

The Influence of Southern USA Writers on Horst Bienek's Gleiwitz Tetralogy

Doctoral Thesis

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Declaration

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Joseph Gerard McIvor

Summary

This thesis examines the influence of four Southern USA writers (William Faulkner, Thomas Wolfe, Carson McCullers, and Truman Capote) on Horst Bienek's portrayal of Upper Silesia's final years as a German province in the four novels of the Gleiwitz tetralogy: *Die erste Polka* (1975), *Septemberlicht* (1977), *Zeit ohne Glocken* (1979), and *Erde und Feuer* (1982). The tetralogy is Bienek's epic literary memorial to his now disappeared childhood province (in 1945 Upper Silesia became sovereign Polish territory). The author was born in the industrial border city of Gleiwitz in German Upper Silesia in 1930, and died in Munich in 1990.

Chapter 1 begins with introductory remarks, and a review of current research on Horst Bienek's literary work. This is followed by short analysis of the reception of US literature in post-war Germany. The main body of the chapter explains and contextualises data relating to the two regions—Upper Silesia and the American South—with which this study is concerned. This includes historical analyses of critical periods in both regions, and a review of Bienek's short story *Wallfahrt zu Sankt Anna* (1968). Topics such as liminality, myth, and Bienek's use of the Southern "grotesque" genre are also discussed. The chapter concludes with a short analysis of intertextuality and appropriation (Bienek was a prolific user of intertexts in the Gleiwitz tetralogy).

Chapter 2 is devoted to an analysis of *poetischer Realismus*, the narrative style Bienek adopted in the tetralogy, which he believed derived from the four Southern writers. The chapter examines in depth attributes of Horst Bienek's poetic realist style, and its relationship to that of the nineteenth-century German poetic realist epoch.

The three succeeding chapters are dedicated to the four Southern authors themselves (McCullers and Capote are discussed in a joint chapter). Each chapter

in its own way elucidates how the Southerners' fictional reconstruction of disappearing, liminal and "cursed" Southern spaces shaped and defined how Bienek would memorialise his own lost German borderland province. Chapter 3 (William Faulkner, 1897-1962) focuses on significant Faulkner tropes such as identity, history, the myth of the South, the significance of the past, and Faulkner's literary style, all of which were compelling for Bienek as he engaged with his Gleiwitz memorial. A significant section of the discourse examines the divided identity issues of several Bienek and Faulkner protagonists. The emphasis in Chapter 4 (Thomas Wolfe, 1900-1938) is on one Wolfe novel, *Look Homeward, Angel*, to which Horst Bienek had a strong emotional attachment, and which exerted considerable influence on the author's Gleiwitz writing. The chapter investigates Wolfe's aesthetics and how these impacted upon Bienek's tetralogy, and discusses Bienek's poetic realist approach to the use of history and memory in the tetralogy. Finally, the themes of loneliness, longing and the loss of homeland are discussed. The focus in Chapter 5 (Carson McCullers, 1917-1967, and Truman Capote, 1924-1984) is again on aspects of Bienek's understanding of poetic realism, on rite-of-passage as an analogue for a liminal province, and on Bienek's development of a Southern "grotesque" aesthetic for Upper Silesia. Four novels by McCullers, and a single work by Truman Capote (*Other Voices, Other Rooms*) are discussed, all of which impacted significantly on Bienek's Gleiwitz novels.

All three chapters dealing with the individual Southern writers include analyses of Bienek's intertextual use in the tetralogy of "appropriated" texts, where the author replicates situations, plotlines, motifs, and character attributes from each of the Southern writers. These sections demonstrate that the appropriated texts have, in the context of the Upper Silesian tetralogy, been effectively transformed into something new, creative, instructive, and meaningful.

