi sympathisers to absolution from their feelings of personal responsibility. On a political and civic level, opportunities to publicly express a consciousness of guilt also seemed to pass by, such as the adoption of the *Grundgesetz für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland* in May 1949, and the constituent sessions of the state parliaments and the *Bundestag* between 1946 and 1949. Speaking at the adoption of the *Grundgesetz*, former Minister-President of North Rhine-Westphalia Karl Arnold declared: ‘*Wir beginnen mit dieser Arbeit in der Absicht und mit dem festen Willen, einen Bau zu errichten, der am Ende ein gutes Haus für alle Deutschen werden soll*’.<sup>12</sup> Evidently, these occasions saw politicians and citizens optimistically looking towards the future of their nation,

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<sup>8</sup> Joseph. W. Koterski, Introduction, Karl Jaspers, *The Question of German Guilt*, trans. Ernst Basch Ashton (New York: Dial, 1947), p. ix-x.

<sup>9</sup> Jaspers, *Question*, pp. 25-40.

<sup>10</sup> Theodor Haecker, *Tag- und Nachtbücher* (Munich: Kösel, 1959), p. 24.

<sup>11</sup> Telford Taylor, *The Anatomy of the Nuremberg Trials: A Personal Memoir* (New York: Knopf, 1992), p. 248.

<sup>12</sup> Michael Feldkamp, *Die Entstehung des Grundgesetzes für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1949: eine Dokumentation* (Stuttgart: P. Reclam, 1999), p. 72.

and sought to encourage physical and emotional renewal within German society. Yet despite the political and civic significance of these sessions, the question of guilt remained firmly off the agenda. Additional declarations, most notably those from Federal Chancellor Konrad Adenauer, deflected the severity of the *Schuldfrage*, for whilst he acknowledged the need for ‘Gewissenforschung’ to be undertaken by individual members of German society, and noted the immorality of pointing the finger solely at ‘die Bonzen, die hohen Militärs [und] die Großindustriellen’ for the barbaric crimes committed, Adenauer seemingly overestimated the ease with which a tragedy of this magnitude could be dealt with.<sup>13</sup>

In the context of the 1952 *Wiedergutmachungsabkommen* legislation, for instance, Adenauer referred to Germany’s moral failing, but he also bypassed the need to comprehensively address the question of guilt by assuring that an adequate resolution to the reparations question would enable all countries concerned to better overcome their individual suffering:

Die Bundesregierung ist bereit, gemeinsam mit Vertretern des Judentums und des Staates Israel, der so viele heimatlose jüdische Flüchtlinge aufgenommen hat, eine Lösung des materiellen Wiedergutmachungsproblems herbeizuführen, um damit den Weg zur seelischen Bereinigung unendlichen Leides zu erleichtern.<sup>14</sup>

The citation above reveals a somewhat superficial response to a highly problematic and emotionally complex matter. Evidently, Adenauer and politicians alike deemed it important to express their disgust at the Nazi atrocities, yet their expressions of abhorrence only served to avert the issue of finding an adequate solution. Ultimately, the collective failure of Adenauer, opposition leader Kurt Schumacher and the Bundestag to directly address the question of moral guilt by generating public discussions on questions such as ‘why did we conform and not resist?’ and their incapacity to recognise the complexity of the guilt problem after presenting initiatives like the

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<sup>13</sup> Konrad Adenauer, ‘Grundsatzrede des 1. Vorsitzenden der Christlich-Demokratischen Union für die Britische Zone in der Aula der Kölner Universität’, in *Reden 1917-1967: Eine Auswahl*, ed. by Hans-Peter Schwarz (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1975), pp. 84-87 (p. 84).

<sup>14</sup> Cited from a speech given by Konrad Adenauer at the German Bundestag, September 27. 1951.

*Wiedergutmachungsabkommen* as effective ways to deal with the trauma of the Second World War, were to have grave consequences. Germany's attempt to grapple with the *Schuldfrage* was visibly tentative, and this sense of trepidation and uncertainty rendered it an increasingly taboo topic in German society, a development that resulted in the memories of the previous six years being heavily repressed, and questions of personal guilt, lack of courage, individual accountability and personal resistance being discussed predominantly in 'single families, in small private circles, and among the intellectual, religious, and nonpartisan political elites'.<sup>15</sup>

### The Guilt Debate within the Catholic Church

The question of culpability gives rise to a subject that for many years has been obscured by what may justifiably be called an 'extensive mythology',<sup>16</sup> namely, the nature of the relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and the National Socialist state during the Third Reich. Here, too, the Holocaust represents a period in history that, for several decades, remained difficult for Germans to confront.<sup>17</sup> The question of accountability was particularly acute for Christians who, throughout the post-war years, both within and outside of Germany, could not deny the two thousand years of Christian antagonism towards Judaism.<sup>18</sup> Germany has often held the reputation of being a distinctly Christian nation having fostered the rise of Martin Luther and Protestantism in the early sixteenth century, as well as having acted as home to some of the most notable and distinguished Christian theologians of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>19</sup> This piety also saw the religious allegiance of 98% of

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<sup>15</sup>Neil J. Kritz, *Transitional Justice: How emerging Democracies reckon with former Regimes* (Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace, 1995), p. 65.

<sup>16</sup> Here Lewy refers to how the suppression of traumatic memories commonly results in the emergence of legends. Cf. Guenter Lewy, *The Catholic Church and Nazi Germany* (South Boston, MA: Da Capo, 2000), p. xi.

<sup>17</sup>Martyn Housden, *The Holocaust: Events, Motives and Legacy* (Humanities-Ebooks, 2007), p. 83.

<sup>18</sup>Dana Evan Kaplan, *Contemporary American Judaism: Transformation and Renewal* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), p. 16.

<sup>19</sup>John S. Conway, 'Totalitarianism and Theology', in *Christian Responses to the Holocaust: Moral and Ethical Issues*, ed. by Donald J. Dietrich (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2003), pp. 1-11 (p. 1).

Germans to Catholic and Protestant churches throughout the Hitler years.<sup>20</sup> Yet it was evidently their self-image as epitomes of virtue and righteousness that Christians across Europe struggled to uphold in the aftermath of the Second World War, as increasing numbers of writers and scholars began to condemn the Catholic Church for its alleged enthusiasm towards Nazi ideology. Such accusations formed the basis of Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde's 1961 article 'Der deutsche Katholizismus im Jahre 1933: Eine kritische Betrachtung', which controversially disputed Bishop Johannes Neuhäusler's 1946 publication by rebuffing his assertion that Catholics had been victims of Nazi tyranny, and instead affirmed the complicity of the Catholic Church in the rise of Nazism.<sup>21</sup> This theory was explored two years later by German author and playwright Rolf Hochhuth in *Der Stellvertreter*, a play that rebuked Pope Pius XII's failure to denounce Nazi atrocities towards the Jews.<sup>22</sup> The play was first performed in Germany in 1963 and was swiftly translated into several European languages. It is also regarded as a 'cornerstone in the historical evaluation of Pius XII',<sup>23</sup> for its success blackened the Pope's reputation and has since impacted on the way the Papacy is remembered and talked about.<sup>24</sup> Most significantly, the play enabled readers to identify with the victims of the Holocaust and 'opened up key moral and political questions about actions and non-actions of people in the Third Reich'.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, what is particularly pertinent about this latter observation is how it presents literary culture as a response to social reality, for here we see a novel eliciting emotional responses to socio-political circumstances. This notion will be returned to shortly.

The relationship of the Catholic Church and the Hitler regime represents a topic of on-going controversy in modern European history, for it left the institution

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<sup>20</sup> Robert Ericksen, *Christian Complicity? Changing Views on German Churches and the Holocaust* (Washington DC: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2009), pp. 6-7.

<sup>21</sup> Wolfgang Böckenförde, 'Der deutsche Katholizismus im Jahre 1933: eine kritische Betrachtung', *Hochland*, January 1960, pp. 215-239.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Rolf Hochhuth, *Der Stellvertreter* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2005)

<sup>23</sup> Emiliano Perra, *Conflicts of Memory: The Reception of Holocaust Films and TV Programmes in Italy: 1945 to the Present* (Bern: Lang, 2010), p. 192.

<sup>24</sup> Agostino Giovagnoli, *Pio XII e la Shoah dalle polemiche alla storia* (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 2003), p. 10.

<sup>25</sup> Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986), p. 107.

with a tarnished reputation in the post-war years. Pius XII was forced to confront an unprecedentedly difficult set of circumstances during his pontificate, yet an overriding view shared by historians, most prominently Michael Phayer, is that defying genocide was not among the Pope's main concerns during the early 1940s. Phayer argues that Pius XII was far more preoccupied with his 'alternative goals', namely protecting Europe from Communism, avoiding confrontation with Nazi Germany, and safeguarding Rome and the Vatican from attack.<sup>26</sup> Phayer thus fundamentally criticises the Pope's ulterior motives, which resulted in half-hearted attempts to stand in the way of Nazi policy. Alternatively some scholars, such as John Cornwell, do not place emphasis on the Pope's intention of preserving the Church as an institution, but rather attribute the Vatican's inactivity to both his anti-Semitism and his desire to centralise Papal power.<sup>27</sup> Other scholars, such as John Weiss, blame Pius XII's unwillingness to intervene on his deep-rooted conservatism and 'pro-Nazi' attitude.<sup>28</sup>

Whatever view is held in light of the divergent hypotheses surrounding the Catholic Church's alleged silence, the overarching conclusion to be reached is that this Papal controversy initiated a decades-long 'loss of faith that plagued German society'.<sup>29</sup> The Second World War and the poverty, famine and widespread sense of foreboding that ensued had reduced to rubble not only homes and businesses, but also belief in any form of meaning or conviction stemming from 'the church's loss of influence and credibility'.<sup>30</sup> The war had distorted society's conception of morality, integrity, priority and loyalty, and required people to painfully reflect on their actions before being able to re-adapt to the estranged standards of former civic life. From one perspective, having learnt of the barbaric acts that had taken place in Hitler's death camps, it became

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<sup>26</sup> Michael Phayer, 'The Priority of Diplomacy: Pius XII and the Holocaust during the Second World War', in *Christian Responses to the Holocaust: Moral and Ethical Issues*, ed. by Donald J. Dietrich (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2003), pp. 87-98 (p. 87).

<sup>27</sup> Cf. John Cornwell, *Hitler's Pope: The Secret History of Pius XII* (New York: Penguin, 2000)

<sup>28</sup> John Weiss, *Ideology of Death: Why the Holocaust Happened in Germany* (Chicago: Dee, 1996), p. 354.

<sup>29</sup> Amy Marga, *Karl Barth's Dialogue with Catholicism in Göttingen and Münster* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), p. 59.

<sup>30</sup> Benjamin Carl Pearson, *Faith and Democracy: Political Transformations at the German Protestant Kirchentag: 1949-1969* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of North Carolina, 2007), p. 84.

increasingly difficult for Germans to continue putting their faith in a God that had allowed so much suffering to take place. For many people, the Holocaust had rendered ‘any belief about direct divine intervention in history obsolete’,<sup>31</sup> and resulted in re-evaluation of God’s omnipotent capacity. From another perspective, it was deeply afflicting for many German Catholics who had been lifelong devout Christians to discover that Pope Pius XII, the very embodiment of the Lord’s reign on earth that exercises the power of the Lord Himself, had not actively attempted to intervene in the Nazi massacres in the name of human suffering. As the chosen epitome of virtue, compassion and concern for all of God’s creatures, the Pope’s silence left humble Catholics perplexed and confounded by his neglecting the needs of the Jews.<sup>32</sup> Additionally, the church’s behaviour demeaned and belittled the everyday devotion and commitment of Christians worldwide in the way it had ‘betrayed the ideals it had set for itself’.<sup>33</sup>

The historical context outlined above thus serves to expose the period of deep instability in Germany in 1945, not just economically and politically, but religiously and psychologically. The ‘unremitting crises that plagued post-war Germany were habitually transformed nostalgically into crises of morality’, and with the Catholic Church needing to reconcile itself with its wartime silence, a miasma of nihilism, apathy, and negativity began to emerge in Germany society.<sup>34</sup> The questions that citizens wanted answering were: Where is God? Why was he silent? Does faith have any validity after the Holocaust?<sup>35</sup> This was the moral vacuum that Nazism had left in its wake, and left millions of German citizens confounded by the thought of Germany ever regaining structure and stability.

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<sup>31</sup>John. T. Pawlikowski, ‘Liturgy and the Holocaust: How do we Worship in an Age of Genocide?’, in *Christian Responses to the Holocaust: Moral and Ethical Issues*, ed. by Donald. J. Dietrich (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2003), pp. 168-176 (p. 171).

<sup>32</sup> Sergio I. Minerbi, ‘Pius XII: A Reappraisal’, in *Pope Pius XII and the Holocaust*, ed. by John Roth and Carol Rittner (New York: University of Leicester, 2001), pp. 85-104 (p.101).

<sup>33</sup> John F. Morley, *Vatican Diplomacy and the Jews during the Holocaust* (New York: Ktav, 1980), p. 209.

<sup>34</sup>Kate Lacey, *Feminine Frequencies: Gender, German Radio, and the Public Sphere: 1923-1945* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1996), p. 17.

<sup>35</sup> Arlen Fowler, *Facing Auschwitz: A Christian Imperative* (Lincoln, NE: iUniverse, 2003), p. 38.

## Literature at ‘Zero Hour’

The task of the German wartime generation breaking its silence and recalling the nightmares from which it had awoken was something to which politicians, as we have seen, were averse. This was a mission undertaken predominantly by writers and thinkers, who assumed responsibility for inciting personal self-reflection by amalgamating private consciousness with the trauma and devastation that Germany had both inflicted and experienced. Their efforts reflected a desire for moral change, radical regeneration and a clean break from the ‘moralische, geistige und sittliche Trümmerhaufen, den ihr (der jungen Generation) eine wahrhaft verlorene Generation zurückgelassen hat’.<sup>36</sup> These writers readily acknowledged that any attempt to resume from the point in 1933 where Germany had fallen victim to National Socialism would require a spiritual and cultural rebirth by beginning all over again. In the eyes of many post-war writers such as Wolfgang Borchert, Hermann Lenz and Heinrich Böll,<sup>37</sup> a *Wiedergeburt* posed an invaluable opportunity for Germany to emotionally heal and to develop into a land of freedom, self-determination, culture, truth and reconciliation.

The fall of the Third Reich and the death of Hitler in April 1945 thus constituted an unparalleled opportunity for novelists and poets to stake a ‘new literary and cultural claim’ in West Germany.<sup>38</sup> Whilst the question of a literary *Stunde Null* in 1945 remains a contentious topic, evident in the wealth of scholarly disagreement surrounding the alleged existence of a break in literary continuity,<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>Walter Jens, *Deutsche Literatur der Gegenwart: Themen, Stile, Tendenzen*(Munich: Piper 1961), p. 51.

<sup>37</sup>Ingo Roland Stoehr, *German Literature of the Twentieth Century: From Aestheticism to Postmodernism*(Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2001), p. 251.

<sup>38</sup>Stephen Brockmann, ‘German Culture at “Zero Hour”’, in *Revisiting Zero Hour 1945: The Emergence of Postwar German Culture*, ed. by Stephen Brockmann and Frank Trommler (Washington DC: American Institute for Contemporary German Studies, 1996), pp. 8-40 (p. 13).

<sup>39</sup>The assertion that the period 1930 to 1960 marks a period of literary continuity and therefore not a literary Zero Hour is supported by Frank Trommler, cf. “‘Der Nullpunkt 1945’ und seine Verbindlichkeit für die Literaturgeschichte’, in *Basis: Jahrbuch für deutsche Gegenwartsliteratur*, ed. by Reinhold Grimm and Jost Hermand (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1970), pp. 9-25., Heinrich Vormweg, ‘Deutsche Literatur 1945-1960: keine Stunde Null’, in *Deutsche Gegenwartsliteratur: Ausgangspositionen und aktuelle Entwicklungen*, ed. by Manfred Durzak (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1981), pp. 14-3., Franz Schonauer, ‘Die Prosaliteratur der Bundesrepublik’, in *Literatur nach 1945: politische und regionale Aspekte*, ed. by Jost Hermand (Wiesbaden: Akademische Verlagsgesellschaft, 1979), pp. 195-272., and Stephen Parker, *The Modern*



one continues to find various assertions by members of Germany's post-war generation condemning the moral bankruptcy of the older generation and indeed the whole German cultural tradition. 'Unser Hass, der Hass der jungen Generation, besitzt die Rechtfertigung der unbedingten Notwendigkeit. Er gehört zu unserer geschichtlichen Aufgabe wie die Liebe, die Liebe zu unserem Land und zu unserer Nation',<sup>40</sup> wrote Alfred Andersch during the Nuremberg Trials in August 1946. Also speaking on behalf of a 'victimised' younger generation, Hans Werner Richter expressed the belief that the former image of human existence could not be simply rebuilt following the atrocities committed by the older generation, and that it was necessary 'eine geistige Wiedergeburt in dem absoluten und radikalen Beginn von vorn zu liegen'.<sup>41</sup> Richter also reproached the literary and cultural tradition of the wartime generation, predominantly those who had removed themselves by going into foreign exile or assuming a state of 'innere Emigration',<sup>42</sup> for 'wrapping themselves in a cloud of penitential incense and for their self-satisfied professorial attitude', which simultaneously disavowed the potential for the younger generation to demonstrate their moral and spiritual capacity.<sup>43</sup>

Claims such as these two have come to be seen as part of a radical development in West German literature associated with the first generation of *Gruppe 47* writers that centred around the figure of the association's founder and *éminence grise* Hans Werner Richter. Richter, born in November 1908, was a man of single-minded political idealism, who possessed a fixed social vision and a loyalty to basic German interests. He was recruited into the German infantry at the start of the war and after surrendering to American forces in Monte Cassino, was sent to a prisoner of war camp in the United States where he began to

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*Restoration: Re-thinking German Literary History: 1930-1960* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004), pp. 126-185., amongst others.

<sup>40</sup> Alfred Andersch, 'Notwendige Aussage zum Nürnberger Prozeß', *Der Ruf*, August 1. 1946, pp. 12-15.

<sup>41</sup>Hans Werner Richter, 'Warum schweigt die junge Generation?', *Der Ruf*, September 1. 1946, 46-47.

<sup>42</sup> The phase 'innere Emigration' was first coined by Frank Thiess in November 1933 and refers to those writers that decided to remain in Germany during the war and publish, predominantly out of devotion to their country and reading public.

<sup>43</sup>Siegfried Mandel, *Group 47: The Reflected Intellect* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1973), p. 32.

concern himself seriously with political matters.<sup>44</sup> As the defeat of Germany became increasingly imminent, Richter, together with fellow prisoners Alfred Andersch (b. 1914) and Walter Kolbenhoff (b. 1908), steadily gained impetus to write about the political and military situation in Europe. After teaming up with former newspaper correspondent Gustav René Hocke, the first publication of *Der Ruf* was issued. The newspaper circulated among some 400,000 German POWs in American camps before the collapse of the Third Reich.<sup>45</sup> The project was pursued in the war's aftermath in Munich, and resonated to a remarkable degree among subscribers in all four occupied zones.

The dual objective of *Der Ruf*, which soon acquired the subtitle *Unabhängige Blätter für die junge Generation*, was to 'become the voice of the silent generation, the young homecoming soldiers, and to influence the political direction of Germany'.<sup>46</sup> Richter intended for *Der Ruf* to promote a social-humanistic foundation from which German political life would improve and develop. After having witnessed the crises and political consequences of capitalism following two imperialistic wars and intermittent economic crises, Richter was steadfast in the belief that Germany was ready for socialism, and that his radical political periodical could facilitate this progressive development by inciting the need for Germany's freedom of political and social choice. *Der Ruf* was, however, not exclusively politically oriented, for it also contained general sections on culture, fiction and poetry, as well as journalistic reports whose purpose was to assess the current state of German life. By and large, most of these published pieces revealed a similar socio-political tone in the way they depicted society's dispiritedness and the difficulties in dealing with both the past and present. This approach to dealing with history was, however, bothersome for Hocke. Concerned by the failure to adhere to the group's founding principle of a 'geistige Wiedergeburt', evident in the way writers and readers alike were still profoundly influenced by the same Nazi terminology and ideological messages

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<sup>44</sup>Hans Presche, *Künste im Aufbruch: München in den 50er Jahren* (Munich: Allitera, 2006), pp. 15-16.

<sup>45</sup>William Grange, *Historical Dictionary of Post-War German Literature* (Maryland: Scarecrow, 2009), p. 108.

<sup>46</sup>Mandel, *Group 47*, p. 3.

that had characterised the past thirteen years, Hocke called for the rejection of aestheticised language and specifically the mode of expression which had been tainted by the pathos of National Socialism.<sup>47</sup>

The outcome of Hocke's theorising, which he outlined in the article 'Deutsche Kalligraphie oder: Glanz und Elend der modernen Literatur',<sup>48</sup> called for 'a new sensitivity to style and clarity of expression',<sup>49</sup> a lucid and matter-of-fact style like that of Ernest Hemingway or Thornton Wilder that plainly recounted the horrors Germany experienced during the war: hunger, resentment, the lamenting of dead comrades, war as a gruesome lottery, the futility of the soldiers' strife. One of the German poets to best encapsulate the *Kahlschlag* style is Günter Eich (b. 1907),<sup>50</sup> who took a radical departure from his early *Naturlyrik* in favour of simplicity of expression. His poem 'Inventur' (1947) remains an epitome of this lucid linguistic style:<sup>51</sup>

Dies ist meine Mütze,  
dies ist mein Mantel,  
hier mein Rasierzeug  
im Beutel aus Leinen [...]

What the poem describes is an inventory of a soldier's possessions, and reveals linguistic plainness embodied in a paratactic style and extreme simplicity of sentence structure. This mode of simple expression is similarly evident in other poems published in the same year, such as Heinrich Sponsel's 'Heimweh', Hans Werner Richter's 'Der tote Mann', and Wolfdietrich Schnurre's 'An die Harfner'.<sup>52</sup> The *Gruppe 47*'s simplicity of style was, however, met with some

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid., pp. 12-13.

<sup>48</sup>Gustav René Hocke, 'Deutsche Kalligraphie oder: Glanz und Elend der modernen Literatur', *Der Ruf*, November 7. 1946, pp. 3-7.

<sup>49</sup> Mandel, *Group 47*, p.12.

<sup>50</sup>'Kahlschlag' or 'Kahlschlagliteratur' were terms first coined by Wolfgang Weyrauch in 1949 in an essay introducing his volume of short stories *Tausend Gramm*. It is a term commonly used in forestry, and in a literary context refers to post-war German writers' felling and eradicating of Nazi language and terminology.

<sup>51</sup>Cf. Gerhard Kaiser, 'Günter Eich: Inventur. Poetologie am Nullpunkt', in *Poetologische Lyrik von Klopstock bis Grünbein: Gedichte und Interpretationen*, ed. by Olaf Hildebrand (Cologne: Böhlau, 2003) pp. 268-85 (p. 270).

<sup>52</sup>Cf. Heinrich Sponsel, 'Heimweh', in *Deine Söhne, Europa: Gedichte Deutscher Kriegsgefangener*, ed. by Hans Werner Richter (Munich: Nymphenburger, 1974), p. 94., Hans

degree of scepticism in the 1950s, for many publications of this matter-of-fact nature gained a reputation for communicating ‘unrestrained elegiac self-pity’ in the way the poets appeared preoccupied with their own unique experiences of suffering.<sup>53</sup> This resulted in many readers’ failing to identify with such paradoxical lyrical accounts that, on the one hand, offered extensive personal insight, and yet at the same time, seemed emotionally withdrawn and reductive.<sup>54</sup>

The founding members of the *Gruppe 47* continue to be celebrated for their development of *Kahlschlagliteratur*, teamed with their steadfast belief in the spiritual, moral and literary capacity of Germany’s young generation to overcome its traumatic past. Yet whilst this constituted an irrefutably influential step in the group’s achieving international recognition, it is also important to acknowledge the changing nature of the *Gruppe 47* throughout its twenty-year lifespan (the group disbanded in 1967), and the variety of styles and influences that characterised the fiction and poetry of later members, such as Hermann Kasack (1896-1966), Elisabeth Langgässer (1899-1950), Arno Schmidt (1914-1979), Ingeborg Bachmann (1926-1973), and Günter Grass (b. 1927). Kasack’s *Die Stadt hinter dem Strom* (1947), for example, portrays post-war Germany as a fantasy world, in which Kasack develops an existential vision of the pantheistic relationship between life and death.<sup>55</sup> Schmidt’s fiction, on the other hand, reveals modernist and anti-religious sensibilities, seen in *Leviathan* (1949) where Schmidt depicts the suffering of mankind as the plaything of a malevolent God.<sup>56</sup> Grass’s *Die Blechtrommel* (1959) incorporates absurd and ‘carnavalesque’ images to satirically confront the question of German guilt and the silence of the Catholic Church.<sup>57</sup> All of these writers and their works have come to characterise the extensive scope of literary expression nurtured by the *Gruppe 47*, and reveal how the group’s initial literary

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Werner Richter, ‘Der tote Mann’, in *Deine Söhne*, p. 69., Wolfdietrich Schnurre, ‘An die Harfner’, *Ulenspiegel*, October 1948, pp. 4-5.

<sup>53</sup>Mandel, *Group 47*, p. 13.

<sup>54</sup> Annette Runte, ‘Mourning as Remembrance: Writing as Figuration and De-figuration in the Poetry of Rose Ausländer’, in *German and European Poetics After the Holocaust: Crisis and Creativity*, ed. by Gert Hofmann, Marko Pajevic, Rachel MagShamhráin and Michael Shields (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2011), pp. 69-87 (p. 73).

<sup>55</sup> Hermann Kasack, *Die Stadt hinter dem Strom* (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1947)

<sup>56</sup> Arno Schmidt, *Leviathan* (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1985)

<sup>57</sup>Günter Grass, *Die Blechtrommel* (Göttingen: Steidl, 1993)

aims shifted considerably from the emulation of Hemingway and the adoption of a straightforward, lucid language.<sup>58</sup>

### A look forward at this work

In light of the multifaceted nature of West Germany's post-war instability, the aim of this study is thus to explore the questions of religion and canon formation by critically investigating the fiction of four post-war West German writers. Drawing on the on-going scholarly debate surrounding the Catholic Church's alleged silence throughout the Holocaust, this thesis will firstly address the representation of Catholic themes in post-war fiction. This will specifically involve an exploration of how the spiritual dimension is represented by each writer, either as a comforting means for readers of the post-war generation to rediscover trust and love in mankind after a temporary deviation from God's righteous path, or as a cynical and indicting commentary on the hypocrisy of Catholic doctrine. Additionally, the study will investigate how writers used Christian ideas and precepts to reflect on the crimes of the Nazi era and configure their ethical stance, advocating moral engagement and moral renewal.

Without forgetting that this is a literary study of the 1950s, as opposed to a historical or sociological one, my thesis will draw on socio-historical factors to present culture as a mediated response to social reality. Considering how many post-war citizens became labelled as self-pitying and delinquent nihilists in the aftermath of the Second World War, an investigation into the post-war attitude towards faith and spirituality, elements that have served as sturdy cornerstones in German society since the late fifteenth century, will be able to offer substantial insight into the overall impact of the Third Reich on German society and the direction Germany subsequently took, namely a shift towards increasingly capitalist agendas and economic expansion, as was seen during the course of the 1950s. In this regard, my findings on the treatment of Catholic themes will also

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<sup>58</sup>William Grange, *Historical*, p. 109.

seek to throw light, obliquely, on the wider social problems of the 1950s, demonstrating a relationship between literature and society.

In conjunction with this religious emphasis, my study will take as its second focus the question of literary canonisation, specifically how contemporary readers responded to the selected writers and their works, and how this has impacted on the writers' literary reputation in more recent decades. By exploring the canonical status of each of the novels in question, the thesis will analyse the extent to which the writers' contemporary reputations were dictated by their treatment of religious matters, and whether the reputation they established in the 1950s echoes or opposes their literary status in the present day. Studying the contemporary reactions with which each of the four novels were met in the post-war years will accentuate more acutely the fundamental changes brought about by the devastation inflicted by the Nazi regime in the way writers that projected intensely Catholic world views witnessed a decline in interest throughout the 1950s. This will similarly reassert the argument that post-war literature is capable of offering extensive insight into the state of West German society, not in the way it mirrors it, but more in the way it responds to social change. Thus by contemplating the reception and literary canonisation of four novels whose publication dates encompass the whole first post-war decade (i.e. 1950-1959), this literary study will demonstrate the capacity of literature as an artistic medium to comment on the wider socio-political problems of a nation.

The writers and works that have been selected for this study are *Märkische Argonautenfahrt* (1950) by Elisabeth Langgässer, *Wo warst du Adam?* (1951) by Heinrich Böll, *Der Tod in Rom* (1954) by Wolfgang Koeppen, and *Die Blechtrommel* (1959) by Günter Grass. The justification for this selection is four-fold. Firstly and most crucially, each of the novels in question engages in some way with the question of religious spirituality in the aftermath of war. Secondly, the novels selected for study are those that I deem to be the most significant works by each author.<sup>59</sup> By investigating their most celebrated works, I hope to

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<sup>59</sup>Heinrich Böll's *Wo warst du, Adam?* is an exception here. Although Böll's most renowned works include *Und sagte kein einziges Wort* (1953), *Billard um halb zehn* (1959) and *Ansichten*

be able to establish as clear an idea as possible as to the overarching reactions and responses provoked by their fiction. Thirdly, the novels constitute an interesting point of comparison with each other given that all four authors were, to some degree or other, affiliated with the *Gruppe 47*. And fourthly, the publication dates of the novels range from 1950 to 1959. This is significant as it will better enable me to plot the course of literary developments over a nine-year timespan and will allow me to dedicate particular attention to the aesthetic and thematic changes seen in literary works that emerged in the first post-war decade. In order to expand on some of these aforementioned aspects more thoroughly, the four chapters begin by providing a biographical account of each author's upbringing, their religious convictions, and their situation during the war. The aim of each biographical introductory section is to highlight the divergent set of circumstances and ideologies to which each of the authors were exposed, and to understand more fully the precise factors that configured the writers' ethical stances.

Despite the common features of these four novels, they each differ in terms of critical response and canonisation. Since their pinnacle works were published in the 1950s, Heinrich Böll and Günter Grass have gone on to receive world-wide acclaim for their fiction; they have each received an array of literary awards and accolades, their novels have been translated into various languages, and they both hold an ambassadorial status in their native Germany, often being heralded as the finest German literary voices of the mid to late 20<sup>th</sup> century. And yet what is particularly striking about *Wo warst du, Adam?* and *Die Blechtrommel* are the stark thematic and aesthetic elements that differentiate them. Whilst Böll is committed to sympathising with the strife of everyday citizens and advocating the healing capacity of religious faith within a relatively uncomplicated narrative framework, Grass brazenly ridicules the Church for its moral impotence, all of which is expressed through the multidimensional and, at times, obscure narrative

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*eines Clowns* (1963), I selected *Wo warst du, Adam?* for examination in the thesis as I deem it to be the work that best exemplifies Böll's exploration of the notion of Christian faith and his capacity to reach out to a grieving post-war generation (plain speaking linguistic approach, empathy with the victims' plight, the inherent goodness of mankind, etc.)

perspective of a dwarfed child. Langgässer, on the other hand, is a writer whose works faded into obscurity soon after their publication. She witnessed a momentary flurry of critical interest in *Märkische Argonautenfahrt*, a novel that is strongly transcendental, theological and linguistically cumbersome compared to the likes of Böll, yet her fiction has remained largely uncelebrated. Koeppen's *Der Tod in Rom* was berated for its demanding modernist style and provoked controversy on a literary level for his acerbic critique of the Federal Republic. Koeppen has given rise to incomparably more critical literature, yet his fiction failed to find a large popular readership. What can therefore be seen emerging here is a highly divergent set of reactions to four profoundly different novels, all of which offer four distinctive responses to the socio-political circumstances of the post-war era. The perspective that these four novels offer on post-war West Germany society will enable us to better comprehend contemporary society's evident disinterest in some West-German writers, and its particular fascination with others.



CHAPTER 1  
ELISABETH LANGGÄSSER

1.1) Struggles as a writer

During the brief period of her post-war eminence, Elisabeth Langgässer (1899-1950) became known not only as one of the greatest contemporary women authors, but also as one of the few non-exiled ‘inner emigration’ writers to have remained untainted by Nazism. As the illegitimate child of a married Jewish father and a Roman Catholic mother, Langgässer was classified by the National Socialist state as a *Halbjüdin*, which led to her expulsion from the *Reichskulturkammer* (Nazi writers’ organisation) in 1936, placing her under a writing ban until the capitulation and final collapse of the Third Reich in June 1945. Whilst this may appear a rather inconsequential biographical detail with which to begin the first chapter, its significance lies in the way the courageous Langgässer boldly challenged this Nazi interdiction against her right to write. The sanction had initially been imposed due to the distinctly subversive nature of her first novel *Gang durch das Ried* (1936) which employed nationalistic and racist categorisations of Blacks, Whites, Arabs, Jews, Germans, yet also ‘destabilised the notion of a homogenous culture and racial heritage in Germany and instead represented the German population itself as inherently mixed’.<sup>1</sup> The tense relationship between Langgässer’s utilisation of Nazi themes and her evident criticism of other aspects of National Socialist ideology thus put her in a precarious position, for her fiction revealed an understated aversion to the Third Reich. In addition, Langgässer depicted in the novel the integration of protagonist Jean-Marie Aladin whose name reflects his status as a racial and cultural hybrid. This was particularly problematic from a Nazi perspective, for it revealed that Langgässer embraced ‘non-Germans’ as part of Hitler’s idealised racially homogenous community. This narrative detail could also be interpreted as part of Langgässer’s effort to re-assert her status as a German writer.

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<sup>1</sup>Cathy S. Gelbin, ‘Elisabeth Langgässer and the Question of Inner Emigration’, in *Flight of Fantasy: New Perspectives on Inner Emigration in German Literature 1933-1945*, ed. by Neil H. Donahue and Doris Kirchner (New York: Berghahn, 2003), pp. 269-275 (p. 272).

The forthrightness with which Langgässer appeared to subvert Nazi ideology whilst also appearing to conform to the system, is illuminating at this introductory stage. It encapsulates her passion for writing, as well as her tendency towards non-conformism, even when it posed a risk to her safety. Having already compromised her position by undermining the NS-rule in her fiction, Langgässer appeared equally ambivalent toward potential repercussions that may have arisen from the writing ban, namely the possibility of further acts of racial persecution. On April 3 1938, Langgässer boldly sent a letter to the *Reichsminister* Joseph Goebbels, presenting a list of articulately justified reasons why her debarment from the writers' organisation should be withdrawn. What is elucidatory about this extract is that it not only captures Langgässer's ardent expression of her allegiance to Christianity, a theme that will be expanded upon further in this chapter, but that it once again offers a clear statement of her literary convictions and the importance of writing to her existence: Langgässer, as a non-Nazi, disclosed details to Goebbels about her husband's right-wing nationalist past in the hope that this would enable him to revoke the ban.

Ich bin nach den gesetzlichen Bestimmungen Mischling ersten Grades, christlicher Konfession wie meine Eltern, mit einem Arier verheiratet und zähle daher zu jener Gruppe von Staatsbürgern, die das Wahlrecht besitzen, bzw. militär- und arbeitsdienstpflichtig sind. Mein Mann ist Frontkämpfer und hat dem Freikorps Bogislaw von Selchow angehört.<sup>2</sup>

Prior to the writing ban, Langgässer had published a number of volumes of lyric poetry and short stories, including *Der Wendekreis des Lammes* (1924), the short story *Prosperina* (1932), as well as the aforementioned novel *Gang durch das Ried*. Through her work at the *Funkstelle Berlin*, writing radio dramas,<sup>3</sup> she had been able to adequately provide for herself, her husband, philosopher and theologian Wilhelm Hoffmann, and their first child Cordelia, born in 1929.<sup>4</sup> Yet Langgässer's ostracisation from the *Reichskulturkammer* as an intrinsic act of

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<sup>2</sup> Elisabeth Langgässer, *Briefe 1: 1924-1950*, ed. by Elisabeth Hoffmann (Düsseldorf: Claassen, 1950), p. 134.