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ABBREVIATIONS

MR	Horst Bienek, <i>“Mit einem Rucksack voll Dämonen”</i> (1962)
EP	Horst Bienek, <i>Die erste Polka</i> (1975)
SL	Horst Bienek, <i>Septemberlicht</i> (1977)
ZG	Horst Bienek, <i>Zeit ohne Glocken</i> (1979)
EF	Horst Bienek, <i>Erde und Feuer</i> (1982)
BP	Horst Bienek, <i>Beschreibung einer Provinz</i> (1983)
ML	Horst Bienek, <i>Mein Lesebuch</i> (1984)
BB	Horst Bienek, <i>Der Blinde in der Bibliothek</i> (1986)
AE	Horst Bienek, <i>Das allmähliche Ersticken von Schreien</i> (1987)
TB	Horst Bienek, <i>Die Tagebücher 1951-1990</i> (2024)
AD	William Faulkner, <i>As I Lay Dying</i> (1929)
SF	William Faulkner, <i>The Sound and the Fury</i> (1929)
LA	William Faulkner, <i>Light in August</i> (1932)
AA	William Faulkner, <i>Absalom, Absalom!</i> (1936)
GD	William Faulkner, <i>Go Down Moses</i> (1942)
LH	Thomas Wolfe, <i>Look Homeward, Angel</i> (1929)
CN	Carson McCullers, <i>Complete Novels</i> : ▪ <i>The Heart is a Lonely Hunter</i> (1940) ▪ <i>Reflections in a Golden Eye</i> (1941) ▪ <i>The Member of the Wedding</i> (1946) ▪ <i>Clock Without Hands</i> (1961)
OV	Truman Capote, <i>Other Voices, Other Rooms</i> (1948)

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Besonders vom Westen aus betrachtet, handelte es sich um eine exotische Welt.¹

1.1 OVERVIEW

The subject matter of this study is to establish the influence and significance of four Southern USA writers (William Faulkner, Thomas Wolfe, Carson McCullers and Truman Capote) on Horst Bienek's Gleiwitz tetralogy, *Die erste Polka* (1975),² *Septemberlicht* (1977),³ *Zeit ohne Glocken* (1979),⁴ and *Erde und Feuer* (1982),⁵ a series of novels set in Gleiwitz, an industrial city close to the Polish border in the contested German province of Upper Silesia between 1939 and 1945.⁶ The tetralogy—ultimately Bienek's defining opus—is the author's epic memorial to a region that politically and socially no longer exists: in 1945 under a new Polish administration, the German borderland province of Upper Silesia ceased to exist; after the war hundreds of thousands of Germans fled or were expelled from what was now Polish territory, and the region was repopulated by Polish migrants. Horst Bienek himself, born in Upper Silesia in 1930, was part of the momentous exodus from the former German province. In 1946 at the age of 16 he voluntarily left Gleiwitz (by now renamed *Gliwice*), making his way initially to Köthen/Anhalt, and from there to Potsdam in the *Sowjetische Besatzungszone* (SBZ) (subsequently the

¹ Horst Bienek describing his childhood province of Upper Silesia months before he died. 'Horst Bienek: Laßt uns jetzt eine Stadt in Polen bauen. WELT-Gespräch mit Adelbert Reif', *Die Welt*, 14 August 1989.

² Horst Bienek, *Die erste Polka*, Munich: Hanser, 1979. (Subsequently referred to in the text as "EP".)

³ Horst Bienek, *Septemberlicht*, Munich: Hanser, 1977. (Subsequently referred to in the text as "SL".)

⁴ Horst Bienek, *Zeit ohne Glocken*, Munich: Hanser, 1979. (Subsequently referred to in the text as "ZG".)

⁵ Horst Bienek, *Erde und Feuer*, Munich: Hanser, 1982. (Subsequently referred to in the text as "EF".)

⁶ The topic was one I briefly touched upon in my MPhil thesis on Horst Bienek: Joseph Gerard McIvor, *The Adolescent and His Role in Horst Bienek's Upper Silesian Tetralogy*, King's College London (1986), p. 79. (Subsequently referred to as "McIvor 1986".) This thesis is available at Senate House Library, University of London, and in the Horst-Bienek-Archiv der Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Bibliothek, Niedersächsische Landesbibliothek, 30169 Hanover.

GDR), where further life-changing misfortune awaited him.⁷ It is not surprising that Bienek felt a deep sense of personal regret regarding his exile and his precipitate loss of childhood. “Ehe er Kind war, war die Kindheit schon vorbei” was how (writing in the third person) he described his situation in the weeks running up to his exile from Gleiwitz.⁸ Nevertheless, Bienek’s literary reconstruction of his German Upper Silesian past was not to be a work of remonstrance or reproach. The author envisioned *Die erste Polka*, the first instalment of the Gleiwitz tetralogy, as an act of remembrance, in his own words, “nicht als Klage darüber, daß Oberschlesien einmal deutsch war, sondern als Erinnerungen an etwas, was einmal war und was nicht mehr ist.”⁹ And indeed, the overall tone of the novels was to be remarkably conciliatory,¹⁰ without revisionist or revanchist undercurrents.

1.2 THE GLEIWITZ TETRALOGY

As a literary reconstruction of the author’s childhood province encompassing the critical period in German history between the outbreak of war in September 1939 and comprehensive defeat in 1945, the Gleiwitz tetralogy is very much a work of memory. That to some extent explains Bienek’s rising profile among literary scholars since his death in 1990. The year he died coincided with an increased engagement with memory themes and debates within German Studies scholarship as a consequence of the fall of the Berlin Wall and its aftermath. This was not merely in relation to Horst Bienek, but a general phenomenon. As Friederike Eigler put it, the “opening of archives and the increased opportunities for transnational collaboration” at this time contributed to a renewed interest in legacies of flight

⁷ In 1951 Bienek was arrested by the GDR security services for alleged anti-Soviet agitation, and was subsequently sentenced by a soviet military court to 25 years hard labour in a Siberian prison camp. After 4 years he was amnestied, and subsequently settled in West Germany as a literary editor and free-lance writer.

⁸ Horst Bienek, *Das allmähliche Ersticken von Schreien: Sprache und Exil heute, Münchner Poetik-Vorlesungen*, Munich: Hanser, 1987, p. 12. The book was based on a series of lectures delivered at the University of Munich in 1987. (Subsequently referred to in the text as “AE”.)

⁹ *Aussage zur Person: Zwölf deutsche Schriftsteller im Gespräch mit Ekkehart Rudolph*, Tübingen and Basel: Erdmann, 1977, p. 44. (Subsequently referred to as “Rudolph”.)

¹⁰ See Eugeniusz Klin, *Deutsch-polnische Literaturbeziehungen: Bausteine der Verständigung von der Aufklärung bis zur Gegenwart*, Cologne, Vienna: Böhlau, 1988, p. 159.

and expulsion.¹¹ For this reason the Gleiwitz tetralogy began to appear more relevant to scholars engaged with the German victim/perpetrator memory discourse as it evolved during the first two decades of the 21st century. The tetralogy was certainly appropriate in this respect. In particular, the penultimate and final novels of the series, *Zeit ohne Glocken* and *Erde und Feuer*, have at their heart arresting narratives of both German perpetration and German victimhood: in these works Bienek engages not only with the holocaust (according to Hans Otto Horch, Bienek is one of the few non-Jewish German-language authors whose work, “almost always contains direct or indirect references to Auschwitz”),¹² but also with the flight of thousands of Germans from Upper Silesia in January 1945, and finally with the aerial bombing of Dresden of February 1945 (well over a decade, as it happens, before W.G. Sebald complained in his essay *Luftkrieg und Literatur* (1999) that German letters in the years following the war had not adequately engaged with the air war against German cities). In its mediatory yet powerful depiction of both German perpetration and German victimhood Bienek’s Gleiwitz tetralogy therefore appears an important marker in the German *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* discourse in a reunified Germany.¹³

My objective in this introductory section is to explain and contextualise for the reader information relating to the two geo-historical regions under review (Upper Silesia and the American South). I begin however with a résumé of Horst Bienek criticism in my research field since the author’s death in 1990. This is followed by observations regarding the positive reception of US literature in post-war West

¹¹ Friederike Eigler, *Heimat, Space, Narrative: Toward a Transnational Approach to Flight and Expulsion*, Rochester, New York: Camden House, 2014, p. 52. (Subsequently referred to as “Eigler”).