<sup>3</sup> Frederick Hetmann, *Schlaf meine Rose: die Lebensgeschichte der Elisabeth Langgässer* (Weinheim: Beltz & Gelberg, 1999), p. 13.

<sup>4</sup> Langgässer and Hoffmann had three other daughters after Cordelia: Annette (1939), Barbara (1940) and Franziska (1942).

racial persecution, which, incidentally, was never withdrawn by the Nazis, was to drastically impact upon their humble standard of living.

In 1948, Langgässer and Hoffmann relocated to Rheinzabern, as the family longed to distance themselves from the instability and turmoil brought about by the bombing of Berlin, an experience which later became the solemn backdrop to the events in Langgässer's post-war novel, *Märkische Argonautenfahrt* (1950), which will provide the main focus of this chapter. Langgässer felt increasingly stifled by the atmosphere in the capital, and, as greater numbers of new writers came to prominence, she '[betrachtete] das kulturelle Leben der Zeit mit großer Skepsis'.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, following the short-lived success of her second novel, *Das unauslöschliche Siegel*, which had been published in 1946, the constant travelling, lecturing and guest appearances that she had undertaken in early 1947 left her feeling overwhelmed and unable to dedicate quality time and attention to the completion and publication of *Märkische Argonautenfahrt*.

Yet the family's flight from 'entsetzlichen, zerstörten, unbarmherzigen, pöbelhaften, kulturlosen Berlin' was not a solution to Langgässer's troubles, as her existence came to be one marked by struggle and financial hardship.<sup>6</sup> Not even Hoffmann's new philosophy lectureship at the University of Germersheim was enough to sufficiently support the family. In addition, Langgässer appeared both emotionally and physically burdened by the demands of motherhood, which was made more difficult by the worsening symptoms of multiple sclerosis, which she had been diagnosed with in 1942. In a letter to Waldemar Gurian dated March 17 1948, Langgässer speaks candidly about her physical and psychological problems, yet it is evident how she once again focuses her frustration predominantly on matters of writing and publication, that is to say, the grief deriving from her literary inactivity:

Im übrigen geht es mir sehr bescheiden. Ich bin von dauernden schweren Depressionen geplagt, die sich vor allem aus den schwarzen

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<sup>5</sup> Carolin Mülverstedt, *Denn das Thema der Dichtung ist immer der Mensch: Entindividualisierung und Typologisierung im Romanwerk Elisabeth Langgässers* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2000), p. 25.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

Enttäuschungen herleiten, die diese schreckliche Zeit allen Gutwilligen bereitet hat. Jeder Glaube an die Menschheit im Ganzen und an die meisten Menschen im Besonderen geht bei mir zum Teufel. [...] Wenn mich irgendwas manchmal zu lautloser Raserei bringt, dann ist es die Tatsache, dass es für minderwertige Autoren und Werke in Masse Preise und Übersetzungen regnet – und für mich *nichts*.<sup>7</sup>

In the midst of hardship and the resulting periods of literary stagnation, the Hoffmann household remained staunchly pious, and Langgässer's personal devotion to the Catholic faith never faltered. As is made explicit in a letter written to Elisabeth Andre in 1932, the presence of her 'priesterliche[r] Mann', who succeeding in fulfilling the needs of her 'weibliche Seele' by providing the family with 'ein *geistiges Haus*' was of great spiritual comfort to Langgässer.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, her affection for Hoffmann, who had once trained as a novice at the Benedictine Abbey of Maria Laach and Beuron, and whose religious convictions were to significantly impact and shape Langgässer's own religious beliefs,<sup>9</sup> is made apparent in a letter to her long-standing friend Karl Thieme, written on the August 23 1933: 'Ich möchte Dir so gerne von diesem Menschen erzählen. Dir sagen, wie gütig, keusch, fromm und – ach – wie deutsch er ist'.<sup>10</sup> Citations such as these reveal an unbreakable spiritual bond that had been nurtured between Langgässer and Hoffmann, and one that would serve to offer them both endless support in the times of hardship that were still to come. Most significantly, their shared sense of loyalty to Catholicism provided them with the necessary strength and courage to remain optimistic in the post-war years, regardless of whether the Catholic faith ran counter to the increasingly secular discourse of the younger generation.

Having observed the dominant role Catholicism played in Langgässer's life, it would seem inevitable that her unyielding devotion to Christianity would ultimately constitute the foundation of her literary style and influences, particularly in her post-war fiction. In this regard, one of her foremost interests was to uphold and maintain the wave of 're-Christianisation' that had taken root

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 40

<sup>8</sup> Langgässer, *Briefe I*, p. 753.

<sup>9</sup> Joanne Sayner, *Women Without A Past? German Autobiographical Writings and Fascism* (New York: Rodopi, 2007), p. 156.

<sup>10</sup> Langgässer, *Briefe I*, p. 786.

in the immediate post-war years. Former soldiers and POWs had been fundamental in instigating Germany's Christian revival, professing the need to reconnect with God having been without him for the duration of two World Wars. Many POWs had interpreted their periods of captivity as being opportunities for 'soul searching',<sup>11</sup> during which former *Wehrmacht* soldiers reflected on their waywardness and their rejection of God's love. Some returning POWs even wore a 'crown of thorn made out of barbed wire' when they re-entered their homeland.<sup>12</sup> This initial enthusiasm for Germany's return to its Christian roots similarly led to the birth of Germany's presiding post-war political party, the *Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands* (CDU) in 1945, as well as its Bavarian counterpart, the *Christlich-Soziale Union in Bayern* (CSU). It was precisely this brief period of post-war religious enthusiasm that Langgässer wished to advocate in her fiction, evident in the way mythological iconography and biblical images command a ubiquitous presence in her two main post-war novels. As will be explored in due course, the recurrent use of allegory that pervades *Märkische Argonautenfahrt* renders Langgässer's protagonists far more complex and multifaceted than they appear at first glance, as well as offering proof of the author's personal preoccupation with theological scholarship and her desire for her religious convictions to form the backdrop of her writing. Yet whether this would result in *Märkische Argonautenfahrt* striking a chord with the post-war generation by responding to its emotional needs remains a key question to be explored in this chapter. For initial success with which many Germans encouraged society's return to Christian spirituality proved to be short lived; ultimately, it failed to offer the support and consolation that the young post-war generation was seeking.

## 1.2) Reactions to Langgässer's fiction

Expanding upon the notion of 're-Christianisation' in post-war Germany, it is illuminating to reflect on the divergent responses to Langgässer's two post-war novels. *Das unauslöschliche Siegel* was published in October 1946, and tells the

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<sup>11</sup>Frank Biess, *Homecomings: Returning POWs and the Legacies of Defeat in Postwar Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 99.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

story of a baptized Jew, living at the start of the First World War, who does not believe in God. Due to the distinctly reprimanding nature of the work, it has often been interpreted as a ‘large-scale, religiously motivated criticism of civilisation’.<sup>13</sup> Langgässer appears to have been pleased with her work, and expresses her heartfelt satisfaction with its quality by describing it as ‘Ein großes Ding – äusserlich, aber auch innerlich [...]’.<sup>14</sup> After many difficult years of financial hardship, ill health and racial persecution, circumstances which, as we have seen, had often resulted in extended phases of literary idleness, *Das unauslöschliche Siegel* received positive critical recognition following its publication, including a unexpectedly complimentary review from Nobel Prize recipient, exile writer and traditionally discerning critic of inner-emigration literature, Thomas Mann, who recognized *Das unauslöschliche Siegel* as one of a handful of remarkable works of contemporary literature in Germany.<sup>15</sup> As Langgässer notes in a letter to a friend, Mann had described the work as ‘ein Meisterwerk verinnerlichter Prosa’.<sup>16</sup> The novel equally had resounding international appeal, and saw Langgässer receive an offer from Austrian émigré writer, Hermann Broch, who wished to publish an English translation of the work in the United States.<sup>17</sup> It was then in 1947 that Langgässer’s novel first witnessed a much-anticipated flourish of critical acclaim from German audiences, whose fascination and enthusiasm resounds in a letter from Langgässer to her publicist, Henry Goverts, dated April 1947:

Hier in Berlin dringt die Kunde von dem ‘*unauslöschlichen Siegel*’ immer mehr in alle literarischen und nichtliterarischen Kreise, und die das Buch noch nicht kennen, reden von ihm wie von der Seeschlange.

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<sup>13</sup>Thomas Pekar, ‘Experiences of Delocalization and Katabasis in the Literature of Exile and the Early Postwar Period in Germany’, in *Exile And Otherness: New Approaches to the Experience of the Nazi Refugees* ed. by Alexander Stephan (Bern: Lang, 2005), pp. 49-64(p. 58).

<sup>14</sup> Mülverstedt, *Thema*, p. 37.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Mann is referred to here as an ‘exile writer’. He sought refuge in the United States during World War II and returned to Europe in 1952 following the capitulation of National Socialist Germany. Having developed an ‘outsider’s perspective’ during the war, Mann was often critical on the ‘inward perspectives’ of the so-called inner emigration writers, a category to which Langgässer belonged. He allegedly described the literary efforts of many inner emigration writers as an attempt ‘Verkommenheit [zu] beschönigen, das Verbrechen [zu] schmücken’. Cf. Michael Philipp, ‘Sozialgeschichtliche Aspekte der inneren Emigration’, in *Aspekte der künstlerischen inneren Emigration 1933 bis 1945*, ed. by Claus-Dieter Krohn, Erwin Rotermund, Lutz Winckler and Wulf Köpke (Munich: Edition Text + Kritik, 1994), pp. 11-30 (p. 12).

<sup>16</sup>Langgässer’s letter to Eugen Claassen, 30.6.1949, in *Briefe 1*, p. 942.

<sup>17</sup> Mülverstedt, *Thema*, p. 38.

Die Leute sprechen mich auf ‘das großartige Werk’ an, das so ‘neuartig’ und ‘überwältigend’ sein soll [...] <sup>18</sup>

This citation encapsulates Langgässer’s disbelief at the positive responses to *Das unauslöschliche Siegel*, and reveals the widespread interest that Christian publications took in her work. Yet the thematic and aesthetic characteristics of Langgässer’s *christliche Thematik*, particularly those pertaining to mysticism, did not always meet with approval, and appear to have struck a discord among the ‘schnaubende Konvertiten [...], dürre Rationalisten [...] und Vernunftanbeter [...]’ from ‘katholischen Kreisen’, who disapproved of her works’ surrealist and mystical elements and of the supra-realistic framework in which they operated. <sup>19</sup> In addition, the widespread enthusiasm the novel had enjoyed in 1946 slowly began to fade in the later months of 1947, and as increasing numbers of new publications began to emerge, many of which showcased new and innovative modes of expressionism, Langgässer struggled to defend her novel’s relevance on the post-war literary scene. Her reaction to the novel’s waning popularity was evidently one of deep animosity. After reading an article on some of Germany’s new and distinguished publications, Langgässer made a somewhat impulsive and uninformed critique of the contemporary novel *Die Stadt hinter dem Strom* (1947) by fellow inner-emigration writer, Hermann Kasack, a remark which she later regretted and withdrew:

Peter de Mendelssohn schreibt lobtiefende Artikel über ‘Großes Neujahr deutscher Prosa’ - und erwähnt mich neben Kasack [...]. Ich habe das Gefühl, einfach zu ersticken. [...] Ich habe die Empfindung, dass als Reaktion auf den Riesenerfolg des ‘Unauslöschlichen Siegels’ in Deutschland eine bewusste Gegenwehr einsetzt, die diesen katholischen Roman abzuwürgen versucht, indem sie andere (wie Kasack u. seine dünne, gehirnliche ‘Stadt hinter dem Strom’) über den grünen Klee lobt. <sup>20</sup>

What is interesting about this citation is that it appears to capture Langgässer’s frustration not only at being replaced by what she evidently regarded as inferior writers, but more prominently, at the waning interest shown by German and foreign readers in strongly Catholic fiction. In the mid-late 1940s the literary

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<sup>18</sup>Langgässer, *Briefe I*, p. 631.

<sup>19</sup>Langgässer’s letter to Walter Dirks, 12.5.1947, in *Briefe I*, p.647.

<sup>20</sup>Langgässer’s letter to Waldemar Gurian, 29.2.1948, in *Briefe I*, pp. 744-745.

scene underwent another shift in ideological focus, which moved away from attempts to ‘re-Christianise’ Germany. Instead there was a shift towards an entirely new mode of expression that would enable Germany to psychologically distance itself from its past. As has already been described in the introduction to this thesis, many of the writers who began opting for alternative linguistic registers shared a desire for Germany to regain its literary credibility, and many believed that they could achieve this by utilising a clear-cut *Kahlschlag* language. This style expressed its own fragility and sense of estrangement. It was also, according to Adorno, the most effective form of linguistic articulation.<sup>21</sup> Some of the most celebrated works that exemplify the *Kahlschlag* style are Günter Eich’s poem *Inventur* (1947) and Paul Celan’s poem *Todesfuge* (1948), both of which succeeded in arousing particular enthusiasm among critics in the late 1940s. Many of these authors and poets were also affiliated with the *Gruppe 47*, who were similarly concerned with the considerable task of dissolving the nimbus of mystery and fate and depicting the Third Reich in its ‘everyday dress’.<sup>22</sup> The group’s desire to confront and outmaneuver other more traditional forms of literary expression also gained more credibility in 1950, when Hans Werner Richter began bestowing a much-coveted literature prize to those literary creations from *Gruppe 47* members he deemed exemplary and worthy of greater acknowledgement. The recipients included Günter Eich’s poem *Abgelegene Gehöfte* (1950), Heinrich Böll’s *Die schwarzen Schafe* (1951), Ilse Aichinger’s short story *Spiegelgeschichte* (1952) and Ingeborg Bachmann’s poem *Die gestundete Zeit* (1953).

Admittedly, Langgässer’s narrative talents were also recognised by the *Gruppe 47*, and Andersch is alleged to have referred to *Das unauslöschliche Siegel* as ‘eine Inspirationsquelle für eine neue Art Literatur’ in a talk entitled *Deutsche Literatur in der Entscheidung* which was held at the group’s second meeting in November 1947.<sup>23</sup> Yet despite being recognised as a talented writer, it was

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<sup>21</sup>Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life* (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1951), p. 101.

<sup>22</sup>Gordon A. Craig, ‘Politics and Literature’, in *A New History of German Literature*, ed. by David E. Wellbery (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 873.

<sup>23</sup>Marianne Vogel, ‘Krieg als Kulturkrise und utopischer Neubeginn: Elisabeth Langgässer und das Deutschland nach 1945’, in *Imaginäre Welten im Widerstreit: Krieg und Geschichte in*



Langgässer's highly metaphysical and allegorical approach that lacked the sense of immediacy and urgency shown by those writers who succeeded in depicting Nazism with honesty and clarity. This was a period of declining interest in *katholische Romane*, and it saw the literary prominence of many *Gruppe 47* writers such as Böll, Andersch, Bachmann and Grass, whose objectives were to move away from traditional forms of prose and to establish a somewhat 'anti-establishment' creative programme that appealed to the post-war generation.

The changes that took place on the literary scene from early 1947 onwards serve to contextualise the artistic setting in which Langgässer published *Märkische Argonautenfahrt* in 1950. What is evident from the emerging post-war literary talents mentioned above is that Langgässer's attempt to distinguish herself within a market that was quickly becoming saturated with new and innovative modes of literary expression would prove a difficult, if not impossible, challenge for her traditional and allegorical literary style, which effectively evaded the popular 'poetische[r] Kalkül [...]' of the post-war literary era and focused exclusively on her own 'theologische Erwägungen'.<sup>24</sup>

### 1.3) Eine christliche Thematik in 1950s Germany

In order to identify the reasons why Langgässer's *Märkische Argonautenfahrt* and, albeit to a lesser extent, *Das unauslöschliche Siegel*, have commanded minimal critical attention since the 1950s, this section will look specifically at the changes in post-war Germany society that would result in either an aversion to or a disinterest in Christian themes in literature. It goes without saying that Langgässer's two main post-war works 'von ihrem Verhältnis zum katholischen Glauben [leben]'.<sup>25</sup> *Das unauslöschliche Siegel*, for instance, is laden with religious iconography. This includes the Jewish protagonist Lazarus Belfontaine's conversion to Catholicism, the allusion in the novel's title to the

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*der deutschsprachigen Literatur seit 1900*, ed. by Lars Koch and Marianne Vogel (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2007), pp. 222-234 (p. 228).

<sup>24</sup>Volker C. Dörr, *Mythomimesis: mythische Geschichtsbilder in der westdeutschen (Erzähl-)Literatur der frühen Nachkriegszeit: 1945-1952* (Berlin: Schmidt, 2004), p. 368

<sup>25</sup>Eberhard Horst, *Christliche Dichtung und Moderne Welterfahrung: zum epischen Werk Elisabeth Langgässers* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Munich 1956), p.3.

ineradicable nature of Catholic baptism, the cyclical structure of the narrative, which centres on the day of Belfontaine's christening, conjecture about the immaculate conception, the Trinity, Hell and sinfulness, the Mystery of Iniquity.<sup>26</sup> Similarly in *Märkische Argonautenfahrt*, the narrative is overflowing with mythical and biblical discourse, as the seven individuals are summoned by God to undertake a journey of spiritual purification to help them live 'beyond' the war. As Horst rightly affirms, it is the presence of God in both novels, 'der die Menschen hinter ihrem Rücken hervorzog',<sup>27</sup> confirming that whilst Langgässer's two post-war novels fundamentally deal with highly divergent narrative themes, 'das christliche Thema bleibt gleich'.<sup>28</sup>

Langgässer was an author who was openly devout in her Catholic world view and her commitment to the notion of justification by faith, and had no qualms about what she regarded as the pivotal themes in her writing, the very essence of her craft. She assigned to her writing a single purpose: 'christliche Realität dichterisch auszusagen'.<sup>29</sup> It became Langgässer's vocational task to question the reality and topicality of Christian faith in modern, middle-class society by writing *Zeit-* and *Epochenromane*, a genre that allowed her to directly confront the problems of widening secularisation that had been observed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and also to champion the fleeting phase of 're-Christianisation' that had emerged in Germany in 1945. It must be emphasised, however, that Langgässer's defiant advocacy of a nationwide religious revival, her enthusiasm for which is evident in her preoccupation with the post-war *renouveau catholique* movement in France and its notable novelists Léon Bloy (1846-1917), Georges Bernanos (1888-1948), Charles Péguy (1873-1914), François Mauriac (1885-1970) and playwright Paul Claudel (1868-1955),<sup>30</sup> ran counter to the increasingly secular,

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<sup>26</sup>Silke Kubik, *Die europäische Ordnung stirbt: Religion und Geschichtskonstruktion im Angesicht der Katastrophe: eine vergleichende Untersuchung der Romane Die Schlafwandler von Hermann Broch und Das unauslöschliche Siegel von Elisabeth Langgässer* (Frankfurt/M: Lang, 2008), p. 123.

<sup>27</sup> Horst, *Christliche*, p. 5.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Wilhelm Hoffmann, *Geist in den Sinnen behaust* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald, 1951), p. 192.

<sup>30</sup> The French *Renouveau catholique* movement took root towards the end of the 19th century. It sought to modernise and enlighten traditional, conservative Catholicism and challenge the modern world by way of a renewal of the literary arts. This led to the publication of the German Catholic magazine *Hochhuth* in 1903, and was regarded as the official journal of the *Renouveau catholique* movement in Germany.

existentialist aesthetic discourse of the new German *Nachkriegsgeneration*.<sup>31</sup> In the aftermath of war, many Germans citizens began to experience momentous spiritual crises, so that the country's religious landscape became increasingly fragmented. This development is attributable to a wide range of interlinking factors. Firstly, the Catholic Church's alleged silence during the Holocaust left Christians all over the world questioning the role of God, and if they could continue worshipping an institution that had effectively turned a blind eye to the extermination of millions. The increasingly secular nature of German culture, which was paralleled in many other Western European countries in the post-war era, went hand in hand with the development of a much more materialistic, consumer-oriented society as Germany entered a new phase of economic prosperity. Ruff asserts that the *Wirtschaftswunder* that began in the early 1950s was an important factor in the expansion of post-war secularisation and heavily influenced the disintegration of the Catholic milieu.<sup>32</sup> It presented close-knit Catholic communities with the overwhelming prospect of a secular working class open to atheistic Marxist influences. In essence, the new ethos of individualism and consumption was a source of trepidation for the Church in the early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, as clerics, already concerned by the widespread public scepticism of religious institutions in light of the Papacy's wartime passivity, now feared the glamour and appeal of this modern and increasingly capitalist culture. Whilst there had been a broad post-war consensus among returning soldiers, intellectuals, literary organisations, political figureheads and clergymen at the start of 1945 for Germany to return to what they perceived as the sturdy foundations of Christian-Western culture after having fallen victim to National Socialist tyranny, this shift away from Nazism and its nihilism and returning to Christianity was ultimately, for many Germans, a plain impossibility.

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<sup>31</sup>Margaret Littler, 'Restoration and Resistance: Women's Writing 1945-1970', in *A History of Women's Writing in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland*, ed. by Jo Catling (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 172-173 (p. 172).

<sup>32</sup>Following the damage done to the Church during the war (the conscription of many young clerics, erosion of church organizations, destruction of church property by the Nazis), the Catholic milieu sought to rebuild the Catholic spirit in Germany in the form of a tightly unified subculture. In conjunction with their aspiration towards a Europe wide religious revival, the nature of their clubs and societies was also to preach the message of anti-modernism. Cf. Mark Edward Ruff, *The Wayward Flock: Catholic Youth in Post-war West Germany 1945-1965* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995), pp. 1-14.

Evidently, the social and economic developments and the move towards a new phase of German prosperity that began in the early 1950s led to ever-increasing secularism, which inevitably impacted upon Christian writers and their fiction. In the first instance, it became much more challenging to publish a work of Christian fiction in an era that saw the prominence of so many emerging *Gruppe 47* writers. Commenting on the fluctuating nature of the publishing scene in the 1950s, writer and literary critic Hannes Schwenger identifies how ‘für die religiöse Publikationspraxis nach 1945, deren Marktsegment - je nach dem Grad konfessioneller Ausrichtung - erheblich eingeschränkter war als die “säkularen” Verlage [...]’.<sup>33</sup> Schwenger here illustrates how the demand for Christian publications in the 1950s had rapidly diminished, and also how this starkly contrasts with the enthusiasm that had been seen only a few years beforehand after Langgässer’s publication of *Das unauslöschliche Siegel*. Additionally, his words confirm how the market for religious fiction became confined to specialist literary audiences. Interestingly, it was not only new authors of Christian fiction who were struggling to establish themselves in the increasingly saturated post-war literary market, for the traditional canon of *katholisches Volksschrifttum* that had included novelists and poets such as Peter Dörfler (1878-1955), Max Mell (1882-1971), Josef Mühlberger (1903-1985) and Franz Johannes Weinrich (1897-1978), whose works had flourished during the 1920s and 1930s, similarly began in the early 1950s and 1960s to experience a gradual decline in both public and scholarly interest, commanding the attention of a radically smaller readership compared with previous decades. Other religiously inspired works such as Günter Rutenborn’s play *Jonas und der Walfisch*, which was first performed in Berlin in 1947 and subsequently received extensive international acclaim, as well as being translated into other European languages, were remarkably successful in the immediate post-war years, but were completely forgotten in the following decades.<sup>34</sup> This precise shift in interest prompted Ross to define the 1950s as the ‘Ende der christlichen Literatur’; that is to say, the end of the ‘Traditionen christlicher Literatur und christlicher Literaturvermittlung’ that had been known

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<sup>33</sup>Hannes Schwenger, *Das Weltbild des katholischen Vulgärschrifttums* (Munich: Gestern und Heute, 1965), p. 16.

<sup>34</sup>Vogel, *Krieg*, p. 267.

in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>35</sup> For the development of new, clean-cut writing styles that were emerging in the late 1940s and 1950s, typified by the moral stance of Wolfgang Borchert or the cleansing, reworking and simplifying of language by Günter Eich, revealed a moving away from the allegorical weightiness commonly associated with religious literature. It was precisely these qualities that rendered this new literature thoroughly unsuitable for a transposition into the allegorically embellished and transcendental Christian realm. Its ideology, by inference, denoted a break from traditional theological language and a so-called 'Pathos einer leidenschaftlichen Gottesliebe'.<sup>36</sup>

The late 1940s can thus be clearly identified as the period that instigated the gradual decline of the Catholic novel in Germany. The year 1950 would thereby have been a difficult time for the publication of *Märkische Argonautenfahrt*. Reflecting on how many other once esteemed religious writers such as Rudolf Alexander Schröder, Franz Werfel and Ernst Wiechert became increasingly obsolete in the aftermath of the Second World War, Werner Ross encapsulates this literary demise poignantly:

[...] tot sind Claudel und Bernanos, tot Elisabeth Langgässer und Reinhold Schneider, Werner Bergengruen und Rudolf Alexander Schröder, [...]. Alt und schweigsam geworden sind Gertrud von le Fort, Edzard Schaper, Julien Green; alt und geschwätzig geworden ist Mauriac. Stefan Andres' 'Wir sind Utopia' und Luise Rinsers 'Jan Lobel aus Warschau' liegen weit zurück [...].<sup>37</sup>

#### 1.4) Märkische Argonautenfahrt

The previous sections have given a detailed overview of Langgässer's life, her religious convictions, her personal struggles as a writer, her short-lived rise to literary prominence in 1946, and the changing nature of fiction in the German post-war era. These contextual details are central to a study of *Märkische*

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<sup>35</sup> Werner Ross, 'Ist die christliche Literatur zu Ende?', in *Moderne Literatur und christlicher Glaube*, ed. by Paul Konrad Kurz (Würzburg: Kösel, 1969), pp. 129-146 (p. 132).

<sup>36</sup> Hans Harder Biermann-Ratjen and Hans Egon Holthusen, *Eine Welt ohne Transzendenz? Gespräch über Thomas Mann und seinen Dr. Faustus* (Hamburg: Ellermann, 1949), p.27.

<sup>37</sup> Ross, *christliche Literatur*, p.131.

*Argonautenfahrt*, for this historical framework allows one to pinpoint the late 1940s as a formative break in literary history,<sup>38</sup> thus setting the 1950 publication of *Märkische Argonautenfahrt* in a more vivid context. This context will allow us to establish why this particular work has been the subject of minimal critical attention, especially if we hark back to the early success of *Das unauslöschliche Siegel*, which prompted fellow inner-emigration writer Luise Rinser to hail Langgässer as ‘die größte deutsche Schriftstellerin unseres Jahrhunderts’.<sup>39</sup> For not only did *Märkische Argonautenfahrt* fail to capture the critical attention of contemporary literary generations, a lack of interest that was particularly evident in the early- to mid-1950s following its publication, but the work has since failed to ignite the interest of modern day audiences. It is this resounding lack of interest in her fiction that has prevented Langgässer from entering into the post-war West German literary canon.

*Märkische Argonautenfahrt*, on which Langgässer worked from 1947 until her death in July 1950, and which was published posthumously in the same year, is an intensely earnest novel that attempts to deal with the question of Germany overcoming its dismal past. The novel, which, according to Langgässer was intended to become ‘ein Kosmos der Nachkriegszeit’, deals euphemistically with the collapse of Germany by telling the story of a journey of pilgrims who wish to purify themselves by means of a spiritual venture.<sup>40</sup> The journey, which has both physical and allegorical implications (‘eine Wanderung als Gleichnis sämtlicher Fahrten, Eroberungen und Wanderzüge’ (*Märkische Argonautenfahrt* 399, from now on *MA*)), takes place in the summer of 1945, when the seven individuals decide to flee the bomb ravaged German capital and embark on a pilgrimage, modeled after the mythical voyage of the *Argo*,<sup>41</sup> to the monastery of Anastasiendorf, the anagogical ‘Neue Jerusalem’ of the novel, which is situated

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<sup>38</sup> Katherine Ebel, ‘Discussions with the Literary Past: Attitudes of the Gruppe 47 and the Vijftigers towards Earlier Literary Movements’, in *History in Dutch Studies*, ed. by Robert B. Howell and Jolands Vanderwal Taylor (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2003), pp. 39-48 (p. 42).

<sup>39</sup> Alfred Ebenbauer, *Philologische Untersuchungen* (Wien: Braumüller, 1984), p. 167.

<sup>40</sup> Langgässer, *Briefe I*, p. 579.

<sup>41</sup> The *Argonautica* is a Greek epic poem written by Apollonius Rhodius in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC. It is the only surviving Hellenistic epic, and tells the mythical tale of the voyage of Jason and the Argonauts to retrieve the Golden Fleece from the land of Colchis, which enables close thematic comparisons with Langgässer’s *Märkische Argonautenfahrt* to be drawn.

in the southern Brandenburg Marches.<sup>42</sup> The pilgrims - among them architect Ewald Hauteville and his sister Lotte Corneli, actor Albrecht Beifuß, soldier Friedrich am Ende, surviving Jewish couple Flora and Arthur Levi-Jeschower, and young resistance fighter and concentration camp survivor Irene von Dörfer – have all been deeply traumatised by the war and have lost their ‘innere Orientierung’.<sup>43</sup> Some are plagued by deep feelings of guilt, having failed to help those who were persecuted or sent to concentration camps. Others have begun to question the purpose of life, and look upon themselves as nihilists and cynics. And yet, although these feelings of despair derive from differing situations and circumstances, are all fundamentally attributable to the same cause: the abandonment of God. Therefore, in their search for enlightenment, salvation, liberation, oblivion, remembrance and comfort, the seven pilgrims, who are united in their erring from God’s righteous path, join together to achieve a common goal - to reach the monastery of Anastasiendorf, the Heavenly City, a location that is described by Albrecht Beifuß in a vision as transcendental and celestial (*MA* 66-67), which serves as a clear antithesis to the ‘Bild der großen Totenstadt [...]’, a phrase that perfectly encapsulates Langgässer’s allegorical allusions to the novel’s second key location, Berlin.<sup>44</sup> The nature of the protagonists’ dream-like descriptions of the monastery thereby emphasises the mythical purpose of their journey:

[S]ie würden das Goldene Vliess erreichen und bei seinem Anblick endlich wissen, daß sie es niemals gefunden hätten, wenn nicht es selbst sie herangewunken und ihnen wie das Blinklicht am Himmel, das in Abständen um den Horizont geht, den Weg gewiesen hätte (*MA* 276).

Just as the Star to Bethlehem led the shepherds and three kings to the birth place of Jesus Christ, Langgässer’s Argonauts are similarly guided by a divine force, which directs them to the path leading to Anastasiendorf, to the ‘Insel von Ordnung’ (*MA* 268) where the harmonious order of the Heavenly City awaits

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<sup>42</sup>Konstanze Fliedl, *Zeitroman und Heilsgeschichte: Elisabeth Langgässers Märkische Argonautenfahrt* (Vienna: Braumüller, 1986), p. 42.

<sup>43</sup> Ursula Knapp, *Der Roman der fünfziger Jahre: zur Entwicklung der Romanästhetik in Westdeutschland* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1972), p. 48.

<sup>44</sup>This alludes to Langgässer’s vague descriptions of Berlin, a location that it is not often referred to directly in the novel, but rather as part of a list of *Unheilstädte*. Cf. Fliedl, *Zeitroman*, p. 40.

them: ‘Die Insel des Friedens, [...] Die heile Ordnung. Das Ziel der Argo. Das Haus zu dem Goldenen Vliess’ (*MA* 270).

As the pilgrims flee war-torn Berlin in 1945 and set out on their journey, the reader is required to remind him or herself of the fact that this often ethereally depicted *Heilsgeschichte*, which Langgässer repeatedly embellishes with biblical and mythological iconography, is, by way of contrast, operating within a real historical framework that represents a concrete backdrop to the narrated events. The ruin and devastation inflicted on Berlin from 1940 to 1945 is a pivotal point of historical reference in *Märkische Argonautenfahrt*. This is a view that is supported by Ute Wölfel, who notes that ‘[d]ie Großstadt und Reichshauptstadt Berlin rückt in der folgenden Untersuchung [über Elisabeth Langgässer] als Ausgangs- und Zielpunkt des Zweiten Weltkrieges in den Blick’.<sup>45</sup> Establishing, therefore, that the German capital city serves as a point of origin and an indicator of historical reality in the novel, an element that would have also presumably enabled a sizeable part of Langgässer’s contemporary readership to personally identify with the desperate circumstances of the protagonists, the search for solace in the aftermath of war, and the bleakness of the bombed city landscape, questions are raised as to why Langgässer was so intent on incorporating estranging, mythological descriptions that ultimately undermine the reality of the historical context.

Berlin is the native city of the seven pilgrims, and what has been left behind following years of relentless and unremitting attacks are the physical traces of decay, ruin and devastation; bombed-out buildings, the loss of loved ones, a whole world reduced to rubble. Yet even with this backdrop of realism, a veil of mystical imagery continues to detract from the vivid scenes of chaos and destruction. In the extract presented below, for instance, which depicts Ewald Hauteville’s dream, it can be seen how Langgässer’s allusion to the capital city places the events in the narrative in a most familiar context, by way of her

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<sup>45</sup>Ute Wölfel, ‘Berlin: Bilder keiner Großstadt: zur Darstellung und Funktion der Stadt in der Nachkriegsprosa Elisabeth Langgässers’, in *Krieg und Nachkrieg: Konfigurationen der deutschsprachigen Literatur (1940-1965)*, ed. by Hania Siebenpfeiffer and Ute Wölfel (Berlin: Schmidt, 2004), pp. 123-148 (p. 123).



reference to the iconic Berlin radio tower. Yet the fantastical description of a siren with a dragon's body that then follows has a powerfully estranging quality and results in the reader's becoming subconsciously ensnared by the mythological nature of Langgässer's narration, subsequently eliminating any sense of realism:

‘Sieh her’, sagte Ewald Hauteville. ‘Sieh nur her’ und deutete jetzt von dem Funkturm der ehemaligen Reichshauptstadt auf ein Ruinenfeld, über das sich mit langhinlaufendem Heulen die letzte Sirene neidergesenkt und das sie wie Gog und Magog mit ihrem Drachenleib zugedeckt und an der äußersten Peripherie, wo ihre Füße aufgesetzt waren, für immer bezeichnet hatte. (*MA* 18)

The juxtaposition of moments of harsh realism with mythological and biblical imagery, which can also be seen here in Langgässer's allusion to the eschatological figures Gog and Magog who appear in the Book of Revelation 20:7-8 as opponents of God's people, occurs again a couple of pages later in Hauteville's recollection of his dream.<sup>46</sup> Here, Langgässer depicts a vivid scene of turmoil involving bullets, cartridge shells and tanks littering the Berlin streets, an all too familiar reminder of the charred landscape seen in so many war-torn German cities. Yet Langgässer soon transforms this setting into an outlandish and supernatural world, which has a distinctly alienating effect on the reader:

[D]er Boden, von rostigen Kiefernadeln [...] bedeckt, blühte von leeren Patronenhülsen [...], leere Kartuschen, zertrümmerte Panzer staken, gräßlich gebäumt wie erlegte Drachen [...] (*MA* 20)

What is also particularly noteworthy about these passages is the question of narrative perspective, and the extent to which the mythological discourse is attributable to particular characters. In the first extract depicting the siren with a dragon's body, the mythological description is not expressed by Ewald, for his words ‘Sieh her’ appear beforehand. It is rather the account of an omniscient

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<sup>46</sup> Revelation 20:1-6 describes a thousand year period wherein the Devil is ‘bound,’ and God's people ‘reign.’ Satan makes a final attempt to destroy God's children with the help of a divine agent, namely Gog and Magog (believed to be a single unit). God finally sends fire from the heavens to obliterate Satan's enemy force.

third person narrator, whose identity appears to remain purposefully obscured in the novel. The question of precisely *who it is*, however, is of marginal significance, for the overarching question is how the characters also adopt the mythological perspective that is then conveyed in their narrative account. Considering the second passage that depicts the ravaged landscape, it is Ewald himself who claims to have seen dragons in his dream, which suggests that the mythical discourse is also employed by the novel's protagonists, thereby increasing the proximity between the physical events described and the force of dreamlike fantasy. The fact that the characters appear to experience elements of mysticism suggests that Langgässer wished to undermine the backdrop of realism. Ewald is unable to comprehend the actuality of the situation in hand, and therefore resorts to the language of similitude. Admittedly this could represent Langgässer's own attempt to confront the issue of post-war despair, namely to distort truth as a means of achieving solace and comfort. Yet her method of obscuring reality was evidently received negatively by a nation already bereft of clarity and rationality. The novel's treatment of narrative focalisation represents, therefore, a further example of Langgässer attempts to sidestep clarity and realism by resorting to the fanciful imagery that denied her the critical reception she desired, for Germany's young post-war generation ultimately failed to comprehend a novel of such wild imagination.

Langgässer's fantastical treatment of earthly locations in *Märkische Argonautenfahrt* also extends beyond her portrayal of Berlin. Indeed, the many descriptions of the monastery of Anastasiendorf, a location that, unlike the German capital, is admittedly fictitious for narrative purposes but could conceivably be a physical location in Lower Brandenburg, is similarly deprived of any earthly qualities and appears as a celestial realm, rendering it a clear antithesis to the dark and destructive underworld realm of Berlin. An example that is particularly illustrative of Anastasiendorf's status as a holy landscape is Albrecht Beifuß's vision of the pilgrims reaching the end of their journey:

Drei mächtige architektonische Kreise stiegen also konzentrisch übereinander an [...] darüber das Gleichnis geheimnisvoller Türme and Tore, sei es Theben, Mykene, Troja, Orplid oder Jerusalem, und im

höchsten Äther, dem Herz des Himmels und über dem Scheitelpunkt des Polarsterns die mystische Rose [...]. (MA 66)

Beifuß's estranging portrayal of this evidently earthly location, which, incidentally, signifies a further example of a protagonist carrying out his own mythologising, is ultimately achieved by his attempt to envelope it in legendary and mythological imagery. This represents a notable trait in *Märkische Argonautenfahrt*. It is not only apparent that the mystical representations of the evidently earthly locations of Berlin and Anastasiendorf remove them from their earthly contexts, but it is also clear that Langgässer's antithetical treatment of the two cities as a 'Totenstadt' and a 'Heilsstadt' becomes increasingly allegorical.<sup>47</sup> This reveals a further dimension to the obscure nature of the novel's supposedly familiar earthly locations. Anastasiendorf, for instance, is depicted alongside eschatological, legendary and mythological places of sanctuary, which include the cloister of Port-Royal ('diese eigentümliche Reise nach einem "Port-Royal" – sozusagen [...]') (MA 7), Orplid (MA 66, 280, 305), Vineta (MA 64), the Hanging Gardens of Semiramis (MA 26), the Island of Patmos (MA 62), Jerusalem (MA 64, 66) and 'New Jerusalem' (MA 62, 210). By embroiling Anastasiendorf in this world of mystical and theological fantasy, it would seem that Langgässer intends for the monastery to be viewed as a location that is as revered and sanctified as these other mythological places. The metaphorical descriptions endow the monastery with a level of sacredness and inviolability, and thereby remove it from its the earthly realm. The result of this is that the depiction of the pilgrim's journey is once again transported into a transcendental domain, detaching the narrative events from their historical and earthly context.

Expanding upon the antithetical treatment of the 'Totenstadt' and the 'Heilsstadt', it can be seen that Langgässer's also places Berlin alongside other devastated cities. What is, however, particularly noteworthy about Langgässer's metaphorical treatment of the capital is the potential negative impact that such figurative and outlandish comparisons with the novel's solitary embodiment of historical reality could have on a contemporary audience. Frequently when the

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<sup>47</sup> Fliedl, *Zeitroman*, p. 40

pilgrims are in conversation about the native city they have resignedly left behind, one can identify Langgässer's incorporation of allusions to other historical, mythological and biblical examples of 'zerstörte Städte' or 'Unheilstädte' that are woven into the same piece of prose.<sup>48</sup> These include Troy (MA 61, 64, 66, 214, 244, 305, 398), Sodom and Gomorrah (MA26, 240), Babylon (MA 71), Pompeii, Messina (MA 45), Stalingrad (MA 214, 411) and Hiroshima (MA 21, 244). This attempt to indirectly forge allegorical comparisons between Berlin, the 'Stadt des Sittenverfalls und gefährlicher politischer Tendenzen',<sup>49</sup> with cities like Sodom and Gomorrah, Pompeii or Hiroshima must be treated as highly problematic, for whilst these cities can be viewed as 'historische, mythische, biblische Sinnbilder und Manifestationen der zivilisatorischen Katastrophe',<sup>50</sup> their function in the novel as allegorical representations of the German capital could account for further reasons as to why *Märkische Argonautenfahrt* was poorly received in the 1950s.

Firstly, a sense of uncertainty arises from the fact that the list of the aforementioned obliterated cities cited in *Märkische Argonautenfahrt* have all suffered destruction as a result of fundamentally incomparable circumstances, thus rendering their allegorical function in the novel somewhat vague. Sodom and Gomorrah are cities that are commonly understood to be synonymous with impenitent sin, and which suffered destruction and chaos as a result of divine intervention. Pompeii, however, was tragically destroyed and buried following a cataclysmic two-day long eruption of Mount Vesuvius in AD 79. The obliteration of Hiroshima was caused by an American aircraft dropping an atomic bomb on the city in 1945. It is important to consider the contextual details surrounding the cities referred to in *Märkische Argonautenfahrt* for it raises the question of 'Stadtzerstörung' versus 'Selbstzerstörung',<sup>51</sup> in other words, whether these cities can be viewed as victims of attack or responsible for their own destruction. Langgässer's attempt to allegorise Berlin with a seemingly random array of obliterated cities in *Märkische Argonautenfahrt* was presumably

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., pp. 40-41

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>50</sup> Wölfel, *Berlin*, p. 137.

<sup>51</sup> Fliedl, *Zeitroman*, pp. 41-42.

met with frustration, for her provocative attempts to allegorically place Berlin alongside so many other devastated cities that are, due to their own unique set of historical circumstances, essentially incomparable, renders Langgässer's handling of the novel's historically factual details obscure and ambiguous.

Developing this idea further, Langgässer's mythologising tendency reduces the historical specificity of Berlin's destruction by placing it on a par with examples of divine retribution, natural disaster, and Nazi and Allied aggression. This is clearly a controversial insinuation and could feasibly have aggravated contemporary readers, particularly learned readers, because it effaces any burden of guilt or responsibility and allows the protagonists to concentrate on their pilgrimage without the need to reflect on their own conduct during the war. The negative symbolic implication of this could then be that contemporary readers interpret the pilgrims' focus on the journey ahead as confirmation that they too can disregard their own participation in the Third Reich.

In addition to this, Langgässer's depiction of the obliterated German capital alongside some of the most infamous examples of destruction in human and biblical history would inevitably have been viewed negatively by a grieving post-war generation. Already burdened with their own feelings of guilt, loss, pessimism and despair, readers may have felt traumatised by Langgässer's underlying assertion that devastation of this magnitude in Germany is fundamentally akin to some of the most abominable acts of destruction in world history. This was inevitably not the sort of consoling and reassuring message the grief-stricken post-war generation was seeking. Commenting on this idea, Fliedl asserts how '[eine solche Gleichsetzung] bildet seit dem ersten Weltkrieg einen polemischen Topos'.<sup>52</sup> Based on this quote, it seems reasonable to conclude here that Langgässer's clear preoccupation with allegorising corporeal historical location in a novel dense with mythological and biblical iconography, most significantly that of Berlin, would provoke adverse reactions from contemporary readers for the three main reasons listed above; firstly, because Langgässer's mythologising tendency defines the overarching portrayal of Berlin, the

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<sup>52</sup> Fliedl, *Zeitroman*, p. 41.

*Ausgangspunkt* of Langgässer's entire work, as remote, obscure and inaccessible. Secondly, because the allusions to Sodom and Gomorrah and Hiroshima reduce the historical specificity by equating it to natural catastrophes or acts of divine retribution, an insinuation that could lead to Germans' neglecting their complicity in Nazism. And thirdly, because putting the bombing of Berlin on par with several of the most abominable catastrophes in human history would have been deeply demoralising for an already emotionally scarred nation.

In addition to Langgässer's symbolic treatment of the key locations in the novel, her depiction of the protagonists is overlaid with connotative biblical and mythological discourse that similarly lacks a sense of realism. Commenting on Langgässer's euphemistic and allegorical presentations of the seven protagonists, Fliedl asserts 'das Verweissystem der Typen ist vielmehr kompliziert gestaffelt und bezieht historische und vor allem mythologische Vor-Bilder ein'.<sup>53</sup> In an attempt to confirm that the multi-dimensional use of allegory is characteristic of Langgässer's writing, we can begin by referring back to her first post-war novel. It is already evident in *Das unauslöschliche Siegel* that the work's religious didacticism is made explicit through the protagonist's name, Lazarus Belfontaine. It could be assumed here that Langgässer intends for her Catholic convert Belfontaine to embody the role of Lazarus of Bethany by way of their shared experience of the rekindling of the power of God's grace. Lazarus of Bethany was reminded of the magnitude of God's love after he was raised by Jesus from the dead,<sup>54</sup> and Lazarus Belfontaine was similarly saved by God's love and forgiveness after being summoned to return to his Catholic values following seven years of vice and debauchery. Similarly in *Märkische Argonautenfahrt* it can be seen how the descriptions of the pilgrims are constructed according to a 'Netz von typologischen Bezügen'.<sup>55</sup> The figure of the Abbess Demetria, whose name connotes the Greek mythological mother goddess Demeter, would presumably, based on this distinctive allusion, embody the watchful, vigilant, maternal and protective traits that are reminiscent of the Virgin Mary. Langgässer's portrayal of Demetria, however, is evidently more

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>54</sup> John 11:1-44

<sup>55</sup> Fliedl, *Zeitroman*, p. 36.

multi-faceted. Demetria can be seen to possess Eve-like qualities, made concrete through Langgässer's allusions to her child-like innocence and purity, characteristics that are redolent of Eve before the Fall.<sup>56</sup> This renders Demetria's depiction apparently more complex than formerly envisaged:

[...] eine Frau in der Blüte der Spätreife also, achtunddreißigjährig mit festen Händen, [...] schlank wie der Rücken von englischen Windspielen, [...] ihre Schönheit, [...] »Amen«, sagte Demetria mit einem leichten Lächeln, das ihre Lippen teilte und die makellosen, sehr weißen Zähne wie einen Fanfarenton aufblitzen ließ [...] (MA 97-99)

Yet by way of stark contrast, the Abbess's expression is likened seven pages later to the callous and monstrous gaze of Medusa, as if a wicked force had entered her body and corrupted her innocence: 'Er sah in das schmerzlich bewegte Antlitz Demetrias, das sich verändert hatte, und jetzt dem Gesicht der Medusa glich [...]' (MA105). This stark juxtaposition of images reveals an additional layer of complexity, as the changing expression in the Abbess's face not only captures the apparent suddenness with which Eve was persuaded to undertake the act of original sin, '[Eve] saw the tree was good for food [...], [she] took the fruit and ate',<sup>57</sup> but furthermore, the reference to her Medusa-like expression naturally conjures an image of snakes, a motif which is unarguably reminiscent of Eve's Fall from innocence following her encounter with the serpent in the Garden of Eden.<sup>58</sup> Other biblical references that are noteworthy in this regard are the portrayal of Hendrikje, Doctor Cuille's bondswoman or 'Leibeigene' (MA 204), who, according to Fliedl serves as the 'Typos der alttestamentarischen Zweitfrau' because Hendrikje refers to her alongside a number of biblical handmaids:<sup>59</sup> 'Ich hätte sie eigentlich Hagar oder Zelpha wie die Dienerin Lias oder Bala wie Rahels Magd nennen sollen' (MA 209). Similarly the blossoming relationship between Ewald Hauteville and Irene von Dörfer, who accompany each other on the journey to Anastasiendorf and talk candidly about their experiences in the war, is similarly likened to the fleeting, yet intensely powerful love between the Greek mythological figures Orpheus and

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<sup>56</sup> Genesis 3:1-24

<sup>57</sup> Genesis 3:6

<sup>58</sup> Genesis 3:3

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

Eurydice, ‘Wer ist nicht übrigens Orpheus heute, und wer nicht Eurydike?’ (MA 235, 275). Just as Orpheus descended to Hades to liberate his loved one, Ewald descends to the abyss of his sinful past together with Irene in order for them to liberate their souls from evil. Here Ewald as Orpheus, who ‘sich umdreht und Eurydike bei der Hand nimmt’ (MA 315) promises to act as Irene’s eternal protector, offering her the physical and emotional support needed to ensure the pair reach their sacred destination.

Developing the notion of love, particularly sexual love, as it is presented in the novel, Langgässer again reverts to a biblical and mythological framework by depicting natural human desire as an instrument of Satan. As the love between Albrecht Beifuß and Lotte Corneli would suggest, Langgässer presents sexual love as a weapon with which Satan operates to satisfy his goals. And by comparing Albrecht and Lotte to Pablo and Francesca from Dante’s *Inferno*, Langgässer also appears to be underlining the notion that sexual love signifies a source of infernal torture that can ultimately determine a person’s salvation. As can be seen in Albrecht and Lotte’s relationship, what begins as a shared sense of contentment and solace quickly transforms into the most acute form of anguish, as the couple know they are forbidden to partake in extramarital relations, but they are also aware that they must remain together on the journey. The parallel between Langgässer and Dante’s love affairs is presented explicitly in the moment when Lotte and Albrecht first embrace one another:

Sie widerstand nicht, sie gab sich hin, und plötzlich (wie in Dantes Inferno die beiden Verdammten] wurden sie von dem allmächtigen Sturm ihrer dunklen Gefühle hinweggetragen, von dem schwarzen Sog, der sie unwiderstehlich in den Wirbel des Höllentrichters zu reißen und zu entrücken schien [...] (MA 133)

As Pablo and Francesca’s unlawful behaviour resulted in their eternal confinement to the Second Circle of Hell,<sup>60</sup> Langgässer’s allegorical portrayal of Lotte and Albrecht is evidently indicative of the path to salvation that these two

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<sup>60</sup>Cf. Canto 5 in Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy: Inferno: Italian text trans and ed. by John D. Sinclair* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1939), p. 43.



individuals have denied themselves through the egotistical and selfish nature of their actions. What this passage reveals, therefore, is Langgässer's tendency to intermittently depict momentary glimpses of authentic human emotion, untouched by fairy-tale imagery, allowing the simplicity of basic human sentiments and needs to shine through. Yet this emotional moment, shared between two war-scarred individuals, is ruptured by Langgässer's Dantescan allusions, which accords the complexity of the couple's situation a whole new theological and mystical dimension. As has been seen in previous examples, Langgässer's insistence on endlessly paralleling scenarios that relate specifically to human conditions and emotions with eschatological and mythological references, many of which would presumably have been unfamiliar to a considerable proportion of Langgässer's readership, removes elements of realism. The allegorical portrayal of everyday post-war citizens has a fundamentally estranging effect, and means that readers of Germany's younger generation would have been less able to relate to a story which, somewhat ironically, deals explicitly with the sorts of fears that many people might have been experiencing in 1945.

### 1.5) Conclusion

It can therefore be concluded that *Märkische Argonautenfahrt*'s failure to receive critical acclaim since its publication in 1950 is due to the following reasons; the distancing presentations of seemingly terrestrial locations, the allegorical depictions of the protagonists, and the protagonists' own tendencies to distance themselves from the reality of post-war trauma by assuming fairy-tale-like or mythological perspectives. As has been shown, Langgässer's novel was published in a decade that witnessed increasingly more writers' and poets' explicitly rejecting the mythical and allegorical mode. This was a direct result of many writers' favouring stylistic and rhetorical devices that stressed verisimilitude without hoodwinking members of the young generation into believing that memories of the past should be obfuscated or distorted. Following the short-lived wave of enthusiasm for Christian revival in Germany in the war's

immediate aftermath, which, incidentally accounts for why *Das unauslöschliche Siegel* commanded so much interest and curiosity in 1946 and early 1947, many citizens were looking for clarity and rationality as they worked to overcome their suffering. This was similarly the result of the ongoing skepticism towards the Catholic Church for its failure to act in the face of Nazi atrocities, a factor that also accounts for the dwindling of interest in a Christian revival in Germany, and also a widespread desire for openness and truthfulness following years of dishonesty and betrayal from religious institutions.

It is precisely this need for realism and identification that cannot be met by a profoundly allegorical novel like *Märkische Argonautenfahrt*. With reference to Langgässer's figurative treatment of the seven pilgrims, Fliedl observes how the frequent usage of this literary device represents a 'Defizit an psychologisch-individueller Charakterisierung [...] als Identitätsverlust, [...] Desintegration des Subjektes und Depersonalisierung', a statement which reveals how the overlaying of biblical and mythological iconography in the protagonists' depictions is ultimately alienating and depersonalising due to the impenetrability of their true mortal identities.<sup>61</sup> In addition, the estranging portrayal of physical locations denies the reader an opportunity to truly connect to the events in narrative, thus extending the proximity between fantasy and realism. Ultimately, Langgässer's novel obfuscated the realms of truth and fantasy and expected the reader to orientate him or herself within this place of narrative uncertainty. Yet it was precisely this preoccupation with detachment from reality that rendered Langgässer's writing discomfiting and difficult for a contemporary audience, and indeed, it was very much this pervading sense of abstraction from the novel's realistic elements that ultimately led to Langgässer's sharp decline in relevance in the 1950s. The more *Gruppe 47* writers like Andersch, Richter, Böll and Schnurre evaded the disquieting themes of 'Psychologie, Mythologie und Dämonologie' in their attempt to achieve 'Wirklichkeitsnähe' through 'Parataxe und szenische Umgangssprachlichkeit',<sup>62</sup> the more difficult it became for

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<sup>61</sup> Fliedl, *Zeitroman*, p. 34.

<sup>62</sup> Eric Fischer, *Dichtung und Deutung: Beiträge zur Literaturbetrachtung* (Vienna: Globus, 1953), p.313.

Christian writers to assert their authority in the post-war literary scene.<sup>63</sup> Ultimately, as will be explored in the rest of this thesis, it was writers like Richter, Böll, Andersch and Grass that have remained read and celebrated as the true representatives of post-war West-German literature. These writers depicted truth ‘durch einen sogenannten Realismus der Unmittelbarkeit ohne Beschönigung’ and dismissed the weighty allegorical and euphemistic language that is commonly associated with the fiction of Elisabeth Langgässer.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Volker Wehdeking, ‘Eine deutsche Lost Generation? Die 47er zwischen Kriegsende und Währungsreform’, in *Nachkriegsliteratur: Spurensicherung des Krieges; gab es eine Re-education der Sprache? Antifaschismus nach dem Faschismus; das Pathos des Nullpunkts; erste Gespräche über Bäume; Poesie nach Auschwitz*, ed. by Nicolas Born and Jürgen Manthey (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1977), pp.145-164 (p. 147).

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., p.150.

CHAPTER 2  
HEINRICH BÖLL

2.1) Heinrich Böll and literary canonisation

By 1951, Heinrich Böll was already a published author, whose works included the short stories *Die Botschaft* and *Kumpel mit dem langen Haar* (1947), *Der Zug war pünktlich* (1949), and the collection of short stories *Wanderer, kommst du nach Spa* (1950).<sup>1</sup> Yet the year 1951 was a pivotal one in Böll's literary career, for it saw the publication of his first full-length prose work *Wo warst du, Adam?*, a socially critical yet morally poignant novel that depicts nine independent episodes portraying the German army's retreat from Hungary, through Slovakia, and its re-entry into the Rhineland following the defeat of Germany in May 1945.

Böll's fiction reveals a clear preoccupation with the importance of Christian values in times of hardship. Like Langgässer, Böll also came from a pious household and, as will be explored later, the role and responsibilities of the Catholic Church were dominant themes in his fiction. Yet what is particularly notable about Böll in this regard, and is perhaps what sets his fiction apart from the largely uncelebrated and somewhat 'niche' literature of other Catholic authors of this period, among them Elisabeth Langgässer, Josef Mühlberger and Franz Johannes Weinrich, is how Böll's Christian preoccupation was of equal significance as his need for literary clarity. This is reflected in the unmistakably candid and straightforward dimensions of his writing. The simplicity and

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Heinrich Böll, 'Die Botschaft', in *Werke, Romane und Erzählungen: vol 1*, ed. by Bernd Balzer (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1987), pp. 30-35; Heinrich Böll, 'Kumpel mit dem langen Haar' in *Werke, Romane und Erzählungen: vol 1*, ed. by Bernd Balzer (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1987), pp. 63-67; Heinrich Böll, *Der Zug war pünktlich* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1972); Heinrich Böll, *Wanderer, kommst du nach Spa: Erzählungen* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1971)

<sup>2</sup> Robert C. Conard, *Understanding Heinrich Böll* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1992), p. 18.

sobriety of his language,<sup>2</sup> which has often been compared to that of Hemingway, succeeded in doing precisely what Langgässer's mythical and iconographic fiction failed to achieve, in that it spoke plainly and directly to a nation bereft of clarity and rationality. Indeed, appreciation for this matter-of-fact style and laconic simplicity is accurately expressed by Conard, who describes how Böll's writing style is best encapsulated as a delicately understated lyricism that 'appealed to a spiritual longing caused by guilt and suffering' and never denied the emotions of the reader.<sup>3</sup>

Böll's merging of the expression of his moral and religious standpoint, his clarity of prose, with his tendency towards political and artistic controversy that has influenced the mass of critical attention and recognition that his fiction generated in the early post-war decades.<sup>4</sup> Success came quickly to Böll in the 1950s in a multitude of different ways, much like the fleeting phase of Europe-wide critical recognition that Langgässer had enjoyed after the publication of her first novel *Das unauslöschliche Siegel* (1946). Yet, by way of comparison, it was Böll's vast stream of readable publications that kept his public profile high. In 1951 Böll was awarded the *Literaturpreis der Gruppe 47*, followed by the Southern German Radio Prize, the *Kulturpreis der Deutschen Industrie*, and the German Critic's Prize in 1953. In the following year he received the prize from the *Tribune de Paris*, the French prize for the best foreign novel (*Haus ohne Hüter*) in 1955, the Eduard von der Heydt Prize of the city of Wuppertal and the prize of the Bavarian Academy of Arts in 1958, the *Literaturpreis der Stadt Köln*, the Great Art Prize of the State of North-Rhine-Westphalia, as well as election to the Academy of Science and the Arts of Mainz in 1959. Furthermore, in 1967 he was awarded the highly prestigious Georg Büchner Prize of the German Academy for Language and Poetry, before achieving global recognition in 1972 after he became a Nobel Laureate in Literature. It was also not only Böll's abilities as a wordsmith that were publically recognised, however, for he was also heralded for his ambassadorial talents, as seen in his 1970 election to the presidency of the

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Frank Finlay, *On the Rationality of Poetry: Heinrich Böll's Aesthetic Thinking* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996), p. 11.

P.E.N-Club *Schriftstellervereinigung*, before becoming the association's president in 1974.<sup>5</sup>

This wealth of international recognition in the form of awards and accolades offers a clear insight into how Böll subsequently acquired the reputation as the 'conscience of the [German] nation',<sup>6</sup> a description hailing him as a mouthpiece of contemporary society, and one that has been accorded to him by a number of prominent post-war literary scholars. The idea of Böll representing the German nation was also expressed several decades earlier. In 1967, sociologist and philosopher Theodor W. Adorno published a short essay on the significance of Heinrich Böll's literature in celebration of the latter's fiftieth birthday, and his comments are strikingly similar to those that have appeared in more recent scholarship: 'So ist er wirklich zum geistigen Repräsentanten des Volkes geworden, in dessen Sprache er schreibt.'<sup>7</sup> From the one perspective, this is an undeniably acclamatory description of Böll that recognises him as a sort of social spokesperson, and has remained readily associated with his literary personality in twenty-first century scholarship. The label does, however, require further contemplation here, because it predominantly alludes to Böll's criticisms of West German society. Whilst one cannot refute Böll's moral compulsion to speak out against the injustices of the war, he was also deeply perturbed by the public hypocrisy of his fellow countrymen and their predisposition to selective amnesia about the Third Reich. Commenting once 'Ein Mensch, eine Gesellschaft ohne Erinnerung ist krank',<sup>8</sup> Böll was clearly aware of the widespread disinclination to accept personal responsibility that permeated post-war Germany. What is therefore being indicated when scholars refer to Böll as a 'national conscience' is

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<sup>5</sup>Hermann Wiegmann, *Die deutsche Literatur des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2005), p. 298.

<sup>6</sup> These scholars have referred to Heinrich Böll as the 'conscience of the nation'. Cf. Keith Bullivant, *The Future of German Literature* (Oxford: Berg, 1994), p. 18; Martin Black (ed.), *Stories, Political Writings and Autobiographical Works: Heinrich Böll* (New York: Continuum, 2006), p. 5; Frank Finlay, *Rationality*, p. 4; Jan Werner-Müller, *Another Country: German Intellectuals, Unification and National Identity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 47.

<sup>7</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, 'Keine Würdigung', in *In Sachen Böll: Ansichten und Einsichten*, ed. by Marcel Reich-Ranicki (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1968), pp. 7-15 (p.7).

<sup>8</sup> Gabriele Hoffmann, *Heinrich Böll: Leben und Werk* (Bornheim Merten: Lamuv, 1986), p. 246.

not his compassionate nature, but rather his critical accentuation of social problems in Germany such as denial and repudiation.

The ability to criticise, moralise and present solutions, whilst still commanding the attention of the masses remains a central aspect of Böll's literary legacy, as well as his role as a public figurehead and ambassador. What can be seen here is a tone that is perhaps more readily associated with a political statesman or an evangelising religious leader, for whilst Böll was critical in his essays and speeches, it is widely accepted that his underlying motive was to emphasise social ills in the hope of inspiring contemplation and change. Evidently, this accusatory stance was often positively received. In 1981 the French newspaper *Le Quotidien* depicted Böll as a virtuous religious figure by referring to him as literature's last saint.<sup>9</sup> In 1985 following the death of Böll, Joachim Kaiser provided the following tribute: 'Den Heinrich Böll haben wir geliebt. Wenn es noch im 20. Jahrhundert Heilige gäbe, dann müssten sie so aussehen wie der Schriftsteller Heinrich Böll'.<sup>10</sup> In the same year, Heinrich Vormweg also praised Böll's fiction for its clear communication of the author's loyalty to the simplest of Christian teachings and their significance to humanity; 'Glaube, Liebe, Treue, die nicht in Ideologien, immer auch weniger konfessionell, sondern in Mitmenschlichkeit, einfacher Menschlichkeit begründet war'.<sup>11</sup> What emerges from these citations is a portrayal of a righteous Christian man who, albeit critical of the hypocrisy and denial of some German citizens, was ultimately concerned with the welfare of mankind, who used his fiction as a means to effectively communicate these ideas.

Expanding upon this human dimension to Böll's fiction, in his attempt to address the concerns of his era by combining clarity, historical understanding, and moral vision, one of the most distinct qualities of his writing, and one that inevitably accounts for the mass popularity of his fiction, is his 'Sympathie für den kleinen

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<sup>9</sup> Frank Finlay, *Rationality*, p. 4.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

Mann'.<sup>12</sup> This is a motif that has become associated with his works because of his explicit and implicit treatment of the plight of individuals who found themselves adrift in the tumultuous post-war years, which came to be regarded as a mere structural consequence of capitalist expansion. Indeed, this social-satirist standpoint serves to elucidate Böll's attitude towards the 'vacuity and absurdity of the clerical, political and economic institutions which shaped the lives of the exploited, hopeless, somehow enduring little men'.<sup>13</sup> Böll's thematic preoccupation with the role of the 'little man' is, however, not to be viewed as him pitying lowly citizens of humble origins whilst enjoying comfortable distance on his literary pedestal. On the contrary, his concern represents heartfelt compassion for all those individuals whose existence had been reduced to that of 'underdogs' in the aftermath of war,<sup>14</sup> either through loss of loved ones, injury, or the destruction of their homeland. His fiction functioned as a means to express genuine empathy with their suffering. This empathetic dimension can be seen in a great many of his works besides *Wo warst du, Adam?*, for instance *Kumpel mit dem langen Haar*, and *Der Wegwerfer* (1957). In *Kumpel mit dem langen Haar*, Böll reveals his concern for people at the bottom of society, and the triumphant fulfilment that derives from tending to basic human needs in the way a wounded veteran meets a young girl at a station.<sup>15</sup> They are consoled by each other's presence, and warm themselves with each other's breath, a set of images that is undeniably simple yet remarkably poignant in the way it accentuates a whole complex of basic human prerequisites. Similarly in *Der Wegwerfer*, Böll satirises the waste of human life, the senseless destruction and exploitation of humble citizens, and how this is the result of a capitalist profit motive.

Böll's fiction demonstrates his preoccupation with human affairs in the broadest sense and on all levels, be it ministering to the most basic of human needs such as warmth, food, a place to rest one's head, or through demonstrating man's desire for love, friendship and comradeship. It is this unostentatious and

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<sup>12</sup> Asit Datta, *Kleinformen in der deutschen Erzählprosa seit 1945: eine poetologische Studie* (Munich: Uni-Druck, 1972), p. 162.

<sup>13</sup> Christine Downing, *Preludes: Essays on the Ludic Imagination, 1961-1981* (Lincoln, NH: iUniverse, 2005), p. 51.

<sup>14</sup> Datta, *Kleinformen*, p. 162.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Heinrich Böll, 'Der Wegwerfer', in *Gesammelte Erzählungen: vol 1* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1994), pp. 683-693



plainspoken quality of Böll's fiction that accounts for the critical recognition and acclaim that his works generated in the Federal Republic, not just within literary scholarship or politics, but also on a more popular level by appealing to everyday people. Equally significant, however, is the fact that Böll's impact as a public figurehead and cultural figure is seemingly confined to a narrower time period than perhaps first expected. The wealth of attention from esteemed cultural critics such as Adorno, Theodor Haecker and Hans Werner Richter is largely confined to the 1960s and 1970s. Similarly, the aforementioned accolades in the form of prizes, mediatory positions and prevalence in scholarship were virtually all presented to Böll in the 1960s, 1970s and early 1980s. In order therefore to establish as accurate a picture as possible of the legacy of Böll's fiction, it is essential to examine both the context surrounding his novels' success, as well as how interest in Böll's fiction has dwindled and the reasons for this apparent decline. For what can be seen after a string of studies of Böll's fiction, including Heinz Ludwig Arnold's *Heinrich Böll*, Christian Linder's *Heinrich Böll. Leben & Schreiben 1917-1985*, and Klaus Schröter's *Heinrich Böll: Mit Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten*,<sup>16</sup> publications which serve as indicators of Böll's significance as a literary figure in post-war German society, is a noticeable lack of scholarly attention from the 1990s onwards. The only three significant publications on Böll in the last two and a half decades have been Frank Finlay's *On the Rationality of Poetry: Heinrich Böll's Aesthetic Thinking* from 1996, Viktor Böll, Markus Schäfer and Jochen Schubert's *Heinrich Böll* from 2002, and Martin Black's *Stories, Political Writings and Autobiographical Works: Heinrich Böll* from 2006,<sup>17</sup> and even these studies were published several years apart, indicating the sporadic expressions of modern-day interest in Böll's novels. In an attempt therefore to expand upon the waning of interest in Böll's fiction, this thesis shall contend that the years following the *Wende* in 1989 mark the period when literature and literary taste in Germany began to change.

The Fall of the Berlin Wall represented a key transitional phase in Germany.

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. Heinz Ludwig Arnold (ed.), *Heinrich Böll* (Munich: Text + Kritik, 1982), Christian Linder, *Heinrich Böll: Leben & Schreiben 1917-1985* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1986), Klaus Schröter, *Heinrich Böll: mit Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1982).

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Frank Finlay, *On the Rationality*, Viktor Böll, Markus Schäfer and Jochen Schubert, *Heinrich Böll* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2002) and Martin Black (ed.), *Stories*.

Legally, the process called for the states of the German Democratic Republic to form part of the Federal Republic of Germany and gave way to the term *Wiedervereinigung* emphasising a new democratic state to replace the former authoritarian regime. This constituted a whole new era for German citizens, both physically and psychologically. The celebratory mood quickly turned stale in the aftermath of unification, as friction, antagonism and an ‘us versus them’ attitude continued to characterise relations between the western and eastern parts of a united country.<sup>18</sup> The issue of dealing with an impoverished East German economy was met with considerable resentment, with many West Germans feeling burdened with the task of picking up the pieces for sixteen million East Germans. Additionally, Germany was once again expected to confront aspects of its troubled history, including not only the Holocaust, but also the Cold-War division and the furtive role of the East German Ministry of State Security (*Stasi*), which sabotaged the lives of millions. The on-going economic instability led to Helmut Kohl’s conservative government being replaced by that of his Social Democrat rival Gerhard Schröder. Schröder then formed a coalition with the Green Party and began to steer unified Germany in a wholly new direction. And perhaps most crucially, the brief Christian revival that Germany had undergone in the immediate post-war years, following the formation of the *Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands* and the *Christlich-Soziale Union in Bayern*, seemed less of a pivotal matter in the development of post-reunification politics, and possessed a distinctly alienating quality with regard to unified Germany’s new agenda.<sup>19</sup> Ultimately, the Fall of the Wall denoted a significant moment of change in German civic and political life. Citizens were suddenly faced with new priorities, new political and economic expectations, and whilst the aftermath of the *Wende* witnessed extended phases of hardship and desolation for many, it ultimately constituted a clean break from the past.

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<sup>18</sup>Ingo Roland Stoehr, *German Literature of the Twentieth Century: From Aestheticism to Postmodernism* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2001), p. 432.

<sup>19</sup>Stephen Brockmann, *German Literary Culture at Zero Hour* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2004), p. 2.

Fundamentally, Böll was a celebrated writer in the Federal Republic because of his sense of morality, clarity of prose and unostentatious plots that sought to reach out to post-war readers, irrespective of their class, gender, extent of suffering or religious conviction, and he offered them an opportunity to reflect on the grief-stricken war years with lucidity, tenacity and honesty. Yet after the *Wende*, German society had a whole new agenda. It began preoccupying itself with other, far more pressing matters, and the effect of this was to render Böll's post-war fiction increasingly less relevant. This shifting of interests was identified by Hans Magnus Enzenberger, who in 1988 declared:

Eine Person wie Heinrich Böll war ja kein historischer Zufall. [...] Die Gesellschaft hatte damals solche Erscheinungen benötigt und hervorgebracht. Dass solche Figuren heute nicht mehr vorhanden sind, muss nicht unbedingt an Talentmangel liegen oder Charakterlosigkeit. Vielleicht liegt es daran, dass sie in gewisser Weise überflüssig geworden sind. [...] Heinrich Böll haben wir verloren. Aber dafür haben wir Amnesty und Greenpeace.<sup>20</sup>

Böll's fiction was unashamedly associated with the climate of post-war West German society, and it is perhaps this factor that accounts for Enzenberger's characterisation of Böll's post-reunification reception as 'überflüssig'. As Enzenberger affirmed, the artistic developments that took root in reunified Germany and the subsequent dismissal of former celebrated figures was unrelated to the question of literary talent, for it was much more of a matter of relevance. And yet Böll's fiction lacked a timeless quality in the way it was so openly reminiscent of familiar World War themes; the barren landscapes, the trenches, the sense of futility, the existentialist fears, the Nazi commandants. This resulted in Böll's being unable to maintain his former position in the post-*Wende* literary scene, and as increasing numbers of new artistic contributions began to emerge from the East and West, many of which deployed comic and satirical strategies,<sup>21</sup> a new German literary corpus began to take shape.