¹² Hans Otto Horch, ‘Gleiwitz, Lubowitz, Auschwitz. Die Dimension der Schoah in den Gleiwitz-Romanen Horst Bieneks’, *Zeitschrift für Deutsche Philologie*, 114 (1995), 85-112 (p. 85). (Subsequently referred to as “Horch”).

¹³ Nevertheless, it took some time for Bienek’s contribution to this debate to be recognised. His work is not mentioned at all in the first of two important monographs of the early 2000s which address the Nazi aggression/German suffering quandary (*Germans as Victims: Remembering the Past in Contemporary Germany*, edited by Bill Niven, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006. In the second, *Germans as Victims in The Literary Fiction of the Berlin Republic*, edited by Stuart Taberner and Karina Berger, Rochester, New York: Camden House, 2009, there is only a passing reference (p. 6) to *Zeit ohne Glocken*).

Germany, and Horst Bienek's frequent admission of the literary impact of the four Southern writers on his Gleiwitz novels. This in turn is followed by discourses on aspects of the Upper Silesian situation (essential history, identity issues, the province's status as a liminal territory in twentieth-century history, and as an ambiguous literary-spatial construct in the tetralogy) which are important for an understanding of what Bienek was attempting to achieve in his memorial. Thereafter I discuss aspects of myth in both Upper Silesian and Southern writing. In these sections I will argue that one of the main resonances for Bienek regarding the four Southern writers was the literary reconstruction in their works of a disappeared (or disappearing) South. In a sense, like Upper Silesia, it was a "lost" territory that was retrieved through imagination, and the (often mythic) rewriting of history. There were obvious parallels here for Bienek setting out to commemorate his own lost childhood province, as we shall see as this study progresses.

1.3 CURRENT RESEARCH ON HORST BIENEK'S WRITING

Many scholarly publications have appeared on Bienek's work since his death. Certainly the most comprehensive and ambitious is Daniel Pietrek's *Ich erschreibe mich selbst. (Autor)Biographisches Schreiben bei Horst Bienek*,¹⁴ a detailed study of Bienek's literary and cultural work. An important monograph, it makes extensive use of the holdings of the Horst-Bienek-Archiv at the Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Bibliothek in Hannover. Access to Bienek's *Tagebücher* in the archive however was restricted during Pietrek's research:¹⁵ this perhaps accounts for the limited number of diary quotations in the work. In October 2024, however, the diaries were finally published,¹⁶ and my study makes some use of them. Besides Pietrek's monograph, other important book-length works in which Bienek's literary output (especially the

¹⁴ Daniel Pietrek, *Ich erschreibe mich selbst. (Autor)Biographisches Schreiben bei Horst Bienek*, Dresden: Thelem, 2012. (Subsequently referred to as "Pietrek".)

¹⁵ Pietrek, p. 35.

¹⁶ Horst Bienek, *Es gibt nur die Kunst, die Liebe und den Tod. Dazwischen gibt es nichts: Die Tagebücher 1951–1990*. Edited by Daniel Pietrek, Gisela vom Bruch and Michael Krüger, Munich: Hanser, 2024. (Subsequently referred to in the text as "TB".)

Gleiwitz novels) plays a significant role include analyses by Wolfgang Schnei  (1996)¹⁷, Elwira Pachura (2001)¹⁸, Thomas B. Ahrens (2003)¹⁹ and (writing in English) Friederike Eigler (2014).²⁰ These are wide-ranging studies, and as their titles imply, include (among other themes) significant evaluations of issues relating to *Heimat* and *Vertreibung* in Bienek’s tetralogy.