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<sup>20</sup> Hans Magnus Enzensberger, *Mittelmaß und Wahn: gesammelte Zerstreungen* (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1988), p. 239.

<sup>21</sup> Jill E. Twark contends how the significant changes in politics and society following reunification can partly account for how humour and satire became key devices in new German literary texts. Cf. Jill E. Twark, *Humor, Satire and Identity: Eastern German Literature in the 1990s* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2007)

In light of this contention, the rest of this chapter will take as its focus the elements of *Wo warst du Adam?* that rendered it a celebrated and canonical work in the post-war years, focussing on the ways in which it appealed to a post-war generation. In doing so, the aim is to expose how the relevance of Böll's fiction is so confined to the pre-reunification era.

## 2.2) Days of Youth

Heinrich Böll was born in Cologne on December 21 1917 and was raised in a devout yet liberal Roman Catholic household. His father, Viktor Böll, a skilled self-employed cabinet maker, sculptor and liberal pacifist, and his wife Maria, a housewife, mother to their six children, and socialist sympathiser, played a fundamental role in cultivating Böll's lifelong piety, in that their 'Einstellung [...] durchaus von den konfessionellen Bedingungen des katholischen Glaubens bestimmt [war]'.<sup>22</sup> Clearly the effect of growing up in a staunchly Catholic milieu, and one that was characterised by a very strong rapport with his parents, was to become 'eine ganz selbstverständliche Voraussetzung und Bedingung seines Lebens',<sup>23</sup> something that is particularly evident in the way the role and responsibilities of the Catholic Church constitute some of the major topoi in Böll's fiction. Yet it was not only a strong sense of religious conviction that Viktor and Maria Böll instilled in their son's mind, for he was also heavily influenced by their tendency towards humanist ideals. After being sent to the Eastern Front in 1943, which Reid has interpreted as the result of Böll's curiosity to explore a combat existence,<sup>24</sup> he developed an even greater sense of cynicism and distrust of authoritarian power structures, namely the Third Reich's aggressive dictatorial system, the state's increasingly capitalist agenda, and, most notably, 'das einengende [...] Diktat der Amtskirche',<sup>25</sup> a stance which was first

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<sup>22</sup> Theodor Haecker, *Tag- und Nachtbücher: 1939-1945* (Munich: Kösel, 1959), p. 11.

<sup>23</sup> Wilhelm Gössmann 'Heinrich Böll: Kulturchrist', in *30 Jahre Nobelpreis: Heinrich Böll: zur literarisch-theologischen Wirkkraft Heinrich Bölls*, ed. by Georg Langenhorst (Münster: LIT, 2002), pp. 119-127 (p.125).

<sup>24</sup> J. H. Reid, 'Private and Public Filters: Memories of War in Heinrich Böll's Fiction and Non-Fiction', in *European Memories of the Second World War*, ed. by Helmut Peitsch, Charles Burdett and Clare Gorrara (Oxford: Berghahn, 1999), pp. 2-10 (p. 6).

<sup>25</sup> Haecker, *Tag*, p. 11.

observed in Böll's refusal to attend the mass and the reception of the sacraments at the age of fourteen,<sup>26</sup> and can similarly be seen in proclamations in later life about his scepticism towards 'den konfessionell etablierten Frömmigkeitsübungen' and the 'Zwangsjacke religiöser Praxis'.<sup>27</sup>

Böll was openly critical of the Catholic Church's conduct during the war, and recorded his thoughts in two short essays. In his *Brief an einen jungen Katholiken*, Böll speaks candidly about the role of the human conscience, which for him represented 'eine Instanz, die den Menschen befähigt, sein Verhalten – rückblickend wie vorausschauend – zu beurteilen und das Maß der Schuld bei jedem einzelnen zu bestimmen'.<sup>28</sup> By depicting the human conscience as a means to determine the extent of one's guilt, Böll expands this viewpoint through alluding to the bold and heroic acts of Catholic priest Bernhard Lichtenberg and Jesuit priest Alfred Delp, 'die nicht auf kirchlichen Befehl [handelten], sondern ihre Instanz war eine andere, deren Namen auszusprechen heute schon verdächtig worden ist: das Gewissen'.<sup>29</sup> Böll's exaltation of these courageous figures is of particular interest, for it firstly demonstrates clear admiration for Lichtenberg and Delp's strict adherence to their own conscience in their resistance to the Nazi regime, despite religious or political instructions that may have attempted to either discourage or prohibit their opposition. And yet it also highlights an underlying criticism of those ecclesiastics who throughout the Holocaust either claimed ignorance or simply chose to remain inactive, instead of responding to the desperate situation by acting in accordance with their Christian moral code. Clearly no far-reaching conclusions into Böll's personal views on Catholicism can be reached from this slight evidentiary basis, yet Böll's recorded thoughts on the inactivity of Catholic clerics enables one to approach the satirical nature of his fiction with a greater degree of appreciation and understanding.

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<sup>26</sup>Heinrich Böll, *Essayistische Schriften und Reden 1-3: 1952-1978* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1979), p. 539.

<sup>27</sup>Böll, Schäfer and Schubert, *Heinrich Böll*, p. 11.

<sup>28</sup>Wolfgang Stolz, *Der Begriff der Schuld im Werk von Heinrich Böll* (Frankfurt/M: Lang, 2009), p. 31.

<sup>29</sup>Heinrich Böll, *Brief an einen jungen Katholiken* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1961), p. 29.

Despite the support network of love, friendship, spiritual comfort, his family's preoccupation with moral values, and a strong religious conviction throughout his childhood, Böll grew up under a set of highly challenging circumstances, for many of his early years were characterised by deep political, social and economic strife. Evidently the religious and political convictions articulated by his parents had a significant personal impact on the young Böll, yet with the family home serving as a hothouse of lively political discussion and debate, it appears to have had an equally invaluable impact on Böll's way of thinking. The nature of this environment fostered his ability to critically and objectively question the world around him through drawing upon the religious and moral ideas developed in his youth. Firstly, the string of economic crises between 1914 and 1933 had a considerable effect on the family, particularly on his father, Viktor Böll, whose line of work as an artisan and small-scale businessman saw him unable to compete with larger economic units that could succeed with a smaller profit margin. Whilst the *goldenen zwanziger Jahre* did witness five years of significant prosperity in Germany and managed to alleviate a significant amount of hardship and suffering, the 1929 Stock Market Crash in New York signified another devastating blow to the German economy in a way that few could have anticipated, leaving three quarters of German workers unemployed.<sup>30</sup> Already sceptical of the ruling political powers, Böll's first-hand experience of financial ruin and the injustice surrounding the devastated livelihood of an honest, hardworking man like his father left him even more distrustful of the capitalist system. He had observed how his father's willingness to work had been wasted in a highly competitive economic world that promised prosperity for a select few and poverty for the rest. Even in the aftermath of the Second World War with the 1948 currency reform that laid the foundations for economic stability in the coming decades, Böll continued to be mistrustful of a system that was not only prone to collapsing, but that pursued, in his opinion, a harsh and uncaring agenda. It was this level of exploitation and immorality witnessed by Böll in the twenties and thirties that was to remain a personal woe for the rest of his life, and prompted him to make the following declaration several years later:

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<sup>30</sup>Conard, *Understanding*, p. 5.

Ich glaube das, aber ich kann das nicht beweisen, weil es ja hypothetisch ist. Meine eigene Biographie ist eben so verlaufen. Ich glaube nicht, dass es der Krieg war, ich vermute eher, dass das Erlebnis des sozialen Elends der zwanziger und dreißiger Jahre das Entscheidende war.<sup>31</sup>

This brief biographical study of Böll's upbringing thus allows us to form some conclusions about the development of his literary approach. For what is notable about Böll and Langgässer is that these two mid-twentieth-century writers both experienced the Weimar Republic in devout Catholic families and used religion as a dominant theme in their fiction. Their livelihoods were both, on numerous occasions, reduced to extreme financial penury at the hands of an uncaring capitalist system. They also both harboured political objections to National Socialist policies. Considering the biographical details of both writers, it would seem that one conclusion to be reached which account for Elisabeth Langgässer's failure to command critical attention of any notable scholars within the last fifty years and Heinrich Böll's reputation, as uttered by Adorno, as a 'geistiger Repräsentant des [deutschen] Volkes',<sup>32</sup> was the fundamental difference in their treatment of the German nation's need for clarity and rationality in the post-war years. Böll preferred unostentatious plots, low-key grace of style and depth of human understanding, which succeeded in striking a chord within a broad array of social and intellectual spheres, whilst Langgässer opted for an at times allegorically impenetrable writing style. This preoccupation with biblical and mythological allusions rendered many of her works not only fundamentally inaccessible to a large percentage of readers, but was also inadequate for those looking to directly and unequivocally confront the political and social ills of the period. It can therefore be established that whilst there is clear point of crossover in the major topoi in Langgässer and Böll's fiction, it is this disparity in the communication of the moral and religious themes and ideas central to their fiction that has ultimately influenced the comparatively small-scale interest in Elisabeth Langgässer's fiction and the post-war relevance of the works of Heinrich Böll.

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<sup>31</sup>Heinz Ludwig Arnold and Heinrich Böll, *Im Gespräch: Heinrich Böll mit Heinz Ludwig Arnold* (Munich: Edition Text + Kritik, 1971), p. 10.

<sup>32</sup>Adorno, *Keine Würdigung*, p. 7.

### 2.3) *Wo warst du, Adam?*

Eine Weltkatastrophe kann zu manchem dienen.  
Auch dazu, ein Alibi zu finden vor Gott.  
Wo warst du, Adam? 'Ich war im Weltkrieg'.<sup>33</sup>

The significance of this epigraph lies in the fact that part of it was adopted as the title for Böll's first novel and that it constitutes a clear reference to the Fall of Man. With this quotation Böll is making a critical remark about the disabling of religious belief and the limited exercising of religious practice. In addition to this, Böll appears to be calling for individual accountability for one's actions. In the context from which the passage derives, Adam is for Haecker entirely representative of man and human knowledge. The war, as it is portrayed in *Wo warst du, Adam?*, foreshadows man's estrangement from God, for it witnesses the abuse or disabling of this human knowledge. By referencing Haecker's *Tag- und Nachtbücher*, Böll's incorporation of the epigraph as an introduction to the novel naturally forms expectations in the reader's mind as to how the narrative will develop, possibly with Böll exploring the notion of superficial faith, i.e. faith that lacks true love for God. This sense of superficiality additionally lends itself to the idea that 'the war' is subsequently used by man as an alibi that allows him to evade responsibility for the atrocities he has *actively* and *knowingly* partaken in, indicative of a thoroughly unethical attempt to reconcile oneself with God. Whilst this would be a realistic and reasoned expectation based on the themes that emanate from the epigraph, what is striking is that this notion of superficiality is not actually what Böll attempts to assert in the novel. Instead, the novel preoccupies itself with Nazi perpetrators who are neither seeking an alibi, nor wishing to reconcile themselves with God. The individuals depicted by Böll are infatuated with and psychologically consumed by their military roles, and by inference have chosen to reject God's codes of human conduct. Christian faith has lost all significance to them.

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<sup>33</sup>Haecker, *Tag*, p. 51.



Accepting that the question of reconciliation is therefore not central to the novel in question, it prompts us to consider the relevance of the epigraph and Böll's reasoning behind its inclusion from another perspective. Alternatively one could contend, albeit perhaps less compellingly, that Adam's answer takes refuge in a defence that seemingly submerges man in the vastness of war, rendering man's participation in the atrocities *submissive*. As Alan Bance notes, the quotation represents both 'an excuse and an accusation [...] indictment *and* exoneration'.<sup>34</sup> The world war seems to have become its own excuse in the way that man is consumed by it, follows orders without questioning them, and acts in a way that is completely passive. This potentially offers a slightly different way to interpret Böll's incorporation of the epigraph, for without forgetting that war is fundamentally a man-made creation, it alludes to the idea that mankind has found itself at a loss, a victim of its own work. He has relinquished all control and understanding of the war's original purpose, and his attempts to reconcile his wartime conduct are therefore not superficial, but represent God saving him from the war's cruel embrace.

Böll's inclusion of Haecker's quotation is ambiguous. Despite expectations, the novel does not seek to expose the superficiality with which mankind accounts for his estrangement from God and his active abuse of human knowledge, nor does it excuse those perpetrators by revealing humankind's passivity and vulnerability at the hands of a wicked force and the rejection of human values that subsequently arises. This chapter shall therefore contend that whilst there is not necessarily a complete lack of fit between the epigraph and the novel, the link is largely unconvincing in the way it anticipates mankind's superficial attempts at reconciliation, when in fact Böll's overarching assertion in the novel is that vast numbers of people actively rejected Christian faith when they conformed to Nazism. They did not renounce their cause, and did not therefore require an alibi, for atonement was not something they were concerned about. As a result, the only clear link between the epigraph and the rest of the novel is how the opening

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<sup>34</sup>Alan F. Bance, 'Heinrich Böll's "Wo warst du, Adam?": National Identity and German War Writing. Reunification as the Return of the Repressed?', in *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 29(1993), 311-322 (p. 317).

three lines allude to some of the work's overarching themes, i.e. the role of Christian faith and the destructiveness of war. Its inclusion is otherwise a distraction from Böll's true concerns that will be expanded upon shortly, namely the virtuousness of those individuals that never erred from God's righteous path, and the destruction of a sacred Christian bond that arises when man becomes fixated with dangerous ideologies.

*Wo warst du, Adam?* has been selected for analysis in this thesis because whilst many of Böll's literary works deal with issues of morality, religion or politics, *Wo warst du, Adam?* is a novel that manages to merge Böll's stylistic and aesthetic inclinations towards satire, criticism and ridicule with the more intimate spheres of love, tenderness, marriage, family, without neglecting the sombre realms of destitution, hunger, and the aimlessness of the post-war period. It is Böll's earnest preoccupation with the aforementioned themes that accords *Wo warst du, Adam?* a unique lucidity and clarity by way of its representations of real-life experience and real human suffering. Fundamental to Böll's vision is the belief that people are emotional and sensitive beings, and his understanding and appreciation of man's basic emotions, needs and pleasures becomes increasingly self evident in the novel by way of the most insignificant narrative details: lieutenant Greck's momentary feeling of freedom whilst riding on a child's swing boat (*Wo warst du, Adam?* 52-55, from now on *WwdA*), the ripeness of fresh apricots in the midday Hungarian heat (*WwdA* 52-54); or the single moment of tenderness shared between Feinhals and Ilona before he is sent to the front and she is transported to a concentration camp (*WwdA* 71-74). It is this profoundly human element that renders *Wo warst du, Adam?* an apt choice for this discussion, which shall focus on how the aforementioned stylistic and aesthetic concerns inherent in Böll's writing have succeeded in appealing to many readers since the novel's publication.

Within the first few pages of novel it is clear that Böll's attitude towards war is marked by loathing and vexation. The opening scene of the novel includes a harrowing description of a company of soldiers preparing themselves for battle, where a clear sense of futility and misery prevails, and where a few lacklustre 'Jawohls' in response to the colonel's commands is the only expression of

motivation the bedraggled men are capable of demonstrating (*Wwda* 9). With the prospect of death increasingly imminent, the young men reflect on their hopeless situation and the pointlessness of war, ‘müde und hungrig, durstig, wütend und überdrüssig dieses verfluchten Krieges’ (*Wwda* 8), a list of simple, unadorned adjectives through which Böll captures the reality of their suffering. Furthermore, this desolate atmosphere is aesthetically complemented by the description of the barren landscape that surrounds the multitude of faceless, anonymous individuals on their journey eastwards, indicative of Böll’s avoidance of allegory and adherence to clarity of prose in his attempt to portray the sense of dejection exactly as the soldiers experienced it:

[D]er Himmel war graugebrannt [...], schlapp hing das magere Laub von den Bäumen, als sie weitermarschierten, [...] durch die Vorstadt, an Hütten vorbei, [...] vorbei an den Baracken von Lumpenhändlern, einem völlig deplacierten Block moderner, dreckiger Mietskasernen, Abfallgruben, durch Gärten, in denen Melonen faul am Boden lagen, pralle Tomaten an großen Stauden hingen, staubbedeckt, an viel zu großen Stauden, die ihnen fremd vorkamen (*Wwda* 9).

What we therefore begin to see emerging in the first few pages of the novel is a sense of wretchedness that encapsulates Böll’s own personal frustration at the level of suffering and degradation brought about through a farcical military operation, where a group of ten men all struggle towards ‘ein rostiges Eisenrohr mit ausgeleiertem Gartenhahn’ (*Wwda* 13) in order to fill their mess bowls with a few trickles of water, and where the soldier Feinhals is reduced to such a state of neglect and exhaustion that he is forced to kneel over his bowl like a dog (*Wwda* 13). The evidently realistic, yet inherently cynical portrayal of this war-time scene thus elicits a need to pity the men’s desperate cause, for what is also of particular interest about this opening scene is the soldiers’ lack of resistance, which would appear to symbolise a complete renunciation of hope. To draw a brief comparison with a scene from *Der Zug war pünktlich* (1949), the dejectedness of the soldiers is communicated through their silence during talks about a possible victory for Germany and the need to believe in the cause: “‘Der Führer wird’s schon schmeißen!’” Aber das Schweigen derer, die nichts, gar nichts sagen, ist furchtbar. Es ist das Schweigen derer, die wissen, daß sie alle

verloren sind'.<sup>35</sup> What is portrayed here is the unspoken suffering of the men, and the resentment at the merciless wastage the fascist regime has made of them. This same notion is similarly seen in the first chapter of *Wo warst du, Adam?* in the reaction of the soldiers when they see that the general has not been awarded the *Ritterkreuz*. They understand that an accolade of this nature does not represent all that it purports to, and yet 'lähmte es sie doch, daß er nicht einmal das hatte' (*WwdA* 7). The men do express some degree of sympathy with the general for not having been awarded the medal, yet their preoccupation with it is once again largely connected to their own suffering, 'Dieser magere, gelbe Generalshals ohne Schmuck ließ an verlorene Schlachten denken, misslungene Rückzüge, an Rüffel, peinliche, bissige Rüffel' (*WwdA* 7), for the medal does not signify military victory in this instance, but is rather a reminder of the pain and misery of human beings. The fact that the general has not been awarded one means that these soldiers' own sacrifices have not been recognised. And yet by way of contrast, the colonel who proudly displays the glinting decoration on his uniform, is the one who is unable to coax any motivation out of the squadron other than a few wearisome 'Jawohls', thereby imparting the overtly satirical notion that even ownership of the most prestigious of accolades which commend extreme battlefield bravery does not provide the soldiers with any physical or mental comfort.

This intrinsically cynical description of the colonel's haughtiness that emanates from his decoration, as well as the misplaced confidence in his abilities to rouse the spirits of a group of dishevelled, battle-weary troops introduces another central theme in *Wo warst du, Adam?*, namely the egotistical and corrupt nature of the German military. As can be seen in numerous episodes, the bestowing of military decorations and recognition for good military service becomes a clear leitmotif in the novel<sup>36</sup>, in the way material acknowledgment for one's actions appears to be of greater significance than fighting for one's own survival, or honourably dying for one's country. Yet what Böll is criticising here is not the desire for military recognition as an expression of loyalty to the National

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<sup>35</sup>Heinrich Böll, *Der Zug*, p. 18.

<sup>36</sup>Maggie Sargeant, *Kitsch & Kunst: Presentations of a Lost War* (Bern: Lang, 2005), p. 179.

Socialist cause, but rather the sheer ludicrousness of the behaviour of some individuals who, for reasons of either vainglorious materialism or indifference to the Nazi agenda, believe that a medal will provide their suffering with a sense of purpose, or will serve as a consolation for the wretched existence they have found themselves trapped in. It is not that Böll is depicting those who have received military recognition as ‘Träger nationalsozialistischer Orden von den “Opfern”’,<sup>37</sup> in the sense that they have been acknowledged for their ruthless adherence to the National Socialist operation to exterminate racial enemies. Instead Böll is depicting a series of far more complex characterisations, in the way the National Socialist cause appears to have become insignificant for many soldiers. What is explicitly being commented on in *Wo warst du, Adam?* is how these individuals’ desire for honour was not in the name of the Third Reich, but was rather a final, egotistical attempt to better their status and to prove that their suffering had not been in vain, ultimately serving to communicate Böll’s viewpoint that war is illogical and a waste of human life.

An example of this can be seen in chapter six, where Böll offers a farcical scenario depicting sergeant Finck who has been sent on an absurd mission by his commanding officer to buy a case of fifteen bottles of Tokay wine, which he is then forced to drag across the enemy line of fire and refuses to surrender despite the danger it poses to him and his comrades. Böll underlines the preposterous nature of the situation by portraying Finck in a highly pitiable way; ‘[...] der Kleine schüttelte eigensinnig den Kopf, [...] er wackelte, schüttelte traurig den Kopf’ (*Wwda* 86). The lowly Finck soon meets his death in a thoroughly undignified way when a grenade hits the suitcase, showering him in wine and shards of broken glass (*Wwda* 88). What is therefore being satirised here is a character who not only sought commendation for the most inane of tasks during a battle situation, but one who was so fixated with pleasing his commanding officer that it led him to forsake his role as a German soldier by prioritising the Tokay wine over the safety of his battalion. This once again harks back to Böll’s preoccupation with the theme of futility, as his pitiable portrayal of Finck’s situation reveals how the latter’s desire for honour was fundamentally

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<sup>37</sup>Jochen Vogt, *Heinrich Böll* (Munich: Beck, 1978), p. 43.

unconnected to fighting the war. The significance of this scene lies in Finck's foolish preoccupation with the successful completion of a task set by his commanding officer and his subsequent disengagement from his responsibility as a soldier, a scenario which alludes clearly to the absurdity and pointlessness of the soldiers' suffering.

This fixation on praise and recognition, and the apparent indifference towards the military operation at hand is also seen later in chapter six, where lieutenant Greck also meets his fate in the most ignoble fashion moments before he is due to receive his *Eisernes Kreuz* (*WwdA* 119). In the fourth chapter, it becomes apparent that being awarded medals is important for Greck, who is afflicted with feelings of inferiority because of his relatively unadorned uniform. This is largely a result of his mother's own obsession with acquiring status symbols and her constant criticism for his lack of decoration: 'Beckers Hugo war in Urlaub hier. Er hat das EK 1. Allerlei für einen sitzengebliebenen Quartaner, der nicht einmal die Gehilfenprüfung als Metzger bestand' (*WwdA* 63). It is precisely this vain obsession with military recognition that Böll continues to criticise in this instance, for Greck's interest in accumulating trinkets is not an expression of his loyalty to the Nazi regime, but rather a pathetic attempt to prove himself worthy to his mother and to compensate for a sense of personal inadequacy. In an attempt to shame this highly dishonourable obsession and his superficial values, Böll portrays lieutenant Greck in a grotesque scatological death scene that borders on parody. His chronic stomach cramps which he has had to endure his whole life as a result of malnourishment from his mother (*WwdA* 60) have become so paralysing that the partly nude lieutenant is forced to crawl through a putrid sludge of decomposed corpses and defecate during a heavy shelling raid; 'Er hielt sich an der Mauer fest, während sein nacktes Gesäß fror und in seinem Darm sich dieser wühlende Schmerz immer neu bildete wie langsam sich ansammelnder Explosionsstoff, der ungeheuerlich wirken würde [...]' (*WwdA* 95). The absurd and ironic nature of this death scene is twofold. Firstly, it occurs seconds before Greck is awarded the medal he has longed for since the start of his military career, and secondly, the circumstances that prevent him from receiving the *Eisernes Kreuz* are ultimately attributable to his mother's neglect.

This scene therefore represents another example of Böll harshly criticising the superficial prioritisation of ornaments of rank and indicators of status above military duty, an aspect of the German military that he deemed particularly corrupt.

Remaining within this thematic framework, the ideas of perversion and betrayal within the military introduce another discussion about Böll's views on the evils of National Socialist military practice, namely through the portrayal of Filskeit, a fanatical commandant of a concentration camp who appears in chapter seven of the novel. What the reader first discovers about Filskeit is his perverse obsession with choral music. Having studied music in his youth, he became choirmaster of the *MGV Concordia* before joining the Hitler Youth, where his avid interest in and ardent admiration for racist ideology saw him quickly progress to the position of regional choirmaster. He also published an article entitled 'Die Wechselbeziehung zwischen Chor und Rasse' (*Wwda* 104-105), which demonstrated his extreme racial views. Yet what Böll presents as particularly disconcerting about Filskeit's musical fixation and his strict adherence to National Socialist ideology is the way newly arriving deportees are forced to audition for him, and how the quality of their performance dictates their chances of survival; 'Null bekamen nur wenige – sie kamen sofort in den Lagerchor, und wer zehn hatte, hatte wenig Aussicht, länger als zwei Tage am Leben zu bleiben' (*Wwda* 109). In addition to his pitiless treatment of camp inmates, what is also notable about Böll's portrayal of this merciless partisan of racial purity is his almost caricature-like demeanour. The description of his pallid face, expression of brutality, and his angular, oversized chin (*Wwda* 106), for instance, is noticeably scornful and mocking, as if to convey the idea that Filskeit's inner ugliness is complemented by the unpleasantness of his outward appearance. Böll also ridicules Filskeit's behaviour and mannerisms, depicting him as someone who is wildly unhinged and overwrought:

Er war streng, sah auf Ordnung und duldet keinerlei Unkorrektheit, [...] er brach in Raserei aus, wenn jemandem eine Schlampigkeit unterlief [...] er rauchte nicht, trank nicht und hatte für Frauen nichts übrig [...] es war sein Ehrgeiz, alle Befehle korrekt auszuführen. (*Wwda* 105-109)

Yet what is most intriguing about Böll's presentation of a character that is so absurdly neurotic and incapable of non-military human interaction is that it is impossible to either loathe or pity him. Whilst Böll's linguistic style is traditionally lucid, plain speaking, and without unnecessary literary hyperbole, what renders the portrayal of Filskeit particularly fascinating in this instance is the fact that his whole demeanour is so unrealistic that he almost appears like a cartoon villain or a 'cardboard caricature'.<sup>38</sup> His extremist fascination with order, routine, efficiency and the application of these traits in the extermination of racial enemies renders Filskeit so utterly removed from ordinary human behaviour and emotion that the reader can draw only one conclusion: that Böll, through his villainous portrayal of Filskeit, is ridiculing military figures whose commitment to Nazism and abandonment of faith and human morals has become so extreme that their behaviour is more akin to that of sub-humans or robots. Their cruel and distorted ideology has rendered them enemies of their own species.

It is this very notion of relinquishing human values and Christian faith which makes the character Ilona Kartök so pivotal in the novel *Wo warst du, Adam?*, for she represents the figure, 'die den nach Heinrich Böll wahren Glauben am stärksten verkörpert'.<sup>39</sup> Ilona is a Jewish woman who first appears in the narrative because of her fleeting love affair with the German soldier Feinhals. Depicted by Serrer as a 'construction of various stereotypes',<sup>40</sup> Ilona is beautiful, intelligent, a lover of children, selfless, and, beyond that, a converted, devout Catholic. Her connection to Filskeit lies in the fact that, following the gruelling journey to the extermination camp in a small furniture van, Ilona is the first prisoner to sing for him. She performs the *Allerheiligenlitanei*, which awakens in Filskeit a psychotic rage. Ilona's beauty of her voice and the piety with which

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<sup>38</sup>Dieter and Jacqueline Rollfinke, *The Call of Human Nature: The Role of Scatology in Modern German Literature* (Amhurst, MA: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1986), p. 120.

<sup>39</sup>Patrick Trapp, *Der Nicht-Kirchliche Katholizismus Bölls als Gegenpol zur nationalsozialistischen Ideologie in Bölls Roman "Wo warst du, Adam?"* (Norderstedt: Grin, 2006), p. 15.

<sup>40</sup>Michael Serrer, 'Parallelisierung und Grenzverwischung: zur Darstellung von Juden im Werk Heinrich Bölls', in *Vom Umgang mit der Shoah in der deutschen Nachkriegsliteratur*, ed. by Norbert Oellers (Berlin: Schmidt, 1995), pp. 50-64 (p. 53).



she performs the Catholic liturgy is repulsive to Filskeit, for she represents ‘a combination of all his bêtes noires’,<sup>41</sup> namely his rejection of Christianity and his aversion to the Jews and women. Unable to suffer her singing for a moment longer, the enraged commandant fires blindly at his helpless victim: ‘er nahm mit zitternden Fingern seine Pistole, wandte sich um, schoß blindlings auf die Frau, die stürzte und zu schreien anfang’ (*WwdA* 113). The sheer brutality of this episode and Filskeit’s inability to look a pious woman like Ilona in the eyes represents a pivotal thematic moment in *Wo warst du, Adam?*, for it deals with the consequences of man’s estrangement from God after choosing to conform to a new, far more brutal behavioural code.

This harrowing episode sees Böll presenting Ilona’s faith ‘als Gegenpol zur nationalsozialistischen Ideologie’,<sup>42</sup> in the way her devotion represents ‘das Zentrum der Gläubigkeit und Frömmigkeit’.<sup>43</sup> Not forgetting that Ilona is a Catholic convert, it seems that Böll has incorporated this narrative element with the intention of it being viewed entirely positively, for it alludes to the true magnitude of Ilona’s devotion. As is heard in her prayers before she auditions for Filskeit, her commitment to God is pure, and her requests are selfless, for she does not pray ‘um etwas zu bekommen oder von irgend etwas verschont zu bleiben, nicht um einen schnellen, schmerzlosen Tod oder, um ihr Leben, sie betete einfach’ (*WwdA* 100). Ilona is pious because it provides her with a sense of peacefulness and tranquillity in the minutes before her encounter with Filskeit; it ‘erfüllte sie mit einer kühlen Heiterkeit’ (*WwdA* 100). It is this same belief in the comfort of religious practices that Ilona advocates to Feinhals before their separation by telling him to pray and console God. Feinhals later reflects on her words upon returning home and promises to ‘lesen, möglichst nicht viel arbeiten und beten, um Gott zu trösten, nicht um ihn um etwas zu bitten’ (*WwdA* 155).

The narrative significance of Ilona in *Wo warst du, Adam?* is thus her role as an archetypal Christian according to Böll’s own religious values. She represents adherence to simple and pure Christian teachings through her devotion to God

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<sup>41</sup> Sargeant, *Kitsch*, p. 196.

<sup>42</sup> Trapp, *Gegenpol*, p. 16.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

and her attempts to impart this goodness to others, and it is this simplicity of religious practice that Böll champions above all else. As Franz Alt explains in the foreword to 'Brief an einen jungen Katholiken' 'Böll war eindeutig und wahrhaftig [...]. Das wesentlich Katholische war für Heinrich Böll immer Jesus, nicht Theologien und Philosophien über Jesus',<sup>44</sup> a quotation which perfectly encapsulates Böll's belief in the uncomplicatedness of worship, a trait that is very clear in the figure of Ilona. Her faith is not governed by unnecessary external influences, such as the superficial concerns of the *Amtskirche* or the Catholic Youth that Böll outlines in his *Brief an einen jungen Katholiken* (see above), for Ilona's faith denotes an unsullied, wholesome form of devotion. In this way, her death has a symbolic quality, and represents one of Böll's overarching ideas that became obscured by the epigraph at the start of the novel. On a moral level, men like Filskeit have become absorbed by and obsessed with the atrocities they have committed, and immerse themselves in their military role. Regardless of whether this signifies estrangement from God and a relinquishing of human values, it becomes irrelevant to men like Filskeit, who believe that they now conform to a higher force. And yet in the moment when an epitome of pure religious devotion stands before him, Filskeit is suddenly faced with all the knowledge and goodness he has abused through his adherence to the National Socialist regime. Thus whilst Ilona's death is an irrefutably appalling event, in the way Filskeit assassinates her out of sheer abhorrence for her piety, the true didactic significance of the episode lies in its representation of an unforeseen meeting between the notion of Christian faith and the notion of religious estrangement. The fact that Filskeit shoots is ultimately indicative of his own moral and spiritual failings. It is a decision to kill or not kill, to follow the regime or to betray it, to conform to what God would do or what Hitler would do. This is the moral predicament that Filskeit finds himself in during Ilona's audition, and his rejection of God's code of human conduct an ardent criticism of the National Socialist agenda that subtly emanates from the epigraph at the start of the novel; how the war psychologically consumed men like Filskeit, and lead them to abuse moral codes imparted to humankind by God. Filskeit prioritises the fascist code, he defends his position, and believes he will never need to

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<sup>44</sup>Heinrich Böll, *Brief*, pp. 11-12.

justify his decision before God, something that is now only an ethereal phenomenon to him.

Through this traumatic episode, Böll makes a poignant comment on civilisation, and the importance of mankind's adherence to God's moral teachings. As has been seen in his portrayal of Ilona, Böll's emphasis on her honest, human qualities, including her faith in God, kindness, patience and altruism, renders her an archetypal vision of a Christian values, and furthermore, a clear antithesis to the negative qualities attributable to Nazi sympathisers that reject God as their leader. And yet it is this fundamental preoccupation with human issues that renders *Wo warst du, Adam?* a novel that is primarily concerned about the goodness of mankind, rather than the evils of National Socialism. It is a novel that confronts the tragic erring ways of human beings, and contemplates those who have lost their true way by becoming absorbed in dangerous fascist agendas. It is also a novel that understands human suffering, and cherishes moments of warmth, intimacy, and friendship, and the hope that these offer to people. Be it when Ilona and Feinhals enjoy the comfort and safety of their first warm embrace (*WwdA* 75-76), when the beautiful, young Hungarian girl allows Schneider to kiss her on the cheek after delivering fruit to the hospital (*WwdA* 41), or the fleeting moment of companionship between Feinhals and Brecht as they both enjoy a few sips of Tokay wine before marching forward in battle (*WwdA* 89). By allowing these ephemeral moments of bliss to shine forth in the narrative, Böll encourages the reader to trust in the inherently honourable qualities that man is capable of demonstrating, and to have faith in his inner goodness. This on-going preoccupation with familiar moments of tenderness and pleasure that occur in the midst of misery and suffering thereby functions as an understated reminder of truly great ways of humankind, as bestowed on us by God, can offer comfort even in the most abysmal of circumstances, and how they can impart the required knowledge to ensure that man finds himself back onto the right path in life. Through such depictions of man's truly honourable qualities, Böll is also subtly encouraging readers of post-war generations to reflect on the dangers that inevitably arise by replacing wholesome Christian teachings with extremist ideologies, as is shown in the portrayal of Filskeit.

## 2.4) Conclusion

To summarise this discussion, it is important to emphasise how the aforementioned didactic qualities render Böll's *Wo warst du, Adam?* a remarkable post-war novel, not only in the way it offers a satirically critical, yet frankly honest look at the moral and spiritual failings of Nazi sympathisers that lead the German nation into disrepute, but more crucially in the way it focuses on the fundamental goodness and magnitude of Christian teachings.