It is fair to say that the Wojciech Korfanty/Georg Montag identity discourse in *Die erste Polka*, and the fate of Arthur Silbergleit, the historical Gleiwitz-born Jewish writer, whose fictional return to Gleiwitz and subsequent journey to Auschwitz are described in *Septemberlicht* and *Zeit ohne Glocken*, continue to be a significant draw for scholars. Of these the most influential are studies by Hans Otto Horch ²¹ and Anne Fuchs.²² Particularly interesting is also the Polish academic, Marcin Wiatr’s 2015 doctoral study in which Bienek’s portrayal of Wojciech Korfanty in *Die erste Polka* is purposefully compared with Korfanty presentations in three very much older German novels (Arnolt Bronnen’s *O.S.* (1929), August Scholtis’ *Ostwind* (1932), and Alfons Heyduk’s aptly named *Umk mpfte Erde* (1941), as well as in four Polish literary works).²³

It is especially noteworthy that several Polish commentators writing in both Polish and German have now engaged with the Gleiwitz tetralogy, some clearly keen to understand the nature of their regional, historical, and socio-political heritage

¹⁷ Wolfgang Schnei , *Flucht, Vertreibung und verlorene Heimat im fr heren Ostdeutschland: Beispiele literarischer Bearbeitung*, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1996. (Subsequently referred to as “Schnei ”.)

¹⁸ *Polen – Die verlorene Heimat: Zur Heimatproblematik bei Horst Bienek, Leonie Ossowski, Christa Wolf, Christine Br ckner*, Stuttgart: ibidem-Verlag, 2002. (Subsequently referred to as “Pachura”.)

¹⁹ Thomas B. Ahrens, *Heimat in Horst Bieneks Gleiwitzer Tetralogie: Erinnerungsdiskurs und Erz hlverfahren*, New York: Peter Lang, 2003. (Subsequently referred to as “Ahrens”.)

²⁰ Eigler.

²¹ Horch, pp. 85-112.

²² Anne Fuchs, ‘Im Archiv der Heimat: Die Darstellung der Judenverfolgung in Horst Bienek’s Gleiwitz-Tetralogie’, *Ged chtnis und Widerstand: Festschrift f r Irene Heidelberger-Leonard*, edited by Mireille Tabah in Zusammenarbeit mit Sylvia Weiler und Christian Poetine, T bingen: Stauffenburg (2009), 105-115. (Subsequently referred to as “Fuchs”.)

²³ Marcin Wiatr, *Das Portr t von Wojciech Korfanty in der deutschen und polnischen Literatur: eine Studie zu Literatur- und erinnerungspolitischen Diskursen im Umfeld der historischen Semantik*. Praca doktorska, Katowice: Uniwersytet  l sk, 2015.

(several live and work in the former German province).²⁴ These include the above mentioned Marcin Wiatr and Daniel Pietrek, as well as Bożena Chołuj, Sebastian Mrożek, Eugeniusz Klin, and Janusz Siatkowski. Some of these names will crop up from time to time in this study. Finally, while the main focus on Bienek scholarship since his death has been concentrated on the Gleiwitz tetralogy, an innovative work was published in 2016 on Bienek's writings on the theme of imprisonment and the nature of captivity. Heng Barone's *Poetik der Einkreisung. Horst Bieneks Gefangenschaftstexte zwischen Erinnerung, Geschichte und Wahrheit*,²⁵ is primarily an examination of Bienek's *Traumbuch eines Gefangenen*, an early selection of poetry and prose (1957), the novel *Die Zelle* (1968), and Bienek's sketchy autobiographical work *Workuta* (concerning his personal experiences as a prisoner in Siberia), published posthumously in 2013.