Böll grew up in an environment that was characterised by a strong sense of religious conviction, an interest in humanist ideals, and a deep distrust of authoritarian and capitalist power structures. It therefore comes as no surprise that his own religious and moral ideas are so deeply intertwined in his post-war fiction. As can be seen in *Wo warst du, Adam?*, his deeply unflattering and, at times, cartoon villain portrayals of characters like Filskeit, or the farcical description of Greck's death scene which mocks his vainglorious obsession with military decoration is, on a superficially aesthetic level, clearly emblematic of the ruthless and selfish behaviour that some human beings are capable of. Yet on a more understated thematic level, these aspects of the novel are also indicative of man's capacity to reject God and to relinquish moral ideals that are central to humankind. In this regard, what renders *Wo warst du, Adam?* such an important post-war novel is that despite its relatively basic narrative structure in the form of nine independent episodes, and the incorporation of Böll's traditionally lucid and syntactically straightforward linguistic approach that is visible in many of his works, it deals with a number of highly complex and challenging religious and moral themes that found perfect resonance within post-war German society.

It is precisely these qualities that account for the canonical status Böll acquired in the pre-reunification years, and the subsequent wealth of scholarly interest in his work. Böll's fiction was highly sympathetic to the post-war climate, and earned him the reputation as a mouthpiece for German society. Yet this voice faded into comparative obscurity after the *Wende* in 1989 because Böll's empathetic

Christian words lost their relevance and their resonance with contemporary political agendas. This significant political and social turning point marked a momentous change in German literary history, and accounts for the comparatively small amount of international scholarly interest that Böll's fiction has received for the past two and a half decades.

*Wo warst du, Adam?* is a novel through which Böll sought to vocalise his frustration about the ills of the National Socialist regime and the wastage of human life brought about by war. But more importantly, it is a novel that reveals Böll's clear preoccupation with human affairs in the broadest sense and his understanding of the most basic of human needs, as if to convey a sense of optimism and hope for humanity. It is a work that honours humankind's capacity to trust in God in times of hardship, and that praises those who cherish the teachings that He bestowed upon humanity. Through upstanding characters like Ilona and Feinhals, Böll reminds his reader about the importance of these codes of decent Christian conduct, such as love, kindness, friendship, comradeship, sharing and tenderness, and the hope that these can offer to others in need. Indeed, it is this unostentatious ability to empathise with the emotions and suffering of his post-war readers and to instil a sense of hope within them, combined with the unmistakably candid, realistic and fundamentally human dimensions of his writing, that account for the post-war success of this work, and enable us to better appreciate why Heinrich Böll's canonical status is confined to the pre-reunification era.

CHAPTER 3  
WOLFGANG KOEPPEN

The focal points of this chapter are the religious and moral dimensions of Wolfgang Koeppen's post-war novel *Der Tod in Rom* (1954), the Modernist tendencies that rendered him something of an artistic 'Einzelgänger' in the post-war years in Germany,<sup>1</sup> as well as the failure of his post-war trilogy, *Tauben im Gras* (1951), *Das Treibhaus* (1953), and *Der Tod in Rom* (1954) to earn the same level of success and critical acclaim accorded to the likes of Andersch, Bachmann, Böll, Grass, and other canonised writers of the post-war period.

Koeppen's literary career has spanned six decades, and is remarkable in the sense that Koeppen was exposed to all the significant political and cultural ideologies of 20<sup>th</sup> century Germany, from pre-1914 imperialism to the establishment of the Weimar Republic in 1919, the years of Nazism, right up until reunification in 1989. Yet Koeppen's attempts to artistically capture his unique perspective on pre- and post-war Germany were in vain, for other than a handful of albeit notable literary and cultural scholars who have repeatedly hailed him, alongside Böll and Grass, as one of the most important West-German writers of the last century, Koeppen's works have remained, both during the 1950s and in more recent decades, vastly less read and less celebrated.<sup>2</sup> Any reader familiar with Koeppen's post-war fiction will be aware of its ferocity and outspokenness, and its disquieting content, all of which are devices and traits particularly associated with his post-war trilogy. In *Das Treibhaus*, for example, social democrat Felix Keetenheuve returns to Germany after the war in search of a clean break with the past.<sup>3</sup> He soon realises, however, that the new Germany is being governed by the same fascist figures that upheld the Third Reich, a macabre revelation that ultimately leads to the protagonist's suicide. Similarly in *Der Tod in Rom*, the

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<sup>1</sup>Marcel Reich-Ranicki, 'Der Fall Koeppen' in *Über Wolfgang Koeppen*, ed. by Ulrich Greiner (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1976), pp. 100-108 (p. 101).

<sup>2</sup>Michael Hofmann, Introduction, Wolfgang Koeppen, *Death in Rome* (London: Penguin, 1992), p. v.

<sup>3</sup>Wolfgang Koeppen, *Das Treibhaus* (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 2010).

reader is presented with a series of morose images, including Siegfried Pfaffrath imagining the taste of the ash of incinerated Jewish victims, as well as his inner strife resulting from conflicting emotions stemming from his homosexual and paedophilic inclinations. Additionally, Koeppen presents Siegfried's uncle, former high-ranking SS officer Gottlieb Judejahn, as a callous sexual predator, whose obsession with dominance and violence leads him to a brutal encounter with a young Italian barmaid. This dark and acrimonious quality to Koeppen's post-war works heavily coloured the perceptions of contemporary readers, who in the early 1950s, when attempting to rebuild their lives in the wake of a brutal World War, were very much averse to reading such acerbic analyses of the flaws of post-war West-German society. Indeed, as will be expounded upon shortly, many literary and cultural critiques from a range of scholarly and non-scholarly sources serve to indicate how such widespread disregard for his fiction, particularly for the novel *Der Tod in Rom*, was indeed a consequence of Koeppen's determination to publish such a scathing socio-critical indictment of the newly founded Federal Republic.

Yet whilst it remains indubitable that Koeppen rendered in his novels a decidedly bleak account of contemporary Germany society that accounted for his unpopularity, it is the contention of this chapter that Koeppen was not merely a tough critic with nihilistic visions and a harsh mode of expression. On the contrary, Koeppen was a highly compassionate writer who sympathised with his contemporaries' feelings of uncertainty, their pursuit of clarity, their emotional anguish, and their moral shortcomings. By publishing *Der Tod in Rom* and through the development of characters like Gottlieb Judejahn and Friedrich Wilhelm Pfaffrath, Koeppen was striving to provide a desolate, yet plausible and honest account of a society that was both unwilling to deal with its heinous past and apparently indifferent to its on-going contamination by evils of the former fascist regime. Yet it was precisely this degree of forthrightness, combined with a deeply cynical portrayal of the post-war socio-political climate, a depiction of three emotionally and morally disturbed protagonists, allusions to corruption within the Catholic Church, the presentation of history as a habitual cycle of pain and violence, as well Koeppen's failure, or perhaps even refusal, to offer a solution in light of such highly critical observations, that ultimately rendered the

work unappealing for a contemporary audience. These were the characteristics that lingered in the minds of his post-war readers, and resulted in a negative assessment of Koeppen's seemingly nihilistic perspective on the prosperity of the German people and the Federal Republic.

Koeppen was, however, very much preoccupied with the inner condition of the German people, in particular with the misery and pessimism of the younger generation. This chapter intends to demonstrate that Koeppen was not attempting to depict the situation in post-war West Germany as futile, nor was he looking to force his readers into a state of utter dejectedness for the sheer sake of evoking feelings of guilt. Instead, Koeppen was attempting to force the hands of his contemporaries to take a long, hard, and often painful look in the mirror to stimulate collective critical thinking and self-reflection in the hope of encouraging his readers to confront their own personal trials and tribulations so as to guide them towards a moral path.<sup>4</sup> For in the midst of this acerbic critique of contemporary society seen in the portrayals of Gottfried Judejahn and Friedrich Wilhelm Pfaffrath, what can be seen in the character Adolf Judejahn, the son of former SS officer Gottlieb Judejahn, is a man striving to achieve moral and spiritual goodness, having turned to God for consolation after the war made him lose faith in humanity. An embodiment of the post-war religious revival in Germany, the narrative function of Adolf is one that has been obscured and overlooked, for in actual fact he can be seen to symbolise one of the key thematic ideas in the novel - the choice of faith over nihilism.

By drawing on the Christian dimensions that constitute one of the most disregarded thematic strands in *Der Tod in Rom*, the intentions of this chapter will be to consider Koeppen's marginal position in the canon. To achieve this, the study will provide *Der Tod in Rom* with some deserved consideration and exploration that has hitherto been swamped by the wealth of negative opinion of

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<sup>4</sup> This is an argument supported by Koch, who contested that Koeppen was concerned about the human condition, and that by choosing not to focus on humankind's positive traits and by not offering quick-fix solutions to the post-war era's problems it would provoke the need for the individual's own personal self-reflectivity on man's existence after the war. Cf. Susanne Koch, 'In the Footsteps of Pascal and Kierkegaard: Ethics and Faith in Wolfgang Koeppen's Postwar Novels' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Cincinnati, 2009), p. 30.



contemporary critics. It will explore Koeppen's Modernist influences and question the extent to which these account for the negative reactions to his fiction. In addition to this, it will reflect on the moral and spiritual nature of his writing, and will explore the underlying moral messages that Koeppen sought to diffuse into post-war West German society. As Hans-Ulrich Treichel declared in an interview in 2010 when talking about what can be learned from Koeppen's fiction, he poignantly responded 'Etwas über das Menschsein, die *Conditio humana*', and affirmed how 'dieser Autor lehrt uns das Fühlen'.<sup>5</sup> It is precisely this covert human element to Koeppen's fiction that was explored by Treichel in his 1984 dissertation *Fragment ohne Ende*, and led him to declare: 'Es gibt immer einen Grund, auf Koeppen aufmerksam zu machen'.<sup>6</sup> This is an assertion that will constitute a central objective in this chapter, specifically the need to reassess the moral and didactic nature of Koeppen's fiction, and to provide *Der Tod in Rom* and its underlying Christian messages with a fresh reappraisal.

### 3.1) Der Einzelgänger

In an attempt to start piecing together the reasons behind the negative assessment of Koeppen's fiction, it is pertinent to contemplate the oppressive environment in which Koeppen grew up and his early literary curiosities. Born on June 23 1906, Koeppen's early years were either spent in Pomeranian Greifswald or at his Uncle's house in the eastern town of Ortelsburg, where the young child first began showing signs of introversion and detachment by demonstrating minimal childlike interests for a boy his age.<sup>7</sup> Instead, Koeppen occupied himself with the multitude of politically-oriented publications that were delivered to his Uncle's house each day:

[...] der Onkel hatte eine große Bibliothek, und er hielt, was damals in Ortelsburg, wo er hingekommen war, die im Ersten Weltkrieg zerstörte

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<sup>5</sup>Hans-Ulrich Treichel, 'Hans-Ulrich Treichel über Wolfgang Koeppen: "Dieser Autor lehrt uns das Fühlen"', *Der Tagesspiegel*, July 30. 2010, pp. 14-15.

<sup>6</sup>Treichel, *Dieser Autor*, p. 14.

<sup>7</sup>Stanley Craven, *Wolfgang Koeppen: A Study in Modernist Alienation* (Stuttgart: Hans-Dieter Heinz, 1982), p. 40.

Stadt wieder aufzubauen, etwas Besonderes war, außer der ‘*Ortelsburger Zeitung*’, das ‘*Berliner Tagesblatt*’, den ‘*Vorwärts*’, die ‘*Kreuz-Zeitung*’, die ‘*Königsberger Hartungsche Zeitung*’ – täglich kamen fünf, sechs Zeitungen ins Haus.<sup>8</sup>

This fascination with reading became something of a daily ritual for the young Koeppen, who, at the age of eight, sought to avail himself of as much reading material pertinent to the artistic world as possible: ‘[I]ch las alle Kritiken, alles, was über Literatur, Theater und Kunst unterm Strich stand’.<sup>9</sup> Seemingly, it was this literary companionship that offered Koeppen a degree of stimulation and interest that he evidently favoured over human interaction, as it remained with him long into his teenage years. At fifteen he began investing much of his time and energy in devouring works of contemporary literature, which led him to develop refined literary tastes and a particular fondness for Modernist writers, including Benn, Becher, Döblin, Kafka, Mann and Brecht. This blossoming literary curiosity was, however, to have a negative effect on his character development, for Koeppen remained indifferent to the prospect of human relationships and integrating with those around him, preferring a life of privacy and solitude. Soon after starting at the Hindenburg-Gymnasium in Ortelsburg in 1917, the reclusive Koeppen became a regular truant and spent his days developing an alienating educational ritual of reading in bed: ‘Im Bett las ich, lernte ich. Fast möchte ich sagen, daß ich mir mehr Wissen im Bett angeeignet als ich Kenntnisse von der Schule mitbekommen habe’.<sup>10</sup> His capacity to devour the contents of the school syllabus at such speed was to have a negative impact on his reputation at school, as the young Koeppen quickly became bored of the classroom and quarrelled with his teachers and peers.

It was, however, not only Koeppen’s literary curiosity and zealous search for knowledge that beckoned him into a world of seclusion. This is also attributable to the levels of conservative patriotism prevalent in Greifswald that Koeppen was

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<sup>8</sup>Wolfgang Koeppen, ‘Der Weltgeist ist Literat: Heinz Ludwig Arnold: Gespräch mit Wolfgang Koeppen’, in *Einer der schreibt: Gespräche und Interviews*, ed. by Hans-Ulrich Treichel (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1995), pp. 84-115 (p. 88).

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 112.

exposed to as a young teenager. The strong conservative interests that were widespread in the community led him to become increasingly more withdrawn and reclusive, an experience described by Craven as ‘an overpowering sense of oppression, [...] marked by an intense desire to flee to a less constricting environment’.<sup>11</sup> Depicted by Ochs as a ‘kleinstädtisch-konservative Umfeld’, Koeppen appears to have been stifled by the staunch traditionalism of the Greifswald locals, for it prompted strong feelings of estrangement from his country and countrymen and resulted in a desire to flee to a place of mental and physical solitude to replace the claustrophobic world he had come to call his *Heimat*.<sup>12</sup> In the opening pages of his self-reflective short prose piece *Jugend* (1976), Koeppen speaks autobiographically about his aversion to the banality and conceitedness of the Greifswald community. What is illuminating here is that although Koeppen’s depiction is predominantly detailed and descriptive, indicative of the narrator’s presumed engagement and connection with his surroundings, one cannot avoid a clear sense of both mockery ‘den nie erreichten Himmel [...] tollkühner Planung [...] vergreist [...] Sumpf’- and dullness in Koeppen’s words. In the quotation below Koeppen also lists the tedious intricacies of the bourgeois routines of his neighbours, which reveals how stiflingly mundane and superficial he found the habitual practices of the Greifswald community:

[...] die Türme, die Dächer von St. Nikolai, St. Jakobi und St. Marie drückten schwer die Gemeinde, glichen, aus roten Backstein gegen den nie erreichten Himmel gebaut, Festungen tollkühner Planung, vergreist in Wüste, Wildnis und Sumpf, [...] während es in den Gassen ringsum behäbig nach Abendbrot roch, nach Spickaal, nach Bratkartoffel und Fisch, nach Speck und Kleiebrot, [...] nach bürgerlicher Bescheidenheit, tückischer Demut, familiärer Niedertracht, in Furcht und Enge und blind in Dummheit [...] wie hasste ich die Stadt und wünschte die Schlangen herbei, eine gleitende Natter um jeden Pfosten [...].<sup>13</sup>

The decisive rejection of his birthplace is clear in the way Koeppen comfortably assumes the role of a disengaged, contemptuous narrator. Indeed, it is almost as

<sup>11</sup> Craven, *Wolfgang Koeppen*, p. 39.

<sup>12</sup> Tilmann Ochs, *Kulturkritik im Werk Wolfgang Koeppens* (Münster: LIT, 2004), p. 43.

<sup>13</sup> Wolfgang Koeppen, ‘Jugend’, in *Gesammelte Werke in sechs Bänden: 5 vols*, ed. by Marcel Reich-Ranicki (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1986), pp. 7-100 (p. 11).

if he revels in playing the part of an impartial observer, despite actually knowing the place intimately.

### 3.2) Die Gruppe 47

By reflecting on the development of Koeppen's zealous literary curiosity, the sense of unease and oppression brought about by the strong conservative views of his Greifswald neighbours, as well as his lifelong inability to integrate himself and settle into a community, what can be seen is an image of a man who was, unquestionably, an 'Einzelgänger'. Its significance, however, requires further clarification. The reclusive nature of Koeppen's personality does not necessarily account for his particular aesthetic and literary interests, nor can it explain the widespread lack of interest in his fiction and his status as an 'un-canonised' post-war writer. It does, however, provide insightful biographical context that enables us to comprehend the reasons behind the development of his non-conformist literary style, the inspiration he took from the experimental works of Modernists, his minimal participation in the *Gruppe 47*, as well as his refusal to adhere to their sparse style and aversion to poetic verbiage, all of which are relevant details pertaining to the disinterest in his fiction in the 1950s. By comprehending Koeppen's role as an 'Einzelgänger', one is better able to understand the decidedness with which he shaped his own, at times contentious literary path, and, in doing so, learn to assess *Der Tod in Rom* from a more informed perspective.

A particularly illuminating issue to consider in this regard is Koeppen's interaction with the *Gruppe 47*, and the extent to which he, as a fellow post-war writer, was prepared to join forces with Andersch and Richter in their pursuit of new modes of literary representation. Interestingly, many *Gruppe 47* members recognised and admired Koeppen's literary ability, and were quick to overlook the torrents of harsh criticism that were directed at his three novels throughout the 1950s, welcoming him as one of their own. Criticisms of Koeppen's writing will be explored in greater detail shortly. Many of the group's writers, including Andersch, Böll, Enzensberger, Jens, as well as prominent newspaper critics Raddatz and Reich-Ranicki took the task of defending Koeppen's fiction into

their own hands and produced ‘eine Reihe von Artikeln und Buchbesprechungen über Koeppen’.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, ‘[e]s war Andersch, der viele Lesungen zu Koeppens Werken im Rundfunk bewirkte [...]. In der von Andersch edierten Zeitschrift *Texte und Zeichen* sind mehrmals Arbeiten von und über Koeppen erschienen’.<sup>15</sup> These prominent literary figures were enthused by Koeppen’s post-war trilogy, and Koeppen was evidently aware of the group’s impact in steering literature in a new artistic direction. As Schauer and Satschewski affirm, ‘Koeppen [war] der Meinung, daß es ohne das Wirken der Gruppe 47 zu der gegebenen Entwicklung der Literatur in Deutschland nicht so schnell gekommen wäre’.<sup>16</sup> Yet there were certainly particular aspects to the group’s ideological thinking, namely its advocacy of a *Stunde Null* in literature and the belief that the young generation of writers should start again from scratch, that Koeppen neither believed in, nor wished to adhere to. Commenting in ‘Werkstattgespräch’, an interview with Horst Bienek, Koeppen clarifies his view on the notion of tradition and ‘beginning again’:

Bei uns tut man gern so, als ob mit jedem Debütanten die Literatur neu beginnen müsse. Es gibt eine Tradition! Aber sie ist anders, als unsere Traditionalisten sie sich vorstellen. Die neue Tradition ist international.<sup>17</sup>

Here Koeppen expresses the belief that there was already an existing tradition in place in post-war West German literature, namely an international tradition. Here Koeppen alludes to the influences of American Modernist fiction, Italian Futurism and French Existentialism, which he believes contributed towards the development of German post-war literature. By inference, Koeppen appears to suggest that the notion of a ‘new beginning’ is far-fetched, for the tradition already existed elsewhere in the world. There was nothing *new* about it. Through his ardent rejection of the idea of German literature ‘starting from scratch’, combined with his personal interest in 1920s and 1930s Modernist writing that

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<sup>14</sup>Hilda Schauer, *Denkformen und Wertesysteme in Wolfgang Koeppens Nachkriegstrilogie* (Vienna: Praesens, 2004), p. 10.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid. Here, Schauer is quoting the opinion of Eugen Satschewski. Cf. Eugen Satschewski, ‘Wolfgang Koeppen und die Gruppe 47’, in *Wolfgang Koeppen: mein Ziel war die Ziellosigkeit*, ed. by Gunnar Müller-Waldeck and Michael Gratz (Hamburg: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1998), pp.46-57 (p. 52).

<sup>17</sup>Wolfgang Koeppen, ‘Werkstattgespräch’, *Merkur*, July 16 1962, pp. 568-575.

was not necessarily central to the literary curiosities of Andersch and Richter, what can be observed is Koeppen's clear reluctance to involve himself with the *Gruppe 47*. Koeppen openly sympathised with some of the association's aims, yet he was intent on establishing a clear level of distance between his literary career and theirs.<sup>18</sup> Assuming his self-confessed role as a 'Zuschauer' and 'Beobachter' rather than an actively involved participator,<sup>19</sup> Koeppen continually turned down invitations to the group's session meetings and cultural events to demonstrate his desire to remain distinctly aloof from the group's activities.

### 3.3) Wolfgang Koeppen and Modernism

From a young age, Koeppen was captivated by the Modernist visions of the 1920s and 1930s, and was particularly inspired by Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* (1906), John Dos Passos' *Manhattan Transfer* (1929), James Joyce's *Ulysses*, (1922), and Alfred Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1929).<sup>20</sup> Described by Schlant as 'the first major literary efforts in the post-war period to reconnect German literature to the heritage of high Modernism', Koeppen certainly made no attempt to buy into the trend of *Trimmerliteratur*.<sup>21</sup> In fact, his three post-war novels clearly demonstrate his dismissal of the clean-cut *Kahlschlag* style that occupied the literary market of the 1950s, and reveal his adherence to the literary Modernist narrative devices of the 1920s and 1930s, such as interior monologue, fragmentation, montage technique, simultaneity, multi-perspectivism, and association.

In *Tauben im Gras*, Koeppen depicts the events of one single day in 1951 in an occupied city in Germany.<sup>22</sup> In a sequence of more than one hundred individual

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<sup>18</sup> Becker, Sabina, 'Wolfgang Koeppen und die deutsche Nachkriegsliteratur', in *Treibhaus: Jahrbuch für die Literatur der fünfziger Jahre: 2 vols: Wolfgang Koeppen 1906-1996*, ed. by Günter Häntzschel, Ulrike Leuschner and Roland Ulrich (Munich: Iudicium, 2006), p. 66.

<sup>19</sup> Koeppen's acceptance speech for the Georg-Büchner Prize in 1962: 'Ich bin ein Zuschauer, ein stiller Wahrnehmer, ein Schweiger, ein Beobachter, ich scheue die Menge nicht, aber ich genieße gern die Einsamkeit in der Menge [...]' Cf. Koeppen, *Gesammelte Werke*, p. 253.

<sup>20</sup>Cf. Marcel Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu* (Paris: Gallimard, 2002), John Dos Passos, *Manhattan Transfer* (Boston: Clarion, 2004), James Joyce, *Ulysses* (London: Penguin, 1992), Alfred Döblin, *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (Berlin: Fischer, 1992).

<sup>21</sup>Ernestine Schlant, *The Language of Silence: West German Literature and the Holocaust* (New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 37.

<sup>22</sup>Cf. Wolfgang Koeppen, *Tauben im Gras* (Stuttgart/Hamburg: Scherz & Goverts, 1951).

fragmented narrative strands, the inner and outer world of approximately thirty characters, all of whom are of different ages, genders, nationalities, cultures and mentalities, zooms in a cinematic manner in and out of focus. Their worlds intersect, yet none of the thirty characters form relationships, and only communicate on a superficial level. They are depicted as withdrawn and isolated figures. In addition to this, the scenes continually alter in terms of locality and perspective, which disrupts the narrative flow and demands from the reader intense concentration on the portrayed events. Also embedded in the text is an array of legendary, mythological, religious, historical, and literary references, a trait that clearly points towards Koeppen's fascination with Modernist literature. In the same way that Modernist writers of the early twentieth century incorporated myth as a means to impose significance on the tumultuous nature of the modern world, Koeppen is seen to emulate this effect by naming his American soldier Odysseus Cotton. Similarly in *Das Treibhaus*, Keetenheuve appears as 'a modern-day Theseus lost in the labyrinth of Bonn'.<sup>23</sup> The techniques employed in *Das Treibhaus* are, admittedly, somewhat different in the way Koeppen focuses on the perspective of one protagonist. Yet a narrative voice comments on the main character's private thoughts and real life events, meaning that it is often hard to differentiate between the voice and the protagonist's perspective, demonstrative of Koeppen's extensive employment of interior monologue. Similarly in *Der Tod in Rom*, Koeppen chronologically narrates the events that take place over a two-day timeframe, according each day its own chapter. Here we see Koeppen returning to the episodic and fragmented narrative configuration seen in *Tauben im Gras* by way of a constant reversal of viewpoint and location, as well as a frequent shifting backwards and forwards from interior to exterior focalisation.

Koeppen's Modernist style was, however, received with skepticism in the 1950s. Emter describes it as 'diskontinuierlich, fragmentarisch und chaotisch', and remarks how Koeppen's 'Syntax und Interpunktion sich [...] der konventionellen

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<sup>23</sup>David Basker, "'Deutschland lebt an der Nahtstelle, an der Bruchstelle': Literature and Politics in Germany 1933-1950", in *Politics and Culture in Twentieth Century Germany*, ed. by William John Niven and James Jordan (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2003), pp. 89-106 (p. 103).

Sprachordnung widersetzen'.<sup>24</sup> This is seen in Koeppen's tendency to include run-on sentences that extend over pages, semantic fields packed with connotations, and sentences that break off in the middle to be picked up again in an entirely separate context in a later scene. Also commenting on the fragmented nature of Koeppen's narrative, Rudolf Alexander Schröder scathingly described Koeppen's Modernist style as 'pausenlose[r] Wirrwarr', where the reader 'zu keiner der skizzierten Figurinen ein Verhältnis resoluten Abscheus oder entschiedener Teilnahme [gewinnt]. Man atmet auf, wenn man aus dieser kalten, stinkenden Hölle entlassen wird'.<sup>25</sup> By way of contrast, Sabina Becker recognises Koeppen's language as sensual, allegorical, and laden with description in the way he sidesteps the popular reductive, matter-of-fact style of those celebrated *Gruppe 47* writers: '[Wolfgang Koeppen] lieferte statt Trümmerliteratur und Kahlschlagspoesie eine wortgewandte, metaphern- und bilderreiche Prosa [...]'.<sup>26</sup> There is a great deal of truth in Becker's assertion, and the human and sensitive elements in Koeppen's novel will be expanded upon later. Yet despite this claim, this thesis shall contend that the display of 'humanness' through the figure of Adolf was ineffectively communicated, and failed to achieve its intended emotional impact of striking a chord with the post-war generation.

Koeppen's Modernist inclinations played a pivotal part in the work's negative reception, for the fragmented nature of the narrative voice in *Der Tod in Rom* was ultimately discomfiting and alienating to a post-war readership. Simon Ward explains how the patchwork of voices in *Der Tod in Rom* is clearly 'a textual strategy and not merely a sign of growing incompetence on the part of the

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<sup>24</sup> Elisabeth Emter, *Literatur und Quantentheorie: die Rezeption der modernen Physik in Schriften zur Literatur und Philosophie deutschsprachiger Autoren: 1925-1970* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1995), p. 315.

<sup>25</sup> Here Schröder describes why Heinrich Schmidt-Barrien was awarded the *Bremer Literaturpreis* instead of Koeppen's *Tauben im Gras*. Schmidt-Barrien was praised for his 'Einheit aus Mensch und Landschaft', whereas Schröder believed that Koeppen's Modernist interests rendered his aesthetic world '[eine] kalte[...], stinkende[...] Hölle.' Cf. Karl-Heinz Götz, 'Eine kalte, stinkende Hölle: warum Wolfgang Koeppen in den fünfziger Jahren keinen Erfolg hatte', in *Treibhaus: Jahrbuch für die Literatur der fünfziger Jahre: Band 2: Wolfgang Koeppen 1906-1996*, ed. by Günter Häntzschel, Ulrike Leuschner and Roland Ulrich (Munich: Iudicium, 2006), pp.90-106 (p. 95).

<sup>26</sup> Becker, *Wolfgang Koeppen*, p. 67.



author in the face of an increasingly complex reality',<sup>27</sup> yet this is a difficult point to substantiate when the reasons for Koeppen's multi-perspectivism appear to be so ambiguous. Accepting Koeppen's frustration at the state of post-war West German social and political affairs, Basker presents the most convincing case by asserting that the fragmented narrative derives from a biographical tension between a desire for structure and an awareness of the chaotic nature of modern society.<sup>28</sup> Yet whatever the reason for its employment as a narrative device, the overarching point remains that the complex treatment of focalisation renders Koeppen's individual characters indistinct. The task of emotionally identifying with characters whose voices and general presence remains unclear is an arduous one, and resulted in Koeppen's readers being unable to connect to the events or figures in the narrative. Most poignantly with Adolf, the embodiment of Christian faith in the novel, his didactic function becomes increasingly irrelevant, for his failure to command authority over his own narrative voice renders him a highly nebulous figure.

#### 3.4) Contemporary criticism

The aforementioned formal devices thus heavily dictated the general lack of interest in *Der Tod in Rom*, and as was seen throughout the 1950s, the reaction to Koeppen's fiction was characterised by antagonism and disgust. Aside from the demanding nature of his Modernist style, literary critics recoiled at the viciousness and outspokenness of his novels, and their lewd content. His violent attack on the Federal Republic was sharply criticised in newspapers, where journalists sought to safeguard the German post-war generation by scorning and belittling the cogency and relevance of Koeppen's assertions:

*Der Tod in Rom* ist keine literarische Aussage, kein der Wahrheit dienender Dokumentarbericht und bestimmt kein Niederschlag der politischen Wirklichkeit. Bestenfalls ist dieses Buch eine unfreiwillige komische Parodie, und wir wissen, dass auch die junge deutsche Literatur

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<sup>27</sup> Simon Ward, *Negotiating Positions: Literature, Identity and Social Critique in the Works of Wolfgang Koeppen* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001), p. 11.

<sup>28</sup> David Basker, *Chaos, Control and Consistency: The Narrative Vision of Wolfgang Koeppen* (Frankfurt/M: Lang, 1993), p. 318.

der Welt mehr zu bieten hat, als dieses Bekenntnis geistiger Leere.<sup>29</sup>

Other reporters attempted to demean the clarity of Koeppen's literary voice by targeting the sexual nature of his novels, particularly one scene in *Der Tod in Rom* that depicts a brutal sexual encounter between Gottlieb Judejahn and an Italian barmaid. By writing 'Wenn am Ende der General Judejahn ins Bett der Dirne steigt, bis ins letzte Detail geschildert, ist das nur noch Sexualkolportage', the visibility of *Der Tod in Rom*'s didacticism rapidly diminishes, for the journalist's intention was evidently to focus the reader's attention on the alleged vulgarity and tastelessness of his novel in an attempt to render Koeppen a substandard author.<sup>30</sup> Other critics mocked Koeppen's arrogance and audacity following his allusions, particularly in *Der Tod in Rom* and *Das Treibhaus*, to the muddled and chaotic nature of the Federal Republic, as well as his views on the incompetency of the reigning powers in their attempts to rebuild a stable German society:

Koeppen geht es wie den meisten existentialistischen Autoren unserer Tage: er und seine Lieblingsgestalten sehen klar, wie verfahren alles ist, wie fragwürdig die alten Werte geworden sind und wie unfähig wir sind, neue tragende Werte von einiger Allgemeingültigkeit zu schaffen.<sup>31</sup>

It was precisely Koeppen's critical perspective and the way he lacked an inspiring ideology that led to so many readers' taking offence at the trilogy's content, for it was predominantly viewed as a selection of novels that 'sich fast ausschließlich im Morbiden, im Sumpfe tummel[n]'.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, it was this unsettling critical tone that appears to have been the reason that so many critics failed to comprehend that Koeppen's artistic rendering of reality exposed the truth behind the German nation's shortcomings more honestly than any other factual account. Fritz René Allemann is a prime example of someone who failed to perceive the didactic potential in Koeppen's writing by simply ridiculing his ideas as fanciful and whimsical:

Der Dichter, der es unternimmt ein Stück Wirklichkeit darzustellen [...]

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<sup>29</sup>Anonymous, 'Parodie und Wirklichkeit', *Deutsche Tagespost*, December 8 1954, pp. 7-8.

<sup>30</sup>Ulrich Seelmann-Eggebert, 'Die Ratten auf dem Capitol', *Mannheimer Morgen*, November 23 1954, pp. 11-13.

<sup>31</sup>Anonymous, 'Der neue Koeppen', *Stuttgarter Nachrichten*, November 27 1954, pp. 2-3.

<sup>32</sup>Hans Schwab-Felisch, Untitled review, *Der Monat*, June 6 1954, pp. 38-44.

durchdringt seinen Stoff – nicht um an ihm kleben zu bleiben, sondern um durch ihn hindurch zu dem zu dringen, was Koeppen vielleicht mit der gestelzten Phrase von der ‘Dimension’ seiner Aussagen meint. Dem Literaten freilich mag es genügen in 48 Stunden Impressionen zu sammeln, die er dann als wackelige Staffage benützt [...] Mit Wahrheit aber hat das dann nichts zu tun – nicht mit der vordergründigen des gewissenhaften Berichterstatters und schon gar nicht mit der [...] schöpferischen Imagination.<sup>33</sup>

Writer and literary critic Paul Hühnerfeld also overlooked one of *Der Tod in Rom*’s most affirmative elements, the role of faith, by depicting the novel as entirely nihilistic: ‘Die einstmals an Erich Kästner gerichtete Frage [...] “Herr Kästner, wo bleibt denn das Positive?” hat, auf Koeppen gemünzt, eine Berechtigung; ohne das geringste Positivum abgestützt, verlieren seine Negativa an Wert’.<sup>34</sup> In short, these perspectives demonstrate how a many critics loathed Koeppen’s bitter, sexually explicit and mythologised interpretation of post-war German society. Certainly in comparison to the elevating, conciliatory and humanistic approach of post-war authors like Heinrich Böll, Koeppen portrayed a considerably more disconcerting reality through depicting his contemporaries’ misery, vulnerability, alienation and existential fears in the light of a horrific past and an unnerving future. He confronted the older generation’s disinclination to accept guilt and take responsibility for the war, the young generation’s mental anguish having lived through the barbarisms of the Third Reich, as well as the failings and deficiencies of the newly established *Bundesrepublik*. One of the fundamental differences between Koeppen and Böll’s fiction in this regard is the way Böll oriented his works, particularly the novel *Wo warst du, Adam?*, around the notion of man as a victim, as well as the acceptance and forgiveness of man’s moral shortcomings when coerced into a brutal and merciless environment, a theme that many contemporary readers were able to identify with and take solace in. Yet in doing so Böll never appears to have questioned what gave rise to the National Socialist upsurge. Koeppen, however, revealed in *Der Tod in Rom* as contributing elements for the atrocities committed the independent choices of man to conform to such a regime with an apparent lack of scepticism and moral contemplation, an assertion from Koeppen which, in stark contrast to Böll, places the integrity of man firmly in doubt. It therefore becomes clear to see how the

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<sup>33</sup>Fritz René Allemann, ‘Restauration im Treibhaus’, *Der Monat*, June 16 1954, pp. 81-85.

<sup>34</sup>Paul Hühnerfeld, ‘Gespenster in Rom’, *Die Zeit*, November 4 1954, pp. 20-21.

forcefulness of Koeppen's critical perspective was a thorn in the side of a grieving post-war generation. They were so outraged by Koeppen's outspokenness, viewing his fiction as little more than a 'peinliche Störung bei der Bewältigung der Vergangenheit', that they ultimately failed to grasp the affirmative elements of his novels that will be explored in the coming section, namely the role of faith.<sup>35</sup> For what one must remember is that however much controversy Koeppen's novels may have induced in the 1950s, his amalgamation of art and socio-political criticism constituted something entirely new in the post-war literary scene.<sup>36</sup> Therefore as we approach a re-assessment of Koeppen's fiction, paying particular attention to the third novel in the trilogy, *Der Tod in Rom*, it is worth citing a conversation that took place between Koeppen and Günter Grass in Berlin in the 1960s. Commenting on how he believed his fiction to be, stylistically and content wise, 'zu früh gekommen', Grass's contention was virtually a mirror image of Koeppen's, who asserted that 'diese Bücher seien zu früh erschienen [...] Dieser Stil und diese Art der Betrachtung sei dem Deutschen völlig fremd gewesen und unsympathisch'.<sup>37</sup> Returning one again to the image of Koeppen as an 'Einzelgänger', it can be concluded, based on the reactions and reservations of contemporary critics, that there are certain affirmative aspects to Koeppen's experimental, somewhat nonconformist writing style that have been thoroughly ignored. These constitute the focal point of the following discussion.

### 3.5) Church and faith in *Der Tod in Rom*

*Der Tod in Rom* is a novel that ultimately deals with the question of German guilt in the aftermath of the Second World War. At the centre of this are two German men from two different generations – the young and talented composer Siegfried Pfaffrath and his cruel uncle Gottlieb Judejahn, a former high-ranking Nazi commandant who was convicted in absentia at the Nuremberg Trials for

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<sup>35</sup>Lothar Veit, *Einsam in der Menge: der Schriftsteller in Wolfgang Koeppens Nachkriegsromanen* (Marburg: Tectum, 2002), p. 66.

<sup>36</sup>Schauer, *Denkformen*, p. 10: 'Da die politische Problematik in den längeren Werken der Autoren der Gruppe 47 erst Mitte der 50er Jahre eine wichtige Rolle zu spielen begann, bildeten Koeppens Romane in dieser Hinsicht künstlerische Orientierung'.

<sup>37</sup>Wolfgang Koeppen, 'Ohne Absicht: Gespräch mit Marcel Reich-Raniki', in *Zeugen des Jahrhunderts*, ed. Ingo Hermann (Göttingen: Lamuv, 1994), pp. 150-167 (p. 150).

crimes against humanity. Siegfried is in Rome for the first performance of his new symphony, which is being conducted by Kürenberg, who lives in Rome in exile with his Jewish wife. Unbeknown to Siegfried, his mother, father, brother Dietrich and his aunt Eva Judejahn have also planned to meet in Rome that same weekend to stage Gottlieb's furtive return to his German homeland. Additionally, Judejahn's son, the deliberately named Adolf Judejahn, is in Rome studying and seeking to atone for his family's wrongdoings. The novel comes to a dramatic climax when Gottlieb Judejahn callously murders Ilse Kürenberg by shooting her from his hotel window. This harrowing incident is then followed by Judejahn's own death after he flees the hotel and suffers a fatal stroke.

Through the disturbing portrayals of the Judejahns and Pfaffraths, one of Koeppen's key aims was to offer an acerbic critique of the newly founded Federal Republic and its on-going contamination by former Nazis who once again occupy prominent positions in the administration. The novel also unveils Koeppen's concern for the inner condition of the German people, in particular with the misery and pessimism of the younger generation. Worried about his contemporaries' predisposition to blindly conform to authority, this novel was not an attempt simply to berate and condemn, but rather to steer the post-war generation to examine the possibility of conforming to a higher authority – to Christian faith. In an attempt to stimulate his readers' comprehension of true Christian values, what we see in *Der Tod in Rom* is Koeppen's calling into question the nature and integrity of the Catholic Church from several perspectives. This is primarily achieved through the figure Adolf Judejahn who is employed to epitomise man's mastery of a spiritual crisis by exemplifying honest Christian faith as the antidote to Germany's existential post-war crisis. Yet Catholicism as an institution is also heavily criticised in the novel by way of allusions to its former violence and cruelty, something that forces Adolf to question his faith (*Tod in Rom* 111, from now on *TiR*). Siegfried's reluctance to accept faith as the antidote to his existential crisis similarly reveals an air of hesitancy in Koeppen's underlying assertion that Christianity is capable of helping a grieving post-war nature. As will be shown, Koeppen's standpoint on 'Christianity being the ultimate solution' becomes increasingly obscure as the novel progresses and leaves the work enshrouded in a haze of moral ambiguity.

This ultimately raises the question as to whether Koeppen, despite his apparent belief in the potential goodness of Christian conduct, ultimately regarded Christianity as a problematic solution to the problems of post-war West German society.

Koeppen's decision to adopt Rome as the setting for his novel is significant, since the history of the city and the Roman Catholic Church have always been closely interlinked. Using allusions to Rome and the Vatican's historic locations, structures and artefacts, Koeppen attempts to evoke the history of Catholicism in Rome. The narrator alludes to the she-wolf that suckled the founders of Rome, Romulus and Remus (*TiR* 7), the gods of Ostia Antica (*TiR* 90), as well as the religious figure Simon Magus who came into conflict with St Peter (*TiR* 108). Meandering through the Roman streets, Siegfried remarks 'Ich höre den Litaneien zu: *ab omni peccato libera*, dem eintönigen Gemurmel, a *subitanea et improvisa morte*, dem festgelegten und festgefahrenen Wechselgespräch zwischen dem Priester und den alten Frauen' (*TiR* 92), shortly followed by Adolf's observation 'Kapellen waren zu allen Seiten, und an den Altären hantierten geschäftige Geistliche. Sie lasen Messen, sie sprachen Gebete, sie waren in Andacht versunken, fromme Männer' (*TiR* 110). By way of the protagonists' acknowledgement of the ubiquitous nature of Catholicism and its history, specifically its influence on Roman architecture, everyday ambience, and the daily routines of ordinary Italian people, Koeppen is evidently treating the question of religion as a weighty thematic strand in the novel. Yet as Siegfried meanders along the Viale del Muro Torto located near the Villa Medici, Koeppen extends the parameters of the novel's religious discussion by referring to the questionable nature of the Catholic Church's rise to ecclesiastical and political authority in Western Europe:

Macht hatte diese Gärten geschaffen, Macht die Villen, Macht die Paläste, Macht die Stadt gebaut, Macht die Mauer errichtet, Macht hatte die Schätze herbeigeholt, Macht die Kunst angeregt, die Stadt war schön, [...] aber die Macht war für die Mitlebenden stets schrecklich, war Machtmissbrauch, war Gewalt, war Unterdrückung, war Krieg, war Brandstiftung und Meuchelmord, Rom war auf Erschlagenen gebaut, selbst Kirchen standen auf blutbesudelter Erde, kein Tempel, keine Basilika, kein Dom war ohne vergossenes Blut zu denken [...] (*TiR* 155)

With this passage, Adolf reflects on the medieval Catholic Church's misuse of power. Here Koeppen encourages the reader to contemplate the Church's early killing of human beings as a sacrificial act, a thoroughly un-Christian practice that breaches the sixth Commandment 'thou shalt not kill', and neatly correlates with a previous bitter and ironic comment made by the narrator 'Der alte Pontifex maximus im alten Rom hatte das Gebot nicht gekannt. Er sah freundlich den Gladiatorenkämpfen zu. Der Pontifex maximus im neuen Rom war ein Diener des Dekalogs, er ließ das Gebot lehren, er befahl, es zu halten' (*TiR* 77). These quotations clearly serve a multifaceted allegorical purpose in the way they subtly refer to post-war German society. In the same way the Catholic Church morally abused its powers through breaching Christian commandments, these descriptions also remind readers how German Christians similarly repudiated the goodness of Christian teachings by conforming to the 'Macht' of Nazi authority.

During Gottlieb and Adolf Judejahn's visit to the Papal stronghold, Castel Sant'Angelo, Koeppen once again turns the reader's focus to the Church's violation of Christian principles and the atrocious crimes that were committed there. The fortress was built as a mausoleum by Emperor Hadrian in 139 AD, and later became a Papal residence, prison and execution site, where Church-run tribunals interrogated, imprisoned and tortured those convicted of heresy, simony, sacrilege and witchcraft. Adolf is abhorred by the brutalities that were carried out there in the name of God:

[...] und dann kamen die niedrigen Gewölbe, kam Grabesluft, man musste gebückt gehen, abgeschirmte Falltüren zeigten noch finstere Löcher, bodenlose Abgründe schreckten, Mordgruben, Todesbrunnen, Ketten fielen aus der Mauer, Kettenringe für die Füße, Fangeisen für die Arme, geschmiedete Stachelschnallen für den Leib, allerlei Martergerät hing von der Decke, Streckzüge, Knochenbrecher, Werkzeug, die Haut zu

schinden, Steinbetten daneben, auf denen die Gefesselten verfault waren und Fäulnis und Gerippe den Schattenriss des Verurteilten oder Vergessenen selbst in den harten fühllosen Granit gezeichnet hatten. (*TiR* 115-116)

To refer to an observation made by Hania Siebenpfeiffer, who commented ‘die Engelsburg (Castel Sant’Angelo) als glanzvolle Manifestation kirchlicher Macht wird nicht nur umgeschrieben zu einer Heterotopie des Tötens, sie wird zur Manifestation des Todes selber’, it appears that Koeppen is making a similar assertion by placing the cruel, monstrous and inhumane acts of religious men at the forefront of the narrative and encouraging the reader to question the integrity of an institution that once condoned murder and torture.<sup>38</sup> Koeppen also extends the realms of his criticism by likening the medieval Catholic Church’s acts of barbarism to the crimes committed by the Nazis, a somewhat controversial declaration and yet one that illustrates his underlying assertion that the young German generation must learn to thoroughly consider the form of authority they choose to adhere to. Seen in Gottlieb’s nonchalant reaction to the weapons and torture devices exhibited inside the fortress, Koeppen draws on a sense of knowledge and even familiarity displayed by the former SS commandant who appears indifferent to the pain and suffering that occurred there. His son Adolf remarks:

Judejahn war durch die Engelsburg gegangen, er hatte Waffen und Rüstungen und Kriegsgerät gesehen, [...] nichts Neues gab es aus alter Zeit zu sehen, er kannte das, [...] er fühlte sich in seinem Handwerk bestätigt und ging wirklich selbstsicher und gelangweilt wie einer, der nach langer Abwesenheit sein altes Haus besichtigt, in die Verliese hinunter. (*TiR* 118-119)

Shocked by the emotionally hardened Nazi’s display of apathy, Gottlieb then attempts to excuse the Catholic Church’s unethical conduct. Explaining to Adolf how ‘Kriege und Kerker, Gefangenschaft und Tod, immer hatte es sie gegeben, Petrus war am Marterkreuz gestorben, und seine Amtswalter hatten den Martertod ihren Feinden bestellt, so würde es bleiben, und so war es gut. Es war

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<sup>38</sup> Hania Siebenpfeiffer, ‘Kerker, Kirchen, Kriegsschauplätze: Heterotopie und Stadt in Wolfgang Koeppens *Der Tod in Rom*’, in *Krieg und Nachkrieg: Konfigurationen der deutschsprachigen Literatur: 1940-1965*, ed. by Hania Siebenpfeiffer and Ute Wölfel (Berlin: Schmidt, 2004), pp. 99-122 (p. 103).



menschlich. Wer sprach von Unmenschlichkeit?' (*TiR* 119), Gottlieb defends the Church's actions by reminding his son that imprisonment, cruelty and killing are all ancient human characteristics and are thereby excusable. Yet it is here, through Gottlieb's assertion, that the novel's didacticism prevails by implying that the end does not necessarily justify the means. Returning to Gottlieb's question 'Wer sprach von Unmenschlichkeit?', namely man's lack of kindness and concern for other human beings, Koeppen appears to encourage his post-war readers to once again consider humankind's honourable qualities bestowed upon man by God. Following this incident, the narrator comments 'Adolf sah wie Ham seines Vaters Noah Blöße' (*TiR* 119), a remark that, if read in accordance with Augustine's interpretation, refers to Noah's naked state as a symbol of his vulnerability and defencelessness.<sup>39</sup> By inference, Gottlieb's hard attitude also indicates a weakness that Adolf has identified in his father. His brutal conduct accords Gottlieb a façade of strength and potency, yet he appears vulnerable to his son despite his efforts to present himself as fearless. Through this biblical reference, Koeppen depicts Adolf pitying his father, whose cruel pretence can in fact be seen as pathetic and feeble. In doing so, Koeppen's readers are inclined to recognise and berate the thoroughly immoral and fundamentally pitiful conduct that has been displayed throughout the course of history by authoritarian institutions like the Catholic Church and the National Socialist Party, and the vulnerability that derives from rejecting God. Koeppen's placing of Adolf on a moral pedestal here is, however, problematic. Having berated the Catholic Church for its conduct, Koeppen's depiction of a deacon figure pitying an apathetic Nazi figure for having committed crimes akin to those carried out by his own religious institution serves to highlight the aforementioned ambiguity to Koeppen's moral standpoint. Koeppen cannot truly believe in and wish to promote the goodness of Christianity through the figure of Adolf if he is so clearly perturbed by its history of corruption and violence.

Adolf Judejahn's responses to the distinctly un-Christian behaviour of the medieval Catholic Church stand in sharp contrast to the aforementioned reactions

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<sup>39</sup>Cf. The Curse of Ham, *Book of Genesis* 9:20-27. Augustine claims that Ham derides the vulnerability of his naked father, Noah. Cf. Stephen Asma, *On Monsters: An Unnatural Story of our Worst Fears* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 85.

of his father, however. From a moral ambiguity perspective, this episode is also significant. The young deacon is disgusted by his father's blasé reactions, and is horrified to discover that a Christian institution would be ethically and morally capable of employing brute violence as both a punishment, and a way to convert heathens and heretics to Catholicism (*TiR* 116). This harrowing realisation consequently results in Adolf momentarily doubting his faith: 'Adolf fühlt sich einsam in der weiten prächtigen Erhabenheit, die ihm gar nicht so erhaben vorkommen wollte, er sei denn im hochmütigen Sinn des Wortes, er fühlte sich von Gott und von seinen Glauben an Gott verlassen, er fühlte sich von Zweifeln bedrängt' (*TiR* 111).

This once again underscores a distinctly distrustful stance towards the Catholic Church's corrupt conduct that is apparent in the novel, for even Adolf, the novel's apparent epitome of honest Christian values, is seen to falter in his piety. In a later episode, Koeppen also attempts to alert the reader to the dangers of adhering to such powerful forms of authority like the Church and the Nazi Party. Here, through the voice of the narrator, he alludes to those fraudulent and unethical Catholic clergymen who endorsed the brutalities carried out by political and military figures, 'es gab eine Zeit, sie war noch nicht so lange her, da beschäftigten die Päpste sogar Henker, Menschen wie Judejahn, und wie viele Feldherren hatten die Päpste geehrt, und wie oft hatten sie die siegreichen Standarten gesegnet!' (*TiR* 77), before angrily questioning how it is possible that such institutions, whether religious, political or military, have been able to mislead and impair the judgements of so many individuals when their conduct is fundamentally so iniquitous:

Warum übersah man sie nicht in Purpur und in Fräcken, in lamettabhängten Uniformen und schlichten Diktatorenjoppen, warum erkannte man sie nicht, die sich für schmutzige Händel, für Fresslust und Fickgier, für Gold und Landbesitz und gemeine Herrschsucht mit Gott verbündeten und das Kreuz missbrauchen wollten? (*TiR* 110)

These narrative episodes demonstrate a distinctly cynical stance towards the sincerity of religious teaching. There are, however, many episodes in the novel where Koeppen seems to offset his critical views on the Catholic Church by

advocating the potency and goodness of Christian faith. In the following episodes, the character Adolf Judejahn is used to epitomise genuine Christian faith, and a sense of conviction that Koeppen regards as honest, humble and unpretentious, something that the young people of the post-war generation could aspire to. Yet with Koeppen frequently alternating his moral standpoint, it becomes increasingly difficult for readers to grasp the novel's underlying moral assertions. Returning to the scene in which the young deacon questions his beliefs (*TiR* 110-112), seen in his fraught wallowing 'in krausen Gedanken, krausem Leid, krauser Erschütterung' (*TiR* 111), this could on the one hand be viewed as Koeppen problematising Christian faith following his scathing commentaries about the violence committed by Catholic clerics. Yet in light of the upcoming episodes in which Koeppen portrays Adolf exercising true Christian devotion, his doubts could alternatively be interpreted as Adolf revealing himself to be a man of great humanity and sincerity. He is a clergyman capable of comprehending and relating to the emotional, spiritual, existential crises of the post-war era for he suffers with the same hesitations and concerns. From this perspective, Koeppen's underlying justification for Adolf's doubting may be to demonstrate how it is ultimately faith that he returns to and seeks solace in. Let us now focus on other positively represented religious episodes in *Der Tod in Rom*.

Like many young people growing up in the 1950s, Adolf too suffered the consequences of a strict National Socialist background, and as a result carries a heavy weight of guilt for the heinous crimes committed by his family in the name of the Third Reich. Ultimately his upbringing has left him feeling dejected in his general outlook on faith and existence. In the novel, the reader learns how Gottlieb Judejahn indoctrinated his son from a young age with Nazi ideology, forcing him to attend a Nazi military camp where he was trained to become a future leader (*TiR* 70). Yet Adolf's extremist programming came to an abrupt end when the Allies advanced into Germany in 1945, and the camp children were instructed to flee (*TiR* 71). Due to the instantaneous collapse of the life Adolf had come to accept, the young boy found himself trapped in a mental and ideological abyss. Frightened by his own belief system, yet at the same time overwhelmed

by the thought of an existence free from Nazi infiltration, Koeppen intended for the depiction of Adolf's sheltered childhood and forced acquaintance with National Socialist ideology to strike a chord among his young readers. In the hope of creating a point of common ground between contemporary reader and protagonist, Koeppen appears in this episode to use Adolf's mastering of his existential crisis as a model to be emulated. Hence what the author is advocating through the narrator's comment '[alles] was er bisher gedacht und gelernt hatte, nun ausgeräumt war, um vielleicht einem neuen Denken, einer neuen Lehre Platz zu machen, aber das wußte man noch nicht' is not an emotional void, but an incentive for a new beginning. The collapse of the Third Reich signified an opportunity for independent action and thought, free from a poisonous ideology, and it is precisely this movement towards clarity that Adolf experienced which enables him, for the first time in his life, to act in accordance with his own moral code, not one that he has been forced to adhere to.

Perhaps the most illustrative example of this is when Adolf, who is returning home after fleeing the military camp, happens upon a young Jewish boy who has escaped from a concentration camp. When the skeletal child notices Adolf, he attacks him with a stick in the hope of obtaining food (*TiR* 73). Interestingly, the militarily trained Adolf does not fight back, but rather shares his bread with the starving child and offers him his jacket (*TiR* 73), after the Jew's appalling state of health causes him to vomit and shiver. Evidently, the strict nature of his upbringing has left its mark on Adolf's character in the way he still appears somewhat emotionally underdeveloped, despite his kind-heartedness towards the Jew. For instance, the protagonist affirms 'Er tat es nicht aus Mitleid. Er tat es nicht aus Liebe. Nicht einmal aus Scham deckte er den Jungen zu. Er tat es einfach, weil der andere zu frieren schien' (*TiR* 73), which demonstrates his regard for ethical codes of conduct yet incapacity for emotional attachment. Considering the strict nature of his childhood, the reader assumes that neither Adolf's parents nor his teachers at the Nazi military camp would have schooled him in the importance of values like love, compassion or sympathy. Yet the poignancy of this passage lies in the fact that despite his hardened upbringing, Adolf's kindness demonstrates that he is still capable of behaving like a decent

Christian. After comforting the Jewish child for a while, the two bid each other farewell, and Adolf wanders into a church. Here he asks himself: ‘War es Berufung? Hatte Gott ihn gerufen?’ (*TiR* 74). Whilst no clear answer is offered, it would seem that Koeppen raised these questions as a means to show Adolf’s abandoning of evil Nazi ideologies, and his turning to true, honest Christian virtues, such as charity, love, consideration, compassion and brotherly love, which can be rekindled and mastered in spite of the indoctrination he underwent in childhood. Serving as a reminder to post-war Germany’s young generation, the tone of Koeppen’s message here is remarkably optimistic, as it prompts those who, like Adolf, have experienced similar nihilistic feelings to help detach themselves from the emotional abyss by following Adolf’s example, and adhering to good, honest Christian principles.

By portraying the young deacon’s belief in mankind’s Christian potential, Koeppen, as if to convey this assertion more compellingly, describes the negative reactions of Adolf’s mother and father when they first see their son dressed in his clerical robes. This is evidently an attempt by Koeppen to explore the intergenerational dispute from the perspective of the older generation, with the intention of illuminating their tendency towards intolerance and narrow-mindedness. In keeping with his belief in treating all human beings benevolently, the young deacon, despite his initial doubts and fears, decides to visit his mother Eva Judejahn. The reader immediately learns of her obsessive beliefs in National Socialist ideology, as the narrator describes her fixation with the ‘erhabenen Traum vom Reich, von arischer Weltbeglückung und germanischem Herrentum’ (*TiR* 132). Indeed, when Adolf enters the room she openly expresses her outrage at his ‘weibischen Rock, reichsfeindlicher römischer Pfaffen’ (*TiR* 132), branding her own son a traitor. Her remarks are significant firstly in the sense that they first hark back to the homology between nation and masculinity,<sup>40</sup> but also because they allude to Nazi hostility towards the Catholic Church that claimed to oppose the National Socialist regime, thus revealing the resoluteness with which she abides by her extremist beliefs. Yet in spite of her raging and

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<sup>40</sup>Cf. Tamar Mayer, ‘Gender Ironies and Nationalism: Setting the Stage’, in *Gender Ironies of Nationalism: Sexing the Nation*, ed. by Tamar Mayer (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 1-24 (p. 6) – ‘It is men who are generally expected to defend the ‘moral consciousness’ and the ‘ego’ of a nation [...]’

blaspheming, telling her son how she regrets the Nazi's failure to hang the Pope when they had their chance, Adolf's capacity to exercise composure and self-control by simply listening to his mother's curses serve to highlight this generational gap further. In an attempt to emulate the purity and clarity of the young cleric's post-war optimistic mentality, Adolf holds the moral high ground, in the way he feels nothing but pity for his mother's cynicism and animosity: 'Er fühlte, dass sie litt. Er spürte, dass sie in ihren Ideen brannte und die Hölle in sich trug. Es brauchte keines Teufels. Sie war ihr eigener Teufel, sie quälte Leib und Seele' (*TiR* 134). Similarly when Adolf's father enters the room, his reaction towards his son's clerical robes is also one of disgust, declaring simply 'Es ist Verrat' (*TiR* 135). Observing the hardness of their attitudes towards their son's adherence to a different moral code and faith, Koeppen is criticising the older generation's reluctance to shed their former ideologies and their refusal to welcome the possibility of new fraternal bonds within a compassionate, caring, Christian society.

Exploring this intergenerational dispute further, Koeppen also explores the notion of society's need to adopt honest Christian principles by discussing the perspective of Germany's young post-war generation. Given that Koeppen was concerned with the inner condition of the young people among whom he wished to stimulate collective critical thinking to help them deal with post-war despair, one can clearly see how this was a thematic area upon which Koeppen wished to place a particular emphasis. This dispute is explored in the meetings between Adolf and Siegfried Pfaffrath, both of whom are the sons of former Nazis. Clearly, Adolf typifies the role of someone who has opted for faith over nihilism, yet for Siegfried this is not such a clear-cut decision. Unable to escape the world of torment where he is continually plagued by crippling doubts about his own faith, his guilt, and his belief in the Federal Republic, Siegfried embodies the detached and contemptuous stance of young post-war individuals who disbelieve in man's moral potential. Seen in his frantic questioning before his meeting with Adolf, 'Wenn Adolf und ich das Leben nicht meistern, dann sollten wir uns gegen die verbinden, die skrupellos sind und nach dem Grad ihrer Beschränktheit herrschen wollen, gegen die echten Pfaffraths, die echten Judejahns, [...]

vielleicht könnten wir Deutschland ändern? Aber während ich das dachte, schien es mir nicht mehr möglich zu sein' (*TiR* 113), one learns of his inner desire to rid society of National Socialist ills, yet also how he is plagued by a pessimistic outlook. Siegfried knows that his parents were responsible for the rise of Nazism, the war, and the slaughter of millions of innocent people, yet when Adolf speaks of his fears of this frenzied ideological extremism reemerging and pleads to his cousin 'Versuche die Menschen zu ändern' (*TiR* 126), the distrustful Siegfried retorts 'Sie sind nicht zu ändern!' (*TiR* 126-127).

Satisfied in the knowledge that he doesn't need the help of anyone, and can simply live as he chooses, Siegfried demonstrates an attitude that Koeppen viewed as the most problematic of all, namely a hatred of the Nazi past combined with a disinclination to rectify Germany's errors by ensuring that such a destructive wave of nationalism can never rise again. In comparison to his cousin who has regained his trust in humanity through putting his faith in God, Siegfried is unwilling to take this step, for his distrust in the powers of Christianity to help Germany's spiritual recovery is more or less equal to his distrust in Germany remaining free of Nazi contamination: 'Deine Kirche versucht es seit zweitausend Jahren, [die Menschen zu ändern]' (*TiR* 127). Koeppen's portrayal of Siegfried is thus a crucial one, for whilst he encapsulates the older generation's refusal to abandon their former ideals in the portrayals of Eva and Gottlieb Judejahn, it is this critical encounter between Adolf and Siegfried, a Christian and a nihilist, where Koeppen intended to inspire serious critical self-reflection among his young post-war readers by reminding them that faith can offer a positive response to their spiritual crisis. Yet by returning once again to the issue of moral ambiguity in the novel, this exchange must also be viewed as problematic in the sense that Siegfried ultimately rejects faith as a solution. This diminishes the potency of Koeppen's advocacy, and once again reveals disinclination on Koeppen's part to exercise total conviction in his assertion that Christianity offers a remedy to post-war despair. This once again reveals how Koeppen's true moral standpoint is vague, hesitant and lacking conviction.

From the aforementioned narrative episodes, it seems justifiable to assert that, through the employment of the Christian figure Adolf Judejahn as a means to

explore intergenerational disputes and the disinclinations of generations to consider the power of religious belief, Koeppen's *Der Tod in Rom* is clearly a novel that preoccupies itself with questions of faith and the possibility of it being a remedy to the nihilistic views and immoral ideologies that took root during the Third Reich. But as has been demonstrated, Koeppen fails to offer one decisive conclusion. On the one hand the novel appears to promote the possibility of a Christian revival in Germany, yet one can hardly avoid the inherent cynicism seen in Koeppen's paralleling the conduct of the Nazi Party with that of the medieval Catholic Church. This issue of moral ambiguity is perhaps best encapsulated in the final narrative passage where Koeppen, through reference to God's Final Judgment, appears to beseech those sinners, skeptics and disbelievers as Adolf asks for the Lord's forgiveness to save his father's soul. Here the novel ends on a markedly inconclusive note, as Koeppen leaves the reader to reflect on his or her own feelings about this thought-provoking final episode. In the scene, Gottlieb Judejahn flees his hotel and runs into an open palazzo having shot Ilse Kürenburg from his bedroom window moments before (*TiR* 183). Adolf sees his father approaching, and in that instant the agitated Gottlieb falls to the floor after suffering a fatal stroke. Despite his lifelong reservations about his father's beliefs, the young cleric rushes to help him, markedly concerned with saving his father's soul: 'Der Vater war noch nicht tot, und da fiel Adolf das Wichtigste ein – es gab die Hölle es gab die Hölle es gab die Hölle. Und nun war keine Sekunde zu verlieren' (*TiR* 186). Unable to absolve his father of his sins, Adolf rushes to a nearby church and begs an ordained priest to perform the last rites. The priest kneels down in front of the dying Nazi and prays: 'Durch diese Salbung und seine gütige Barmherzigkeit verzeihe dir der Herr, was du durch Sehen, Hören, Riechen, Schmecken und Berühren gesündigt hast' (*TiR* 187).

Here Koeppen relieves himself of moral responsibility by leaving his readers to question their own ethical viewpoint on Gottlieb Judejahn's salvation; should his soul be saved? How can he be saved having never expressed remorse for his crimes? Does such a brutal human deserve to be forgiven? Regardless of how the reader chooses to answer these questions, the ambiguous nature of the final passage reveals Koeppen's reluctance or perhaps inability to present Christian



faith as post-war Germany's ultimate solution. Koeppen was evidently aware of the fact that Germany's older and younger generations both tended towards dismissing religious and moral concerns, either by allowing themselves to trust in Hitler over God the Almighty during the war, or simply resuming a state of cynicism and indifference in the war's aftermath, and this is clearly something that perturbed him. Yet despite his concern for their bleak situation, the final narrative sequence offers no answers. On the one hand, it functions as means to impress on his readers the need to choose a moral, Christian path in life before it is too late. On the other, it reveals Koeppen's doubts about Christian faith being the antidote to their post-war despair. It is this display of indecisiveness that renders *Der Tod in Rom* a fundamentally ambiguous novel with regard to its views on religion and spirituality.

### 3.6) Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated how Wolfgang Koeppen revealed in *Der Tod in Rom* both an unsettling inner and outer reality. Through the deeply critical portrayals of the characters Gottlieb and Eva Judejahn, Koeppen problematised issues surrounding the older German generation's reluctance, or perhaps inability to accept guilt and renounce their age-old pre-war beliefs and ethics. In the novel Koeppen also focused the reader's attention on the skepticism and mistrust of the young post-war generation who, having been plagued by existential fears, ideological voids and a loss of trust in humankind's moral capacity, tended towards a state of nihilistic indifference, rather than striving to improve their lives for both themselves as individuals and for the good of society. Evidently, it was this perceived degree of cynicism and criticism pertaining to the post-war socio-political climate through Koeppen's depiction of numerous emotionally and morally disturbed protagonists, allusions to the Federal Republic's on-going contamination with war criminals that were prominent players during the Third Reich, as well as the presentation of history as a habitual cycle of destruction and violence that prompted critics to label it as entirely nihilistic and pessimistic (Hühnerfeld), void of any truthful elements (Allemann), unnecessarily crude in content (Seelmann-Eggebert), full of hatred (Korn) and audacious in its attempt

to demean the possibility of a prosperous social and economic restoration in Germany. It was Koeppen's ferociousness and outspokenness to which many readers objected, for his acerbic descriptions of the post-war era's defects were fundamentally unwelcome among citizens who were trying to make sense of their shattered war-worn existence by regaining a sense of security, stability, and permanence in their lives. Emotionally they were unfit to be confronted with the brutal realities pertaining to post-war Germany's social, economical, spiritual and moral deficiencies. Indeed, it was this outright rejection of his fiction that prompted Grass to conclude that Koeppen was, in a literary sense, ahead of his time.

In addition to this thematic ferocity, it can be seen that the novel's poor reception following its publication in 1954 was also attributable to Koeppen's Modernist style. Having nurtured an interest in Modernist fiction in his youth after reading Proust, Passos and Joyce, Koeppen remained distinctly ambivalent to the prospect of joining forces with the *Gruppe 47* and developed his own unique contribution to the post-war literary scene through the employment of Modernist narrative devices. Yet this was ultimately problematic, particularly with regards to the moral dimension of Adolf, whose voice fades into obscurity in Koeppen's complex narrative patchwork. The ambiguities deriving from Koeppen's multi-perspectivism rendered the individual portrayals of his protagonists indistinct, obscure and consequently hard to identify with, a linguistic trait that effectively forged great distance between the narrative events and his post-war readers.

Yet perhaps the most important conclusion to have been reached in this chapter concerns the underlying didactic assertions in *Der Tod in Rom*. Koeppen was not attempting to depict the situation in post-war West Germany as utterly futile, nor was he looking to force his readers into a state of utter dejectedness. Instead, he was attempting to stimulate collective critical thinking and self-reflection in the hope of enabling his post-war readers to confront their own personal existentialist fears and doubts. At certain points in the novel, Christian faith was presented as the solution to these social problems. The Christian figure of Adolf Judejahn functions as a model to aspire to, a human embodiment of the young post-war generation's turning to faith over nihilism, to optimism over despair, to

exercising trust in mankind's moral potential over cynicism. Through his interactions with Siegfried and his parents Gottlieb and Eva Judejahn, one learns of the didactic capacity of Adolf in the way he serves to advocate society's need to renounce former evil ideologies by trusting in the love of God Almighty. Yet this optimistic stance is not maintained in the novel, for it is often difficult to decipher Koeppen's religious position given his criticism of the Catholic Church's immoral behaviour and corruption since the Medieval Ages, as can be seen in the cited examples (*TiR* 77, 115-116, 155). Reflecting on Koeppen's personal views on Christianity as declared in *Sein Geschöpf: Antwort auf eine Umfrage: Wie stehen Sie zu Gott*, one learns of Koeppen's Christian beliefs, 'Ich empfang manche Gnade von ihm, er bewahrte mich in der Not und Gefahr, ich dankte ihm'.<sup>41</sup> One also discovers his distinctly critical opinion on institutional Christianity, 'Ich besuche keinen Gottesdienst, ich verlange nicht nach einer Predigt, ich vermisse den Pastor nicht, ich brauche keinen Mittler. Meine Zwiesprache mit Gott ist intim',<sup>42</sup> an assertion which reveals his skepticism towards the Catholic Church. In conjunction with his acerbic commentaries on the Federal Republic and the difficulties experienced by Koeppen's readers in identifying with his protagonists, it must be concluded that the inherent moral ambiguity in *Der Tod in Rom* further accounts for the novel's marginal position within the post-war canon. Koeppen fails to adhere to one conclusive moral position, seen in the way he places Adolf on a moral pedestal against his mother, father and Siegfried, and yet berates the immorality of religious institutions like the Catholic Church by paralleling their behaviour to that of Nazi fascists. This sense of moral doubt is encapsulated in the closing scene, where Koeppen leaves the reader to reach his or her own conclusions. It is precisely Koeppen's unwillingness to commit to either side of his own argument that renders *Der Tod in Rom* a far from didactic piece of literature. From a moral and educational perspective, the work failed to offer a grieving post-war generation clarity, rationality and hope, and this too has to account for the subsequent lack of interest in the work.

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<sup>41</sup>Wolfgang Koeppen, 'Sein Geschöpf: Antwort auf eine Umfrage: wie stehen Sie zu Gott', in *Gesammelte Werke, 5 vols*, ed. by Marcel Reich-Ranicki et al. (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1986), pp. 229-256 (p. 229).

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

CHAPTER 4  
GÜNTER GRASS

Zugegeben: ich bin Insasse einer Heil- und Pflegeanstalt, mein Pfleger beobachtet mich, läßt mich kaum aus dem Auge; denn in der Tür ist ein Guckloch, und meines Pflegers Auge ist von jenem Braun, welches mich, den Blauäugigen, nicht durchschauen kann. (*Die Blechtrommel* 6, from now on *BT*)

These are the well-known opening lines of Günter Grass's first novel *Die Blechtrommel*, a work that promptly propelled the young writer to international recognition and critical acclaim, and subsequently marked 1959, a year that also saw the publication of several other highly significant post-war works including Heinrich Böll's *Billard um halb zehn*, Uwe Johnson's *Mutmassungen über Jakob*, and Paul Celan's *Sprachgitter*,<sup>1</sup> as the 'annus mirabilis' of modern post-war West German literature.<sup>2</sup> Following its publication, *Die Blechtrommel* was met with a highly polarised reception. On the one hand, it was lauded as an unquestionable literary masterpiece that told the story of the rise and fall of Nazism from the infantile perspective of dwarf narrator and protagonist Oskar Matzerath and ultimately led to Grass's receiving the Nobel Prize in 1999. On the other, it was fiercely lambasted for its profane references, explicit representations of sexual behaviour, and aggressive sacrilege, a reaction so explosive that it resulted in Grass's defending his fiction in some forty lawsuits brought against both *Die Blechtrommel* and *Katz und Maus* (1961). A religious youth group even went as far as to stage a public burning of the *Die Blechtrommel* in Düsseldorf as condemnation of the novel's blasphemous content.<sup>3</sup>

As one would expect from a narrative work of such ingenuity and artistic creativity, and one that divided public opinion so markedly, no single analytical

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. Heinrich Böll, *Billard um halb zehn* (Berlin: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1959); Uwe Johnson, *Mutmaßungen über Jakob* (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1974); Paul Celan, *Die Niemandrose: Sprachgitter: Gedichte* (Frankfurt/M: Fischer, 1988)

<sup>2</sup>The year 1959 has been acknowledged as an 'annus mirabilis' in the following works: Siegfried Mews, *Günter Grass and His Critics: From The Tin Drum to Crabwalk* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2008), p. 1; Robert Weninger, *Streitbare Literaten: Kontroversen und Eklats in der deutschen Literatur von Adorno bis Walser* (Munich: Beck, 2004), p. 208.

<sup>3</sup>Patrick O'Neill, *Günter Grass: A Bibliography: 1955-1975* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976), p. 278.

approach is capable of sufficiently illustrating the conceptual, thematic and ideological depth to *Die Blechtrommel*. Since its publication, the novel has attracted the scholarly attention of ‘an entire army of analysts, interpreters and exegetes’,<sup>4</sup> whose inquisitive artillery has been aimed at, among other targets, the multiplicity of narrative perspectives, the novel’s ‘carnavalesque’ and grotesque imagery,<sup>5</sup> the early modern influence of Grimmelshausen, the significance of objects, the ambiguity and reliability of Oskar’s narrative perspective, the recurrent motif of guilt, and the implied connection between the Catholic Church and the National Socialist state. With this wealth of interpretative approaches in mind, the final chapter of this thesis will focus on a selected range of these thematic and formal aspects, specifically those that pertain to the religious dimensions of the novel, the complex triple-authority of an authorial, autobiographical and narrative voice, and the themes of culpability and accountability. It will ultimately explore the responses that the novel has provoked since its publication, and will examine the reasons for its reputation as ‘the greatest novel by a living author’.<sup>6</sup>

One of the most notable features of Grass’s public persona as author, poet, dramatist, essayist, graphic artist, sculptor, political activist and social commentator is his status as the ‘moral voice of the nation’<sup>7</sup> or the ‘conscience of the German nation’.<sup>8</sup> This acclamatory epithet is strikingly similar to the canonical status of Heinrich Böll as Germany’s literary hero, a reputation that began to take root in the late 1950s and was further cemented during the 1960s. It has even resurfaced in more recent scholarship in the publications of Keith Bullivant (1994), Martin Black (2006), Frank Finlay (1996), and Jan-Werner

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<sup>4</sup>Patrick O’Neill, *Acts of Narrative: Textual Strategies in Modern German Fiction* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), p. 97.

<sup>5</sup>The term ‘carnival’ or ‘carnavalesque’ first came to prominence as a literary term in: Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1984). It connotes subversion and anti-authoritarianism; the mockery of authoritative figures, the retraction of the mundane routines of everyday life, and the lower bodily strata degrading those conceptions of the world which seek to marginalise them.

<sup>6</sup>John Irving, Untitled review, *Saturday Review*, March 16 1982, pp. 13-14.

<sup>7</sup>Mary Fulbrook, “‘The Concept of Normalisation’ and the GDR in Comparative Perspective”, in *Power and Society in the GDR: 1961-1979: The Normalisation of Rule?*, ed. by Mary Fulbrook (New York: Berghahn, 2008), pp. 1-32 (p. 8).

<sup>8</sup>Stephen Brockmann, *Literature and German Reunification* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 5.

Müller (2000).<sup>9</sup> Yet whilst Böll and Grass both continue to uphold their reputations as leading voices of West German literature, what is apparent is the inherently dissimilar nature of the key concepts, themes and ideologies that characterise their oeuvres. As noted in Chapter II, Böll's early fiction primarily explores facets of the everyday lives of soldiers by expressing a 'Sympathie für den kleinen Mann',<sup>10</sup> the difficulties of returning to normality in the war's aftermath, and man's feelings of dejectedness and futility, themes which are prominent in the novels *Der Zug war pünktlich* (1949), *Wo warst du, Adam?* (1951), and *Billard um halb zehn* (1959).<sup>11</sup> Böll's fiction also operated within a humble moral framework and sought to contemplate earnestly issues such as the all-consuming nature of war, the victimised status of man, and the subsequent loss of humankind's underlying moral capacity. Grass's early fiction, on the other hand, is markedly more preoccupied with the home front, and whilst the novel does depict experiences of devastation, such as the *Kristallnacht* episode, its representation is not specifically intent on emotionally rousing the readers to feel sadness or pity. Here Oskar's narration is far more detached and his fairytale-like formulation defamiliarises the events: 'Es war einmal ein Kolonialwarenhändler [...] Es war einmal ein Spielzeughändler' (BT 241-242), and reveals his other preoccupations in the midst of his neighbours' despair and helplessness, 'Ich sorgte mich um meine Trommeln' (BT 243), something that renders Grass's approach markedly less emotionally fuelled. For unlike Böll, who predominantly identified with the plight of ordinary people who were affected by Nazi tyranny, Grass steers a more objective course by circumventing the themes of suffering and victimisation and focussing predominantly on Germany's burden of guilt.<sup>12</sup> This thematic strand constitutes the crux of the

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. Keith Bullivant, *The Future of German Literature* (Oxford: Berghahn, 1994), p. 18; Martin Black (ed.), *Stories, Political Writings and Autobiographical Works: Heinrich Böll* (New York: Continuum, 2006), p. 5; Frank Finlay, *On the Rationality of Poetry: Heinrich Böll's Aesthetic Thinking* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996) p. 4; Jan Werner-Müller, *Another Country: German Intellectuals, Unification and National Identity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 47.

<sup>10</sup> Asit Datta, *Kleinformen in der deutschen Erzählprosa seit 1945: eine poetologische Studie* (Munich: Uni-Druck, 1972), p. 162.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Heinrich Böll, *Der Zug war pünktlich* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1972); Heinrich Böll, *Wo warst du, Adam?* (Cologne: Middelhaue, 1967); Heinrich Böll, *Billard um halb zehn* (Berlin: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1959)

<sup>12</sup> Elisabeth Krimmer, *The Representation of War in German Literature: From 1800 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 133.

novel in the way it weaves itself into many of Grass's aesthetic ideas and narrative scenarios; Oskar's hump as an expression of the guilt he is forced to endure throughout his life, the dichotomous nature of Oskar's personality indicative of man's inner wickedness, as well as Grass's more overt criticism of the shame and guilt the Catholic Church should be forced to endure following their passivity in the face of Nazi barbarism. It is precisely Grass's acerbic tone and critical stance, in conjunction with his aesthetic preoccupation with eroticism, absurdity, and the 'carnavalesque', that render *Die Blechtrommel* such a fascinating and extraordinary case, particularly when contemplating its status as one of the most celebrated canonical works of post-war Germany.

This chapter shall therefore begin by contending that whilst Grass is commonly regarded as being a 'voice of the German nation', an epithet that parallels the canonical status of the everyman's novelist, Heinrich Böll, what appears to require further investigation is the question of how a writer whose depiction of pre- and post-war Germany is so scornful and pejorative and whose literary content is so scathing and outlandish, has been able to continuously capture the interests of readers, both nationally and internationally, ever since he started publishing. In Chapter III, it was asserted that it was the critical vilification of Koeppen's *Der Tod in Rom* as a profane, vulgar, nihilistic, and ferociously outspoken account of the ways in which Germans living in the Federal Republic went about dealing with their guilt that effectively determined the volume of disapproval and lack of interest in the novel on the part of contemporary readers. One cannot deny, however, that such defamations pertaining to *Der Tod in Rom*'s crudity, obscurity, undertones of sacrilege, as well as Koeppen's socio-political criticisms are also inherent characteristics not only of *Die Blechtrommel*, but also *Katz und Maus* and *Hundejahre* (1963).<sup>13</sup>

It is thus necessary to investigate further the question of how an author like Grass, who in ideological, thematic, and aesthetic terms is arguably more akin to a satirically oriented, and consequently neglected author like Wolfgang Koeppen,

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. Günter Grass, *Katz und Maus* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1999); Günter Grass, *Hundejahre* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1993)

holds the same reputation as a moralist like Heinrich Böll as a national literary hero. In light of previous premises made on Koeppen, the excitement and ongoing interest generated by Grass's fiction problematises any easy hypothesising about canonisation. This in turn raises two main questions for the upcoming discussion. Firstly, putting Grass's critical stance to one side, was it ultimately the bizarre, humorous and satirical nature of *Die Blechtrommel* that captured contemporary readers' interest? Secondly, is Grass's canonical status, both in Germany and internationally, less attributable to the nature of his fiction and possibly more closely related to his quasi celebrity status as a political and social commentator?

This chapter will therefore closely analyse *Die Blechtrommel* from a thematic, linguistic and narratological perspective and will question to extent to which *Die Blechtrommel* is accountable for Grass's on-going prevalence as a controversial artistic figure. It will also consider Grass's prominence within the public domain, his political activities, the scandal surrounding his autobiography *Beim Häuten der Zwiebel* (2006),<sup>14</sup> and the recent publication of his highly controversial poem 'Was gesagt werden muss' (April, 2012), in an attempt to conclude whether Grass's international reputation is actually a case of notoriety, popularity or both.

#### 4.1) Grass and the public domain

Günter Wilhelm Grass was born in Danzig, Poland (now Gdańsk) on October 16 1927 to mixed German-Slavic, Catholic-Protestant, petit-bourgeois parents. He attended local schools until 1944, whereupon he volunteered as part of the air defence unit, and was eventually sent to the Eastern Front during the Winter of 1944-1945. Although badly wounded, Grass was fortunate to have survived a skirmish that left half of his fellow soldiers dead. Moreover, if this fateful event had not provided sufficient insight for Grass into the futile and repugnant nature of such a bloody conflict, he was also forced to walk through the Dachau concentration camp prior to his release from a prisoner-of-war camp, an initiative

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<sup>14</sup>Günter Grass, *Beim Häuten der Zwiebel* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2006)



instigated as part of an American re-education programme.<sup>15</sup> This was an experience to which Grass, who had been indoctrinated in the ways of National Socialism as a child, responded with despair and disbelief: '[...] es brauchte weitere Jahre, bis ich zu begreifen begann: Das wird nicht aufhören, gegenwärtig zu bleiben; unsere Schuld wird sich weder verdrängen noch bewältigen lassen'.<sup>16</sup> This harrowing experience during his military service, in conjunction with his subsequent discovery of the brutal reality underlying Soviet rhetoric, namely through his expulsion from his native Poland after it was seized by the Soviet Army in 1946, inevitably contributed towards the critical stance seen in Grass's fiction. These experiences also help to account for the possible reasons behind some of his thematic preoccupations; the question of culpability, the focus placed in the *Danziger Trilogie* on the interwar and wartime years in his beloved native city, as well as his employment of an infantile perspective in *Die Blechtrommel*, possibly as a means to reflect on and indirectly communicate some of his own childhood experiences in Nazi-occupied Poland.

The eclectic mix of Grass's experiences growing up, exposure to dissimilar political ideologies, and the perspectives he presumably gained from his relocation from Poland to Düsseldorf, to West Berlin, to Paris, before returning to West Berlin in 1960, render him a most intriguing personality whose continued ferocity and outspokenness on a host of political, civic and cultural issues have accorded him a prominent status within the public domain. It is, of course, important to note that Grass has outlived many of his contemporaries such as Johnson, Koeppen, Améry, Hildesheimer and Celan. As a result, these writers have thus not been able to increase levels of interest in their fiction in the 21<sup>st</sup> century through public appearances, lectures, readings, etc. Grass, however, is still alive and whilst he may be 84 years old, he remains as successful as ever in maintaining his position in the national and international limelight by generating discussion through copious political engagements and literary controversies.

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<sup>15</sup>These biographical details are listed in: Julia F. Klimek, 'Günter Grass: 1927-', in *Holocaust Literature: An Encyclopaedia of Writers and their Works: 1 vol: Agosin to Lentin*, ed. by S. Lillian Kremer (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 464-467 (p. 464).

<sup>16</sup> Günter Grass, *Schreiben nach Auschwitz* (Frankfurt a/M: Luchterhand, 1990), p. 9.

Expanding upon this further, one of the most talked-about facets of Grass's public persona is his desire to speak out on political issues. The notion that writers might express themselves publically on civic matters gained particular urgency after the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961, as can be seen in one of Grass's first attempts to penetrate the political sphere. In 1961 he wrote to Anna Seghers, president of the GDR Writer's Association, asking 'Was können die Schriftsteller tun?'.<sup>17</sup> This was certainly a crucial step forward in terms of Grass's self-conception as a politically engaged writer. In the following years Grass went on to demonstrate loyalty to Germany's Social Democratic Party (SDP) and became active in their electoral campaigns. After participating in the SPD's election campaign in 1965, Grass published a collection of political pieces entitled 'Dich singe ich, Demokratie.' He campaigned vigorously on behalf of Willy Brandt and travelled throughout Germany, holding speeches on fifty-two separate occasions.<sup>18</sup> The distinctly theatrical nature of these speeches, which included 'Loblied auf Willy', 'Des Kaisers neue Kleider', and 'Ich klage an', demonstrates the enthusiasm with which Grass undertook his political duties. This level of enthusiasm is also evident in his 1972 publication *Aus dem Tagebuch einer Schnecke*, a work which clearly accentuates Grass's political activities by offering a partly fictionalised account of the party's 1969 campaign. Incidentally, this initiative led to the dissolution of the CDU/SDP coalition (under CDU Chancellor Kiesinger) and the accession of Willy Brandt to the role of *Bundeskanzler* some months later. It would be a vast oversimplification to claim that Grass's active participation and campaigning was directly responsible for such a momentous political victory, but it certainly reveals how the support and involvement of a figure so well known within the public domain was capable of impacting significantly on public opinion.

In addition to his work with the SPD, Grass also intervened in a whole host of issues of public interest. In adherence to his self-proclaimed status as a

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<sup>17</sup>Rebecca Braun, *Constructing Authorship in the Work of Günter Grass* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 40.

<sup>18</sup>Stuart Parkes, *Writers and Politics in Germany: 1945-2008* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2009), p. 58.

democratic socialist,<sup>19</sup> Grass ‘engagiert[e] sich [...] besonders für die Anliegen der Sinti und Roma, da viele von ihnen als Flüchtlinge wieder abgeschoben werden’.<sup>20</sup> In order to raise awareness of the Roma people’s strife, ‘die Grass als der blinde Fleck im Bewußtsein Europas versteht, weil sie wie kein anderes Volk, außer dem der Juden, anhaltender Verfolgung, Benachteiligung und in Deutschland der planmäßigen Vernichtung ausgesetzt gewesen sind’, he set up the ‘Stiftung zugunsten des Romavolkes’ in September 1997.<sup>21</sup> A further example of Grass recently voicing contentious personal opinions on political matters was his publication of ‘Was gesagt werden muss’, a poem published in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* on 4. April 2012 in which Grass alleges that Israel, with its extensive but undeclared nuclear programme, poses a greater threat to world peace than Iran. The extract below reveals Grass’ preoccupation with political matters.

[...] von ureigenen Verbrechen,/die ohne Vergleich sind,/Mal um Mal eingeholt und zur Rede/ gestellt wird,/wiederum und rein geschäftsmäßig, wenn/ auch/mit flinker Lippe als Wiedergutmachung/ deklariert,/ein weiteres U-Boot nach Israel/geliefert werden soll, dessen Spezialität/darin besteht, allesvernichtende/ Sprengköpfe/dorthin lenken zu können, wo die Existenz/einer einzigen Atombombe unbewiesen ist,/doch als Befürchtung von Beweiskraft sein will,/sage ich, was gesagt werden muß.<sup>22</sup>

The most significant moment of Grass’s public career to date is also one that heavily coloured the perceptions of those that had always closely followed his career, and this was when he made the highly polemic confession. In his autobiographical work *Beim Häuten der Zwiebel* (2006) and an interview published in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* interview of 11. August 2006, Grass confessed that he had served a short period of time in the *Waffen-SS* at the end of the Second World War.<sup>23</sup> In his autobiography, Grass provides an account

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<sup>19</sup>Mews, *Günter Grass*, p. 2.

<sup>20</sup>Markus Schulz, *Die Vernichtung der Menschheit hat begonnen: Zivilisationskritik im Spätwerk von Günter Grass* (Norderstedt: Grin, 2005), p. 100.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Günter Grass, *Was gesagt werden muss*, *Die Süddeutsche Zeitung*, April 4. 2012, pp. 3-4.

<sup>23</sup>Frank Schirrmacher and Hubert Spiegel, ‘Warum ich nach sechzig Jahren mein Schweigen breche’, *Die Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, August 11. 2006, pp. 33-35. Here Grass remarks ‘Ich war Mitglied der Waffen-SS, [...] Mein Schweigen über all die Jahre zählt zu den Gründen, warum ich dieses Buch geschrieben habe. Das mußte raus, endlich.’

of his childhood years, his relationships, his compulsory labour service, his application to work for the submarine corps, his accession into the military, and his membership of the 10<sup>th</sup> Tank Division Frundsberg. Described by Monika Schafi as ‘the literary political equivalent of a nuclear explosion,’ Grass’s exposé incited a venomous public reaction for three main reasons.<sup>24</sup> First, it betrayed those who regarded him as a ‘moralische Instanz’ in the way a cornerstone of his fiction had always been to critically confront Germany’s Nazi past.<sup>25</sup> Secondly, it came as a harrowing revelation for many Social Democrats who had welcomed Grass as an ambassador and a public face of their political party. Thirdly, and perhaps most crucially, his confession was then later used as sufficient justification in 2012 to render his poem ‘Was gesagt werden muss’ as not only politically controversial, but seemingly anti-Semitic. This notion once again called into question Grass’s credibility as a political and ethical authority. Once hailed as a great public moralist, Grass’s dark secret left many questioning the true nature of his persona. The resulting sense of mistrust was expressed by German Jewish Council President Charlotte Knobloch, who affirmed that Grass’s ‘langjähriges Schweigen wohl seine früheren Reden ab absurdum führen würde’.<sup>26</sup> This naturally forced many former advocates of his fiction to question whether it had it all been a lie, and whether it would now be hypocritical to use Grass’s literature as a moral benchmark. A particularly revelatory example in gauging the impact of Grass’s controversial confession is a study of influential German figures that was conducted by the German political magazine *Cicero* in October 2006, a couple of months after the release of *Beim Häuten der Zwiebel*. Compared to a similar study conducted by *Cicero* in April of the same year, in which Grass was voted as the most influential intellectual in German speaking countries, the same survey in October revealed that Grass had plummeted from first to twelfth place.<sup>27</sup> Reflecting on this sharp decline, it would seem likely, given the August publication date of his autobiography, that Grass’s waning

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<sup>24</sup> Monika Schafi, ‘Günter Grass’ *Beim Häuten der Zwiebel* (Peeling the Onion)’, in *The Novel in German since 1990*, ed. by Stuart Taberner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 270-283 (p. 270).

<sup>25</sup> Rebecca Braun, ‘“Mich in Variationen erzählen”: Günter Grass and the Ethics of Autobiography’, in *German Life Writing in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Birgit Dahlke, Dennis Tate and Roger Woods (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2010), pp. 121-136 (p. 121).

<sup>26</sup> Charlotte Knobloch, ‘Zentralrat vermutet PR-Maßnahme’, *Der Spiegel*, August 14, 2006, pp. 14-15.

<sup>27</sup> Mews, *Günter Grass*, p. 4.

popularity among critics and the general public was certainly connected to his disreputable confession. Conversely, it serves to illustrate, in conjunction with the aforementioned examples, how Grass's reputation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is predominantly dictated by his various scandals and controversies.

#### 4.2) Die Blechtrommel

The image of Grass in the public domain is one of outspokenness, dispute, audaciousness, and eccentricity. Grass continues to make known his political and ethical preoccupations, and appears to exercise a somewhat unsystematic approach regarding the eclectic mix of issues to which he has offered his support. Yet it is this continued presence in the limelight, the heartfelt loyalty and belief in his campaigns, and his apparent indifference to the negative consequences that often follow that make Grass such a '[...] skurrile und farbige Figur'.<sup>28</sup> Regardless of whether one agrees with his views on the threat of Israel, or whether one believes his fiction should be discredited for his belated confession to his *Waffen-SS* membership, it remains a contention of this thesis that Grass remains a prevalent international figure in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This is largely attributed to the curiosity and interest that surrounds his eccentricity and unconventionality, and also the heated discussions and reflections his actions are capable of generating. Carrying this notion forward towards a discussion on the canonisation of *Die Blechtrommel*, it appears that, in spite of the dark and cynical tones that originate from Grass's confrontation of issues like Germany's culpability and the failings of the Catholic Church, it is once again the notion of *Skurrilität*, absurdity, eccentricity, and satire, traits that continue to encapsulate the image of Günter Grass and account for contemporary readers' avid fascination with the work.

We shall begin by exploring the character Oskar Matzerath, the chief narrator and protagonist in *Die Blechtrommel*. The novel opens in a psychiatric institution in post-war Germany, where Oskar recounts his past in Danzig in the years

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<sup>28</sup>Herbert Glossner, 'In wechselnden Zeiten', *Das Sonntagsblatt*, August 25.1995, p. 4.

preceding and during the Second World War as well as in post-War Düsseldorf. Oskar professes to have consciously stopped growing at the age of three as an act of defiance against adulthood. He achieved this by throwing himself down the stairs in the cellar at his family home, which resulted in his developing a contorted dwarf stature. Oskar also possesses the bizarre ability to shatter glass with his intensely shrill voice, a passion that is intertwined with his love of banging on his tin drum. This becomes a key device in the novel with which Oskar evokes memories from the past and laments the shortcomings of the present.

One of the particularly interesting characteristics of Grass's narrator and protagonist is the amount of scholarly debate surrounding his literary function and the representation of his character. Many critics regard him as a monstrous figure, an interpretation that prompted Volker Neuhaus to comment that hardly any other character in literature has stimulated so much criticism as Oskar Matzerath.<sup>29</sup> Hans Mayer, for instance, offers an extremely negative characterisation, describing Oskar as 'a wicked imp [who] presents himself to the reader in the guise of an ugly and awful villain and lacks human qualities.'<sup>30</sup> William Gordon Cunliffe is similarly critical, asserting how Oskar 'serves as a substitute for Hitler'.<sup>31</sup> Peter Michelsen, on the other hand, recognises him as a quasi-mythological, beastly character.<sup>32</sup> Despite this wealth of criticism on this perceived monstrous and virtually inhuman persona, it is also interesting to draw attention to those scholars whose characterisation of Oskar is founded on doubt and uncertainty. John Reddick, for instance, recognises Oskar as the paramount figure in the novel, but raises questions on how Grass's protagonist is 'compounded inwardly of two distinct personas',<sup>33</sup> an observation that makes the issue of Oskar's inherent goodness or wickedness considerably more difficult to resolve. This question of ambiguity surrounding Oskar's enigmatic depiction has

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<sup>29</sup>Volker Neuhaus, *Günter Grass: die Blechtrommel: Interpretationen* (Munich: Oldenbourg: 1982), p. 121.

<sup>30</sup>Hans Mayer, *Zur deutschen Literatur der Zeit: Zusammenhänge, Schriftsteller, Bücher* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1967), p. 195.

<sup>31</sup>William Gordon Cunliffe, *Günter Grass* (New York: Twayne, 1969), p. 76.

<sup>32</sup>Peter Michelsen, 'Oskar oder das Rostrum: Reflexionen über Die Blechtrommel von Günter Grass', *Neue Rundschau*, February 2. 1972, pp. 722-724 (p. 722).

<sup>33</sup>John Reddick, *The 'Danzig Trilogy' of Günter Grass: A study of The Tin Drum, Cat and Mouse, and Dog Years* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), p. 58.

also been explored by an anonymous Irish critic, who asserted ‘It remains a moot point whether the dwarfish ‘hero’ [...] can be regarded as a mirror of his times or an abnormal, distorted caricature’.<sup>34</sup> It is specifically these latter citations pertaining to Oskar’s mysterious and to some extent impenetrable nature that account for the widespread interest and curiosity with which *Die Blechtrommel* was met following its publication.

One of the most unconventional and fascinating facets of Grass’s depiction of his narrator and protagonist is the way it reflects the paradigms of the carnival and the grotesque that Mikhail Bakhtin addresses in the study *Rabelais and His World*. Both Grass and Bakhtin confront the tyrannical regimes of their time, namely Stalinist orthodoxy and the Third Reich, both of which exercised oppressive politics for the marginalisation and extermination of undesired ‘asocials’. By making his protagonist a dwarf, Grass appears to be drawing parallels with the history of the profane and the grotesque in European culture, which established itself through the presence of trickster figures, such as ‘gypsies, transient musicians, exotics of doubtful origin, freed slaves, midgets and giants’,<sup>35</sup> and other ostracised social subgroups in European marketplaces. Grass’s allusion to the grotesque and ‘carnavalesque’ as a means to challenge the official culture thus provides the portrayal of his dwarfed protagonist and narrator with a unique and satirical function, whose absurdity and eccentricity generate curiosity.<sup>36</sup>

These points accentuate some of the possible ways to interpret Oskar’s character, yet another productive way of approaching him is to consider his role as a narrator. The reader quickly becomes intrigued by Oskar’s complex, multi-dimensional personality. In adherence to the trickster’s reputation for disruption and mischief, as well as his tendency to rebel against order and normality,

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<sup>34</sup>Mews, *Günter Grass*, p. 21.

<sup>35</sup>Peter O. Arnds, ‘Blasphemy and Sacrilege in the Novel of Magic Realism: Grass, Bulgakov and Rushdie’, in *Negotiating the Sacred II: Blasphemy and Sacrilege in the Arts*, ed. by Elizabeth Burns Coleman and Maria Suzette Fernandes-Dias (Canberra: ANU, 2008), pp. 69-79 (p. 70).

<sup>36</sup>Arnds describes the unique perspective of the trickster and their ability to bring weaknesses to the fore and to therefore rise against the official culture. Cf. Peter O. Arnds, *Representation, Subversion and Eugenics in Günter Grass’ The Tin Drum* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2004), p. 112.

Grass's 'modern picaresque' appears to take advantage of the power of his literary presence in the novel by ignoring conventional modes of linear narrative representation, and scampers roguishly between a number of key positions to create confusion;<sup>37</sup> his role as the first-person narrator ('Ich beginne weit vor mir; denn niemand sollte sein Leben beschreiben [...]') (BT 9), and his appearance in the third-person ('An seinem dritten Geburtstag stürzte unser kleiner Oskar die Kellertreppe hinunter, [...]') (BT 67). The narrative has the complex double-authority of an autobiographical and story telling voice, and this oscillation of perspectives complicates the reader's understanding of Oskar's level of proximity and affiliation to the narrated events. The nonlinear narrative also distorts and de-familiarises Oskar's reality, and forces readers to call into question what may have previously been accepted as truth. Clearly, the question of focalisation in *Die Blechtrommel* is extensive and complex, and requires consideration of additional facets such as the role of Bruno Münsterberg and Gottfried Vittlar as other first-person narrators, which this thesis has no space to explore at length. The point remains that the complex narrative web sees the figure of Oskar drumming his own rhythm and commanding the authority of his own autobiographical account by portraying himself from several complex perspectives, firstly in the way he self identifies, and secondly in the level of proximity he assumes to recall particular events.

A pertinent response to the assertion above is to question how this impacts on Oskar's reliability as a narrator. As a storyteller, Oskar is mendacious, prejudiced and far from sane. The multiple first and third person narrative frames, seen in 'Ich stand im Schlafzimmer der Greffs. Meine Trommel hing mir schief und unsicher an. Oskar kannte das Zimmer ja [...]' (BT 384), constantly force the reader to assess the truth of what is happening in the story and this renders Oskar an untrustworthy narrator. On the first page of the novel the reader becomes aware that Oskar is an inmate of an asylum for the mentally ill, which naturally defines the veracity of his account as doubtful. Yet what is perhaps more

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<sup>37</sup>Richard Hinton Thomas and Wilfried van der Will, *The German Novel and the Affluent Society* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1968), p. 69.



bewildering from a reader's perspective is that the narrated events are presented by Oskar as 'truth'. Other than a fleeting reference to '[s]ein hoffentlich genaues Erinnerungsvermögen' (*BT* 7), there is 'no external commentary to signal to the reader to what extent his perception of reality may be disturbed',<sup>38</sup> which characterises the reliability of his narrative as doubly questionable. This is an important facet of our discussion of Grass's canonicity, because, in light of contentions made in the previous chapter regarding the estranging and distancing nature of Koeppen's Modernist multiperspectival narrative, particularly with the character Adolf Judejahn, the fragmented and distorted nature of Oskar's storytelling achieves a somewhat different effect, in the way that the eccentric narration and focalisation invites identification. This is however thwarted by the switches into the third person and by the far-fetched nature of much of the narrative content. What can therefore be seen is a simultaneous offer and retraction of the possibility of identification that makes Oskar so compelling a figure. In accordance with Michael Hollington's contention that the interest in and enthusiasm for Grass's work derives from Oskar being a 'virtuoso exponent of multiple, complex personae',<sup>39</sup> what can once again be seen here is Grass gaining critical attention through the fascination surrounding his reputation as a contentious, satirical and obscure writer, for despite the questions surrounding the extent of Oskar's knowledge, the multifaceted nature of his persona remains compelling due to the possibility of personal identification.

Pursuing this discussion of the curiosity that derives from Oskar's complex representation, he also assumes numerous different identities at several points in the narrative. On the basis of Oskar's uncertain paternity, his passion for drumming, his contorted posture, and his love for Signora Roswitha, one quickly reaches the conclusion that it is impossible to determine the fundamental essence of Grass's protagonist. The mischievous Oskar refuses to conform to the social norms of the official culture by assuming an array of different roles and identities at different stages throughout his life; he can be Oskar the drummer, Oskar the

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<sup>38</sup>Maggie Ann Bowers, *Magical Realism* (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 63.

<sup>39</sup>Mews, *Günter Grass*, p. 21.

dwarf, Oskar Bronski, Oskar Matzerath, Oskar Markus, Oskar the circus performer, Oskarnello Raguna, for it is he who is in control.

Enthusiasm and interest in Grass's obscure and complex protagonist is similarly achieved by the idea of the trickster opposing official social conventions, and one can identify this level of rebellion, controversy and sheer eccentricity in Oskar in the way his inner goodness becomes overrun by an instinctive desire to create commotion. In order to depict this tumultuous clash between order and chaos, Grass imitates Goethe's notion of 'Zwei Seelen', whereby Faust feels torn apart by dual material desires – 'Zwei Seelen wohnen, ach! in meiner Brust,/ Die eine will sich von der anderen trennen'.<sup>40</sup> The young protagonist describes his own two souls as Rasputin and Goethe, a conclusion he reaches after reading Goethe's *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* and the illustrated volume *Rasputin und die Frauen*: 'Nach längerem Zögern [...] griff ich, ohne zu wissen, was ich griff, nur dem bekannten inneren Stimmchen gehorchend, zuerst den Rasputin und dann den Goethe' (BT 102). This sense of inner conflict that Oskar identifies is explained as a contrast 'zwischen dem Gesundheitsbeter und dem Alleswisser, zwischen dem Düsternen, der die Frauen bannte, und dem lichten Dichturfürsten, der sich so gern von den Frauen bannen ließ' (BT 102). Here, Grass is drawing on Rasputin's tainted reputation as a debauched spiritual healer and perverted charlatan and comparing it to that of Goethe, who was known to enjoy a life of intellect, exploration and passion. This thoroughly incongruous set of images once again alludes to the dichotomous nature of Oskar, specifically, to his capacity for good and evil. This inharmonious blend of orderly and chaotic characteristics that Oskar identifies within himself is also reminiscent of a later comparison made between Hitler and Beethoven, whose portraits are placed side by side in Oskar's parents' living room: 'Hitler und das Genie hingen sich gegenüber, blickten sich an, durchschauten sich und konnten dennoch aneinander nicht froh werden' (BT 134). In much the same way, Grass positions two highly divergent individuals within close proximity to one another; while Beethoven evokes the humanist-classical epoch, Hitler signifies ardent nationalism and an

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<sup>40</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust: der Tragödie: erster Teil* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1971), verses 1112-1113.

ideology of Aryan supremacy. This juxtaposition thus permits the illustration of conflicting influences and ideological forces Oskar was exposed to during the Nazi years. A further example of Oskar possessing 'zwei Seelen' is the occasion on which he reflects on his baptism, and how Father Wiehnke asked him to declare whether or not he renounces Satan: 'Widersagst du dem Satan? Und all seinen Werken?' (BT 161). Oskar, however, does not feel the desire to renounce, for he does not wish to spoil his relations with the devil: '[...] ich dachte nicht daran, zu verzichten, [...] Ohne daß ich es mir mit Satan verdorben hatte salbte Hochwürden Wiehnke mich auf der Brust und zwischen den Schultern' (BT 161). After the service, Oskar asks the Satan within him 'Alles gut überstanden?' (BT 161), an act that irrefutably points to the young child's inner dark side and his patent embracing of it.

And yet this preoccupation with the devil stands in sharp contrast to the scene in which Oskar undermines the authority of Jesus, and appears to usurp his authority. By encouraging Jesus to drum on his tin drum as a means of asserting his divine primacy, - 'Ein kleines privates Wunderchen wollte er [...]. Ich saß und wartete [...]. Die Zeit verging, aber Jesus schlug nicht auf die Trommel' (BT 169 ff.) - his failing to do so appears to suggest that Oskar arrogates the name of Jesus.<sup>41</sup> Oskar's interactions with both Jesus and Satan reveal an intriguing paradox of divine and malevolent traits, a dichotomous mix that once again points to Oskar's dual personality and his instinctive desire to bring about chaos. Again, it is this level of complexity and eccentricity inherent in Oskar's depiction that makes this protagonist so fascinating, for he is inherently contentious and satirical and thereby captivating.

The scene where this intriguing paradox of attributes particularly comes to the fore depicts a Nazi rally that Oskar attends on the *Maiwiese* (BT 135 ff.). In true trickster style, Oskar, from his marginalised position underneath the rostrum, defiantly drums 'Jimmy the Tiger' as a counter-rhythm to that played by the Hitler Youth marching band. The military procession soon dissolves into a

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<sup>41</sup>Alfred D. White, 'Triumph of the Creative Dwarf: How Grass uses Oskar to defy the Power of Evil', in *Approaches to Teaching Grass' The Tin Drum*, ed. by Monika Schafi (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2008), pp. 90-102 (p. 101).

freewheeling waltz of laughter and merriment, much to the irritation of Gauleiter Löbsack, whose attempts to appease the commotion are utterly in vain: 'Nur dem Löbsack, [...] mit einem langen brauen Führungsstabschwanz mitten in der Menge kochte' (BT 141). Having previously observed the frailty of the rostrum's scaffolding, - 'mit dem Anblick des nackten, in seiner Hässlichkeit tatsächlichen Gerüstes' (BT 139) – Oskar realises that the whole procession is vulnerable to being toppled by the forces of chaos, a chaos that he, from his inferior position beneath the structure, is able to bring about. This bizarre and comical scene thus depicts the emergence of Oskar's 'zweite Seele', his devilish and mischievous side. His function as a political liberator also comes into play to challenge the official culture by exposing its weaknesses in a most obscure way. This additionally serves to offer a fresh perspective on the dichotomous nature of the trickster, whose perceived dark and rebellious side paradoxically has the capacity to establish order and stability, in this case by interfering and disrupting Nazi activity. Evidently, the role of Oskar as an embodiment of the grotesque and 'carnavalesque' is both central and marginal, for he exacts order from the chaos he initially establishes and inhabits, and it is additionally this element that has accorded Oskar's 'trickster' function with such a great deal of interest and curiosity. On the one hand, Oskar is a young boy with a distorted, feeble body, yet on the other, he is powerful rebellious force, whose personality is so enigmatic and multifaceted that it leaves readers enraptured and entertained.

#### 4.3) Germany's culpability

The strength and success of Grass's portrayal of his narrator and protagonist thus partly derives from the power he assumes from his physically and socially marginalised position, all of which operates within an eccentric aesthetic framework to reflect the paradigms of the 'carnavalesque'. Yet the impact of Oskar's trickery is not merely a means for Grass to ridicule Nazism or to express sympathy with society's marginalised subgroups, for it also acts as a way for Grass to comment satirically on some of the era's more problematic subjects, namely the issue of Germany's culpability and the question of the Catholic Church's decision to remain passive throughout the Holocaust. Beginning with

the polemical issue of Germany's guilt, Grass confronts the subject matter with utmost seriousness, but by steering a tactfully indirect course. Unlike Koeppen, whose treatment of the question of Germany's accountability was ferociously forthright, as was seen in the portrayals of Gottlieb Judejahn and Friedrich Wilhelm Pfaffrath, who outwardly revelled in their bloody participation in the Holocaust and their 'success' at evading justice, Grass's representation of these same social issues exercises a greater subtlety which renders the entire commentary distinctly less acerbic and cynical.

An obvious first example of Grass's indirect treatment of the question of culpability would be Oskar's confinement to his hunchbacked posture, a potentially figurative symbol of Germany's ugliness and the burden of history it is forced to eternally carry.<sup>42</sup> This idea is also put forward by Alan Bance, who also uses Oskar's disability as a means to better decipher Grass's indictment of Germany's conduct during the war: '[Oskar's] dwarf stature reflects the immaturity and dwarfed morality of society',<sup>43</sup> in other words, Germany's political *Unmündigkeit*. By parodying the elements of the carnivalesque, Grass succeeds in earnestly drawing attention to serious subject matter but veils it with touches of eccentricity and absurdity. Another example of where Grass employs an unconventional mode of representation to critically comment on society denying its guilt is the scene where the Soviet Troops invade Danzig, and enter the cellar of Alfred Matzerath, where he and his family are hiding. In a state of panic, Matzerath is forced to conceal his affiliations with the Nazi party by swallowing his party signet pin that Oskar presses into his hand: '[er] wollte es los werden und fand [...] kein anderes Versteck als seine Mundhöhle, [...] Nun würgte er an dem sperrigen Bonbon, lief rot an, bekam dicke Augen, hustete, weinte [...]' (BT 485). A harrowing scene then ensues, where Matzerath's body violently convulses as he chokes on the sharp pin, before being shot dead by Russian soldiers in front of his wife and two sons. Arguably the brutal nature of this scene reveals a personal condemnation from Grass of the outright cowardliness shown by Nazis who immediately renounced their loyalties

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<sup>42</sup>Arnds, *Blasphemy*, p. 70.

<sup>43</sup>Alan F. Bance 'The Enigma of Oskar in Grass' Blechtrommel', in *The German Novel 1945-1960*, ed. by Alan F. Bance (Stuttgart: Hans-Dieter Heinz, 1980), pp. 147-156 (p. 151).

following the collapse of the Third Reich; after all, one can hardly fail to miss the ironic and satirical undertones of a Nazi choking to death on his own signet pin. Yet the exaggerated and ludicrous nature of the scene once again reveals Grass's adherence to the paradigms of the carnivalesque in an attempt to veil a challenging subject matter with touches of eccentricity and hyperbole.

The repeated emphasis on the children's game 'Die Schwarze Köchin' in *Die Blechtrommel* similarly underscores the question of repressed guilt, this time in Oskar (BT 722, 724, 731). Oskar claims to have murdered his mother and his uncle, which he first blames on his drum before replacing the pretence by accepting accountability: '[...] meine Trommel, nein, ich selbst, der Trommler Oskar, brachte zuerst meine arme Mama, dann den Jan Bronski, meinen Onkel und Vater ins Grab' (BT 299). The theme of Oskar's guilt figures largely in the final chapter where he is haunted by the 'Schwarze Köchin', a character of infantile fantasy with a 'ubiquitous, protean, fear inspiring presence'.<sup>44</sup> Grass invokes her omnipresence in the closing lines of the novel, 'Schwarz war die Köchin hinter mir immer schon [...] Ist die Schwarze Köchin da? Ja- Ja- Ja!' (BT 731), a technique that serves to highlight the magnitude of the emotional burden that has forever haunted Oskar. Katharina Hall supports this view and affirms how the 'Black Cook' 'embodies the trauma and guilt of his own [Oskar's] as well as the larger German past'.<sup>45</sup> Inevitably the issue of Oskar's expression of guilt is, to some degree, problematic, for his narration is unreliable and his words should not always be taken at face value. For instance, he confesses in the final chapter to mimicking his fear: 'das mühsame Aufrechterhalten der Furcht' (BT 723). As is often the case in *Die Blechtrommel*, it is left to the readers to establish where the truth lies.<sup>46</sup> The point however remains that, regardless of the ambiguity surrounding Oskar's feelings of personal accountability, the aforementioned examples show the thematic prevalence of guilt in the novel.

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<sup>44</sup>Constantin V. Ponomareff and Ken Bryson, *The Curve of the Sacred: An Exploration of Human Spirituality* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), p. 39.

<sup>45</sup> Katharina Hall, "'But even Herr Matzerath is unable to keep his story running in a straight line": The Role of the Secondary Narrators in Günter Grass's *The Tin Drum*', in *Approaches to teaching Grass' The Tin Drum*, ed. by Monika Schafi (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2008), pp. 103-116 (p. 113).

<sup>46</sup>Noel Thomas, *The Narrative Works of Günter Grass: A Critical Interpretation* (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1982), p. 73.

#### 4.4) Indictment of the Catholic Church

Remaining within this aesthetic framework, Grass also employs a distinctly satirical approach in the way he directs the question of culpability towards the Catholic Church. It is important to begin this section by stating that *Die Blechtrommel* is a novel that is outwardly atheist, since, like Koeppen's *Der Tod in Rom*, it problematises the role of faith as a means to overcome the atrocities of the Holocaust. Grass is extremely cynical and accusatory when dealing with matters of Christianity, for the novel explicitly deals with the Catholic Church's spinelessness in its failure to account for its wartime passivity, as can be seen in Oskar's figurative attempt to *break* the Church's silence. Grass's tone is unashamedly blasphemous in the way Oskar violates the sacred realm with his uncouth language and behaviour. As noted in the previous chapter on Koeppen, it was, to a certain degree, such ferociously obscene thematic content in Koeppen's *Der Tod in Rom* that accounted for its thoroughly unfavourable reception. Yet as I will argue here, whilst one would struggle to find elements in *Die Blechtrommel* that were intended to comfort, console and offer hope to a grieving post-war nation, the innately cynical tone that typifies Grass's treatment of the question of the Church's guilt is so eccentric, as the following examples will demonstrate, it sparked a widespread literary frenzy in post-war Germany and resulted in the novel selling 400,000 copies in its first year.<sup>47</sup>

The historical context surrounding Grass's thematic preoccupation is the alleged silence of Pope Pius XII when faced with the atrocities of the Holocaust, the Catholic Church's failure to intervene despite its knowledge of widespread human suffering, as well as endemic anti-Semitism within the Catholic Church. Oskar is employed by Grass to denounce such abominable acts of apathy by once again embracing the role of a trickster figure that rises up from his marginalised position in society. In accordance with Arnds' depiction of ancient European trickster culture, where the profane were excluded from churches as their

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<sup>47</sup> Patrick O'Neill, *Critical Essays on Günter Grass* (Boston, MA: Hall, 1987), p. 5.

presence signified a grotesque violation of the sacred realm,<sup>48</sup> Grass unashamedly breaches this division by having Oskar challenge the official culture through confronting the Jesus figure in person whilst his mother is confessing her sins. These represent some of the most blasphemous passages in the novel, conflating ‘sacred images with those of the material lower bodily stratum’.<sup>49</sup> Oskar climbs up onto the statue in the Sacred Heart Church and positions himself on the Virgin Mary’s right thigh, defacing the figure in the process: ‘Seinen Fingernägeln ermöglichte sich jenes Schaben, welches unter der Farbe den Gips deutlich macht’ (BT 167). Evidently a physical manifestation of Oskar rising up to subvert the figures’ divine authority, the young child continues to violate this division by stroking the Jesus figure’s penis, his ‘Gießkännchen’ (BT 167), thus giving himself an erection. In the marketplace, Bakhtin affirms how ‘the most improper and sinful oaths were those involving the body of the Lord and its various parts’,<sup>50</sup> and like a true trickster, Oskar appears to revel in molesting the sacred Jesus figure. The indecent behaviour then continues when Oskar puts the tin drum around Jesus’ neck. Expanding upon the uncouth image of Oskar touching the Jesus figure’s flaccid penis as a representation of the Catholic Church’s moral impotence, Oskar’s decision to offer him his firm, rigid drumsticks is evidently a phallic symbol to suggest Oskar’s usurpation of Jesus’ authoritative role. Oskar then demands that the Jesus figure drums, a request that can perhaps best be interpreted as Jesus’ opportunity to speak out, to explain, to clarify his failings through the medium of Oskar’s treasured instrument. This is perhaps the one moment in the novel where Oskar verges on the edge of discovering faith, - ‘Ein [...] Wunderchen wollte er, [...] damit ein für allemal feststand, ob Oskar dafür oder dagegen trommeln sollte’ (BT 169), – yet Jesus’ silence, his feebleness, and his failure to clarify reaffirms Oskar’s scepticism and cynicism. Thus, as a symbolic gesture to figuratively disrupt the Church’s taciturnity, Oskar readily fills the void by directing his shrill voice up towards three stain glass windows, - ‘sang ich die drei hohen Fenster der Apsis an’ (BT 171) -, an act that serves to show the *breaking* of the silence that the Catholic Church themselves were unprepared to break.

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<sup>48</sup> Arnds, *Blasphemy and Sacrilege*, p. 70

<sup>49</sup> Arnds, *Representation*, p. 110.

<sup>50</sup> Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, pp. 192-193.



#### 4.5) Conclusion

This reading of *Die Blechtrommel* demonstrates several key aspects. First, Grass is the only writer of the four studied in the thesis who has not sought to thematise the importance of Christian faith as a means of overcoming nihilistic fears. Conversely, Grass's thematic treatment of religion reveals a thoroughly accusatory and acerbic tone, and represents a damning indictment of a divine institution responsible for defining the moral and ethical code society is expected to adhere to. In addition to this, the novel's content is not only frequently sacrilegious, but the ubiquitous presence of the question of man's personal culpability for his actions also symbolises a harsh and chilling indictment of post-war German society. The fact remains, however, that *Die Blechtrommel* was extremely well received in the 1960s. It achieved a record number of sales, was translated into most major languages, and was the subject of extensive international critical acclaim. A film adaptation was also made in 1979. The novel's success record easily surpasses the accomplishments of *Märkische Argonautenfahrt*, *Wo warst du, Adam?* and *Der Tod in Rom*. The remarkable post-war reception is firstly attributable to the year of the novel's publication. It can be seen that in 1959 Germans were willing to accept truths that they had been unwilling to confront in 1954. The German *Wirtschaftswunder* that boomed in the latter part of the 1950s saw a social shift towards capitalism, and at the same time, an increasingly secularised society and one that was learning to deal with its memories of the Third Reich. By 1959, German readers were perhaps less abhorred by the themes of victimhood, satire and sacrilege. Developing this theory on a textual level, readers were captivated by Grass's comic and satirical treatment of mankind's monstrous actions. Grass flaunts incongruity as a literary device, and by demonstrating such an extensive aesthetic preoccupation with the grotesque and the 'carnavalesque', he succeeds in establishing an outlandish aesthetic framework within which to confront paradoxically sombre thematic issues. The novel's success is also related to the figure of Oskar, who remains a fundamentally fascinating protagonist. The wealth of interpretations of his narrative function is extensive, and ranges from him being regarded as a wicked

imp to a capricious trickster. Yet is precisely this level of ambiguity surrounding his multifarious persona that renders him such a captivating protagonist; sometimes he is Oskar Matzerath, sometimes Oskar Bronski, other times an incarnation of Jesus, other times Satan. His function as an unreliable narrator is similarly significant. Whilst it results in the same confusion and disjointedness that was partially accountable to the failure of Koeppen's readers to emotionally connect with the character Adolf Judejahn, it does not have the same estranging effect. Instead, it makes Oskar's story all the most captivating. To reiterate the aforementioned conclusion, it is Grass's tendency towards eccentricity that has always worked in his favour, and it is precisely his unique portrayal of Oskar, his bizarre symbols and metaphors, the unfathomable scenarios, and acts so sacrilegious that they verge on hilarious that account for such widespread post-war fascination with *Die Blechtrommel*.

This chapter has thus sought to illustrate the high and on-going level of interest shown not only in Grass's literary abilities, but also in his role as a public figurehead. His reception has always been clearly marked by public interest and curiosity, and his capacity to sustain the attention of national and international audiences has not only accorded him the reputation of being a 'voice of the German nation,' but has earned him a place alongside other canonised authors of the post-war era. The circumstances surrounding Grass's on-going success have been, however, worthy of deliberation. By harking back to assumptions put forward in previous chapters in this thesis, the triumph of fellow canonised writer Heinrich Böll's fiction was his lucidity of language, his unostentatious ability to empathise with the emotions and suffering of his readers, and the clear sense of optimism in his writing. Conversely, it was Wolfgang Koeppen's acerbity and ferociousness, his difficult thematic content, and his preoccupation with post-war Germany's social, economical, spiritual and moral deficiencies that led to his widespread rejection. Such postulations then inevitably raise questions as to how *Die Blechtrommel*'s markedly blasphemous and accusatory stance, the abhorrent nature of some of Grass's depicted scenarios, and the apparent lack of lucidity that derives from such a complex network of differing narrative perspectives have succeeded in earning it the reputation as 'the greatest novel by a living

author', for these were precisely the traits that accounted for the waning interest in Koeppen's fiction.

As this chapter has attempted to illustrate, the answer to this query lies in Grass's sheer unconventionality, eccentricity, and the humour that derives from it. Seen in his aesthetic preoccupation with paradigms of the 'carnavalesque,' Grass brandishes absurdity as a literary device, but employs it as a means to figuratively deal with questions of culpability. For what is significant about Oskar's humpback, his mother's grisly suicide, Oskar's profanities in church and his father's unintentional death by choking on his party lapel badge is that Grass constructed these hyperbolic episodes as a means to combine critical self-reflection with satire and comedy. It is precisely this unique and controversial style that first captured the interest of readers in the 1960s and 1970s by drawing them in, eliciting a blend of earnest contemplation and humour, and providing subsequent generations with a distinctive literary talking point. This fascination with Grass has since been able to maintain itself through his on-going public appearances and ability to remain relevant within the public domain. Whether he is engaged with an ethical cause, campaigning on behalf of the SPD, or inciting debate by confessing his former membership to the *Waffen-SS*, the fact remains that Grass continues to exude the same air of audaciousness, controversy, and outlandishness that was first seen in his 1959 publication, and has earned him something of an iconic status within the modern-day 'celebrity sphere'. This chapter shall therefore conclude by reaffirming that Grass's on-going canonised status is attributable to his reputation as an eccentric, a trait proudly displayed in his literary accomplishments of the 1960s, and one he continues to revel in in political, social, and ethical matters in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## CONCLUSION

This thesis has explored religion and canon formation in 1950s West German writing by critically examining four post-war West German novels. It has looked at the divergent representations of Catholic themes, revealing how some writers championed Christianity as a solution to the fear and despair that plagued post-war German society, whilst others assumed an ambivalent or cynical position. In conjunction with this, the study has concentrated on the contemporary reactions to the four novels, and questioned why some particular works have earned a place in the literary canon of West German literature, whilst others remain largely unread. Below is a concise overview of the conclusions reached in Chapters 1 to 4.

Man tut gut daran, sich zu erinnern, daß Elisabeth Langgässer im ersten Nachkriegsjahrzehnt die meistbeachtete, meistzitierte zeitgenössische Dichterin Deutschlands war.<sup>1</sup>

Eberhard Horst's quotation perfectly encapsulates the discrepancy between the widespread public interest shown in Langgässer's first post-war novel, *Das unauslöschliche Siegel*, and the 'bald darauf einsetzende[m] Vergessen ihres literarischen Erfolges' that prevailed in the 1950s.<sup>2</sup> In setting itself the task of identifying how a once celebrated writer became 'nahezu vergessen' within a matter of years,<sup>3</sup> this study has concluded that the profoundly allegorical and iconographic nature of *Märkische Argonautenfahrt*, combined with Langgässer's rejection of 'Wirklichkeitsnähe' by obfuscating the realms of truth and fantasy are accountable for why this Christian writer failed to stake her place in the first post-war literary decade.<sup>4</sup> Impassioned by the wave of re-Christianisation that took root in the early post-war years, seen in the establishment of the CDU and the Bavarian CSU in 1945, Langgässer's enthusiasm for the topicality of re-Christianisation resounded in her religiously oriented first novel, *Das unauslöschliche Siegel*. Such compelling Catholic themes resonated well among

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<sup>1</sup>Eberhard Horst, 'Wird die Verfolgte sich retten? Elisabeth Langgässer', in *Geh ein Wort weiter: Aufsätze zur Literatur*, ed. by Eberhard Horst (Düsseldorf: Claassen, 1983), pp. 112-123 (p. 113).

<sup>2</sup>Mülverstedt, *Thema*, p. 11.

<sup>3</sup>Schonauer, *Prosaliteratur*, p. 204.

<sup>4</sup>Wehdeking, *Lost Generation*, p. 147.

readers in the mid- to late-1940s, yet this success was ephemeral. With the onset of the *Wirtschaftswunder* that implanted increasingly capitalist agendas in West German society,<sup>5</sup> combined with the growing prominence of *Gruppe 47* writers like Andersch, Richter, Böll and Schnurre in the latter part of the decade who committed themselves to the sizable task of dissolving the nimbus of mystery and fate and presenting the Third Reich in its ‘everyday dress’,<sup>6</sup> Langgässer’s religious and euphemistic mode became gradually more marginal. *Märkische Argonautenfahrt* is a novel laden with eschatological and mythological references, estranging depictions of earthly locations, character interaction void of true human emotion, as well as the novel’s implicit assertion regarding the restorative powers of Christian faith. It was ultimately this heavily allegorical and staunchly Catholic focus that failed to uphold relevance in post-war West German society. Her Catholic themes not only failed to resonate within an increasingly secularised society, but it also lacked the sense of immediacy and urgency shown by other writers of the era who succeeded in depicting Germany’s past with honesty and clarity.

In light of the above conclusions, the first pertinent remark to be made about Heinrich Böll’s *Wo warst du, Adam?* is that despite being published less than a year after *Märkische Argonautenfahrt*, the profoundly religious and human dimension to this work reverberated positively among post-war readers and played a significant part in Böll receiving his reputation as a ‘geistiger Repräsentant des [deutschen] Volkes’.<sup>7</sup> One of the fundamental attributes to *Wo warst du, Adam?* that accounts for its popularity in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s is its unostentatious ability to relate to the emotions and suffering of Germany’s post-war readers. Unlike Langgässer who employed euphemistic expression to communicate her views on the recuperative function of Christian faith, Böll fully comprehended Germany’s need for clarity and rationality in the post-war years and demonstrated a clear preoccupation with human affairs in the broadest sense. This can be seen in the unmistakably candid and straightforward dimensions of

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<sup>5</sup>Ruff, *Wayward Flock*, pp. 1-14.

<sup>6</sup>Craig, *Politics and Literature*, p. 873.

<sup>7</sup>Adorno, *Keine Würdigung*, p. 7.

his writing, and his appreciation for a matter-of-fact style and laconic simplicity,<sup>8</sup> literary devices that were strongly promoted by the *Gruppe 47*'s original founders, Andersch, Richter and Hocke, as a means to plainly recount recent history.<sup>9</sup> Examples of this unadorned style include the moment of companionship between Feinhals and Brecht as they share a bottle of Tokay wine before progressing into battle (*WwdA* 89), the tender moment between Ilona and Feinhals before she is transported to a concentration camp (*WwdA* 71-74), and the unadorned adjectives that depict soldiers' suffering (*WwdA* 8).

In addition to Böll's preoccupation with human affairs, the novel also deeply engages itself with the question of spirituality. Through the portrayal of Ilona Kartök, Böll's places the emphasis on her kindness, patience and altruism, all of which derive from her unshakeable piety and render her both an archetypal vision of a Christian values,<sup>10</sup> and a clear antithesis to the negative qualities attributable to Nazi sympathisers like Commandant Filskeit. The scene in which she is assassinated denotes a meeting between the notion of Christian faith and the notion of religious estrangement, and Filskeit's decision to shoot symbolises his rejection of God's moral teachings. *Wo warst du, Adam?* is a novel that firstly serves to demonstrate Böll's heartfelt empathy with the suffering of his fellow citizens, but it also conveys an unostentatious moral message about the comfort and solace offered by Christian devotion, and it is these attributes that account for the novel's relevance in the early post-war decades.

As has been identified, Böll's canonical status is largely confined to the pre-reunification era. Most scholarly work on the writer emerges from the 1960s and 1970s, and his literary voice appears to have faded into relative obscurity after the *Wende*. It can thus be concluded that the modern-day waning of interest in Böll's fiction is fundamentally attributable to his confined relevance in the post-war years. The empathic and moralising voice in his novels harmonised with contemporary audiences in the early post-war decades, and whilst his fiction was

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<sup>8</sup>Conard, *Understanding*, p. 18.

<sup>9</sup>Mandel, *Group 47*, pp. 12-13.

<sup>10</sup>Trapp, *Gegenpol*, p. 16.

regarded as ‘überflüssig’ in the post-reunification era,<sup>11</sup> Böll remains a highly celebrated West-German writer.

In stark contrast to Böll’s preoccupation with the innate goodness of humankind, Koeppen’s *Der Tod in Rom* reveals an unsettling inner and outer reality when depicting the post-war socio-political climate in Germany. In the same year of its publication, Seelmann-Eggebert described the work as ‘Sexualkolportage’, Hühnerfeld labeled it as entirely nihilistic, and Allemann berated Koeppen’s ‘schöpferische Imagination’, claiming that the novel was void of any truthful elements.<sup>12</sup> It was ultimately this dark and acrimonious style, combined with the novel’s demanding content that accentuated the flaws of post-war West-German society to which a war-ravaged population was very much adverse, and accounts for the work’s unpopularity in the 1950s. Yet whilst Koeppen rendered in the novel a decidedly bleak account of German society, this thesis has explored the hitherto disregarded religious dimension to *Der Tod in Rom* in an attempt to conclude whether the novel was less of an attempt to berate the Federal Republic, and more a reminder to post-war readers of the restorative powers of Christian faith. Adolf Judejahn, the embodiment of Christian devotion in the novel, represents the young post-war generation’s turning to faith over nihilism, to optimism over despair, to exercising trust in mankind’s moral potential over cynicism. Through his various interactions with Siegfried Pfaffrath (*TiR* 113-127) and his parents Gottlieb and Eva Judejahn (*TiR* 132), one can identify Adolf’s understated didactic capacity in the way he encourages society’s need to renounce former evil ideologies by trusting in the love of God Almighty. Yet following Siegfried’s outright refusal to accept faith as a solution to his doubts and fears, encapsulated in his angry retort ‘[Die Menschen] sind nicht zu ändern!’ (*TiR* 126-127), the underlying moral and spiritual assertions in the novel become gradually more ambiguous.

It remains irrefutable that institutionalised Christianity, specifically Roman Catholicism, is heavily criticised in *Der Tod in Rom*. Koeppen confronts the

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<sup>11</sup>Enzensberger, *Mittelmaß*, p. 239.

<sup>12</sup>Seelmann-Eggebert, *Die Ratten*, p. 11; Hühnerfeld, *Gespenster*, pp. 20-21; Allemann, *Restauration*, p. 82.

dubious nature of the Catholic Church's rise to ecclesiastical and political authority in Western Europe (*TiR* 155), and refers to those depraved Catholic clergymen who endorsed the brutalities carried out by political and military figures in the Third Reich (*TiR* 177). Significantly, this causes Adolf to falter in his faith, an indicator of Koeppen's own hesitancy about advocating religious devotion as Germany's ultimate solution. Furthermore, in the novel's final passage, Koeppen leaves the question of Gottlieb's salvation purposely open-ended, forcing the reader to question their own moral stance on whether a remorseless Nazi's soul can, or indeed should, be saved (*TiR* 187).

*Der Tod in Rom* is a novel that unequivocally deals with the possibility of spirituality as a solution to Germany's social problems, yet the ambiguity of Koeppen's moral standpoint dilutes the work's didactic potential. Whether a result of the author's reluctance, or perhaps unwillingness to be explicit in his views on the restorative function of Christian faith, the novel's sense of moral incomprehensibility and failure to establish a firm position renders its purpose indefinable, an element that accounts for the work's marginalised position in the literary canon. In combination with Koeppen's dark and acerbic tone, and his employment of Modernist literary devices that obfuscate the individual portrayals of his protagonists, it is perhaps these attributes that have resulted in Koeppen's fiction being, compared to that of his contemporary counterparts, 'vastly less read and less celebrated'.<sup>13</sup>

One of the most interesting facets to Grass's novel *Die Blechtrommel* which sets it apart from the other three novels in this study is that it does not thematise the importance of Christian faith as a means to overcome nihilistic fears. Rather, Grass employs an accusatory and derisive tone to address the question of the Catholic Church's guilt. The novel's content is also incongruous and sacrilegious, and the issue of man's personal accountability that pervades the novel reveals Grass's attempt to harshly berate post-war German society. In this regard, *Die Blechtrommel* is arguably akin to the acerbic socio-political commentary seen in Koeppen's *Der Tod in Rom*. Yet what makes Grass's novel

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<sup>13</sup> Hofmann, Introduction, *Death*, p. v.



so intriguing in this regard is its reputation as one of the most important pieces of literature for the construction of post-war German identity.<sup>14</sup> The novel ‘catapulted the young author into instant success and fame’, and earned him a place both in the German national and international canon of world literature.<sup>15</sup> The thesis therefore sets itself the task of questioning how a dark and cynical novel like *Die Blechtrommel* could achieve such soaring sales figures, translations into numerous languages, extensive international critical acclaim, a film adaptation, and its author being hailed, alongside Heinrich Böll, as a ‘moral voice of the German nation’.<sup>16</sup>

The first conclusion to be reached concerns Grass’s representation of the absurd. Seen in his aesthetic interest in the ‘carnavalesque,’ Grass brandishes eccentricity as a literary device, but he also employs it as a means to figuratively deal with questions of culpability. For what is significant about Oskar’s humpback, the function of ‘die Schwarze Köchin’ (BT 722, 724, 731), Oskar’s profanities in church (BT 167-169) and his father’s unintentional death by choking on his party lapel badge (BT 485) is that Grass constructed these hyperbolic episodes as a means to combine critical self-reflection with satire and comedy. *Die Blechtrommel* flaunts incongruity as a literary device, yet it is precisely this engaging quality that continues to leave readers enraptured. The same can be said for the complex narrative portrayal of Oskar. The dwarfed protagonist is characterised as ‘a virtuoso exponent of multiple, complex personae’.<sup>17</sup> He assumes many different identities, he refuses to conform to the norms of the official culture, and his frequent interchange between first and third person narration renders his account erratic and unreliable. Yet it is once again this level of complexity and eccentricity inherent in his portrayal that makes him such a fascinating protagonist. He may be a mendacious and prejudiced storyteller, yet his multifaceted portrayal remains one of the most intriguing and captivating aspects of the novel.

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<sup>14</sup> Arnds, *Blasphemy*, p. 69.

<sup>15</sup> Schafi, *Günter Grass*, p. 270.

<sup>16</sup> Fulbrook, *Concept*, p. 8.

<sup>17</sup> Mews, *Günter Grass*, p. 21.

With regards to the longevity of Grass's reputation of a canonised author, this thesis' second conclusion concerns Grass's role as a public figure and quasi-celebrity. Whether preoccupied with an ethical cause, campaigning on behalf of the SPD, or inciting debate by confessing his former membership to the *Waffen-SS*, Grass remains an audacious, controversial, and outlandish character, and has earned him something of an iconic status within the modern-day celebrity sphere. It is precisely this tendency towards polemic that first captured readers' interest in the 1960s and 1970s. It drew them in, elicited a blend of earnest contemplation and humour, and has provided subsequent generations with a distinctive literary talking point. The overarching point inherent in both conclusions reaffirms Grass's reputation as a controversial character, a trait proudly displayed in his literary accomplishments of the 1960s, and one he continues to revel in in political, social, and ethical matters in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Returning to the social, political and economic situation in post-war West Germany, one of the most pivotal observations to be made in references to the four literary works is that they all directly address the wartime context. Soon after Germany witnessed a cessation of attacks in May 1945, a widespread sense of foreboding began sweeping the nation, and the issue of the Church's silence initiated a decades-long 'loss of faith that plagued German society'.<sup>18</sup> The question of faith in post-war German society is central to the four novels explored in this thesis, and the centrality of this thematic concern denotes the topicality of Christianity in early decades after the collapse of the Third Reich. As has been demonstrated, Langgässer, Böll, Koeppen and Grass each offer highly divergent responses to the possibility and appropriateness of a Christian revival. Langgässer and Böll's novels present faith as a remedy to post-war nihilism and despair, the assertions in Koeppen's work are characterised by uncertainty and ambiguity and therefore struggle to establish a definite position on faith, and Grass's treatment of Catholicism is mocking and critical. What this thesis has achieved is an exploration of four very different responses to socio-political circumstances in the late 1940s and 1950s, which simultaneously exposes the multiplicity of interpretations on social reality that writers sought to

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<sup>18</sup>Amy Marga, *Karl*, p. 59.

divulge through their fiction. Returning to the relationship between the text and the world, what these divergent literary approaches succeed in accentuating are the wider social, political and economic problems of post-war West Germany, and reveal that issues like the Church's silence were perhaps markedly more complex than first perceived.

Having established that the four 1950s novels in this study all present conflicting, yet equally valid responses to social reality, the question of a novel's canonisation would presumably be capable of offering even greater insight into contemporary social mentalities. Despite this being a plausible expectation, the findings in this thesis regarding the repute and on-going popularity of each of the works lead us to conclude that the processes of canonisation are, to some degree, indeterminable. The question of canonisation arises from the interplay of a whole host of factors, including the horizon of expectation of the target readership, wider developments in society and social psychology, the thematics and formal attributes of the texts themselves, the manipulation of the literary marketplace by powerful cultural organisations (the *Gruppe 47*), and the involvement of authors in their own self-promotion. Because the interaction of these factors is complex, any approach to canon formation has to be developed on a case-by-case basis; simple dichotomies and linear narratives don't work. Let us take, for instance, the treatment of Catholic themes in the four novels. *Märkische Argonautenfahrt*, a relatively unknown and uncelebrated work, describes a flight into fantasy. Laden with eschatological and mythical imagery, Langgässer portrays seven Argonauts being guided by divine force to undertake a journey of spirituality, and imparts the restorative capacity of Christian faith. *Wo warst du, Adam?* similarly preoccupies itself with the remedial powers of humble Christian teachings, and reminds readers of the consequences of erring from God's righteous path, yet Böll has always been regarded as one of the greatest 20<sup>th</sup> century German novelists. Grass shares Böll's reputation as a canonised writer, yet *Die Blechtrommel* has a distinctly anti-religious strand and alludes to the Church's incompetency. From these observations, the possibility of attributing the canonical status of a literary work or an author to a thematic strand like religion is clearly problematic.

The same conclusions can be reached when contemplating an element such as language. Böll's writing in *Wo warst du, Adam?* is unmistakably candid and straightforward. Indeed the simplicity and sobriety of Böll's language that reflected the unadorned and unembellished approach advocated by members of the *Gruppe 47* succeeded in doing precisely what Langgässer's mythical and allegorical style failed to achieve, in that it spoke plainly and directly to a nation bereft of clarity and rationality. Koeppen's uncanonised work *Der Tod in Rom* was also berated for its demanding Modernist style. Incorporating devices like interior monologue, fragmentation, montage technique, simultaneity, multi-perspectivism, the novel failed to reach out to Koeppen's post-war audiences as his style was fundamentally alienating. It must not be forgotten, however, that Grass also included complex narrative devices in *Die Blechtrommel*. The web of voices and perspectives inherent in Oskar's narration renders him a mendacious and unreliable storyteller. And yet it is precisely this linguistic eccentricity that accounts for readers' on-going fascination with Grass's novel. As such, it is similarly problematic to forge parallels between a work's individual linguistic approaches with its canonical status, for this conjecture would fail to explain several findings in this thesis, one of which being Böll and Grass's shared reputation as canonised German writers.

The divergence of reactions to four 1950s novels which, from a thematic, aesthetic and linguistic perspective, possess a multitude of individual conflicting traits leads us to conclude that the question of literary canonisation arises from the interplay of a whole host of factors. Based on the findings reached in each of the chapters with regards to the treatment of religion, it would be highly problematic to attempt to attribute the success of a literary work to particular thematic preoccupations. As such, this might prompt one to consider additional possibilities that go beyond the text. Günter Grass's on-going relevance could be attributable to the fact that he is still alive, and assumes a prominent position in the public domain. By way of comparison, Langgässer died in 1950, the same year she published *Märkische Argonautenfahrt*. The issue of lifespan could thereby feasibly lead to the alternative supposition that a writer's canonisation is

partly determined by their physical presence in the artistic realm. Alternatively, one might consider at greater length the question of a writer's external engagement with social issues. Böll, for instance, was not only regarded as a writer but also as a public figurehead and ambassador for Germany society. He spoke out about Germany's war past, and was a 'constant critic of moral hypocrisy'.<sup>19</sup> Grass has similarly acquired something of a celebrity status in Germany through his campaigning on behalf of the SDP and preoccupying himself with issues of public interest, ranging from the strife of the Roma people to the orthography reforms. A writer's canonical status could alternatively be related to the progression of his or her literary oeuvre. *Märkische Argonautenfahrt* was the last novel Langgässer wrote before her death. Following the trilogy, Koeppen also had an extended period of literary inactivity before publishing a few works of travel literature.<sup>20</sup> Grass and Böll, on the other hand, have written extensively in recent decades. Böll's works have continued to be published posthumously, including the novel *Kreuz ohne Liebe* in 2002,<sup>21</sup> and Grass recently published the controversial poem 'Was gesagt werden muss' in April 2012.

It can therefore be concluded that the process of determining how and why particular literary works become canonised can perhaps best be explained by non-textual factors.

This thesis has identified the centrality of a literary thematic concern with Catholicism in post-war West German writing and hopes to point the way forward for future research in exploring the role of Christianity in the Federal Republic, which remains hitherto unexplored.

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<sup>19</sup> Black, *Stories*, p. x.

<sup>20</sup> Wolfgang Koeppen, *Nach Rußland und anderswohin: empfindsame Reisen* (Stuttgart: Goverts, 1958); Wolfgang Koeppen, *Reisen nach Frankreich und andere Reisen* (Stuttgart: Suhrkamp, 1961)

<sup>21</sup> Heinrich Böll, *Kreuz ohne Liebe* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2002)

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