What is quite striking about Bienek scholarship since his death in 1990, however, is that there has been no comprehensive study on the impact of the four Southern USA authors on the Gleiwitz novels. One might, for example, have expected a short section on Horst Bienek in Ute Müller's *William Faulkner und die Deutsche Nachkriegsliteratur* (2005), the one critical work that stands out on the subject of Faulkner's influence on post-war German fiction.²⁶ In this study Müller documents at length the extraordinary influence Faulkner exerted on post-war German writers both in the Federal Republic and the GDR, demonstrating the extent of his impact predominantly on Siegfried Lenz, Heinrich Böll and Uwe Johnson (with Johnson taking up the lion's share of the discourse). It is surprising that Horst Bienek is mentioned in this work only in connection with his well-known series of literary

²⁴ In this study I have restricted my engagement with Polish scholars to those writing in German, or to those whose work is available in translation.

²⁵ Heng Barone, *Poetik der Einkreisung: Horst Bieneks Gefangenschaftstexte zwischen Erinnerung, Geschichte und Wahrheit*, Marburg: Techum, 2016.

²⁶ Ute Müller, *William Faulkner und die Deutsche Nachkriegsliteratur*, Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2005. (Subsequently referred to as "Ute Müller.")

interviews *Werkstattgespräche mit Schriftstellern* (1962)²⁷ (which incidentally Bienek declared were inspired by a William Faulkner interview in *The Paris Review*),²⁸ rather than for the Gleiwitz tetralogy which had considerably raised Bienek's literary profile in the late 1970's and the 1980's. Given that Faulkner's influence on the Gleiwitz novels is apparent to any scholar familiar with the Faulkner canon, this neglect is surprising. Perhaps the fact that Horst Bienek did not belong to the top tier of German post-war writers (for example the three authors mentioned above—Lenz, Böll and Johnson—but also writers of international repute, such as Günter Grass, Alfred Andersch, and Christa Wolf) was an issue of consideration for Müller. Nor is the importance of Faulkner for Horst Bienek even referred to in Hermann Schlösser's essay "William Faulkner's Influence on Post-War German Literature: Erich Franzen, Wolfgang Koeppen, Alfred Andersch", which in addition to the three writers in the essay's title, also mentions other Bienek contemporaries such as Uwe Johnson, and Peter Handke.²⁹ Finally, in Peter Nicolaisen and Daniel Göske's essay, "William Faulkner in Germany: A Survey" published over 25 years after the appearance of the final Gleiwitz novel, *Erde und Feuer*, there is also no mention of Horst Bienek or his response to Faulkner. Instead, only the usual suspects are referenced:

German novelists whose books began to appear after World War II *did* respond to Faulkner; the list of those who have acknowledged their indebtedness to him is long. It includes among others, Günter Grass, Heinrich Böll, Siegfried Lenz, Max Frisch, Wolfgang Koeppen, Martin Walser, Uwe Johnson and Christa Wolf.³⁰

²⁷ Horst Bienek, *Werkstattgespräche mit Schriftstellern*, Munich: dtv, 1976. The volume included, amongst others, interviews with Andersch, Böll, Dürrenmatt, Frisch, Johnson and Zuckmeyer. (Subsequently referred to as "*Werkstattgespräche mit Schriftstellern*".)

²⁸ Ute Müller, p. 172.

²⁹ Hermann Schlösser, 'William Faulkner's Influence on Post-War German Literature: Erich Franzen, Wolfgang Koeppen, Alfred Andersch', *Faulkner, His Contemporaries, and His Posterity*, edited by Waldemar Zacharasiewicz, Tübingen and Basel, 1993, 152-160. (Subsequently referred to as "Schlösser".).

³⁰ Peter Nicolaisen and Daniel Göske, 'William Faulkner in Germany: A Survey', *Faulkner Journal*, 24.1 (2008), 63-81 (p. 73).

A lack of eminence or reputation might also explain the non-inclusion of Horst Bienek in Jedidiah Evans' study *Look Abroad, Angel* (2020), which devotes a large section to Thomas Wolfe's relationship with Germany in the 1930s, and explores what Evans calls, "Wolfe's reception and transmission in the works of German authors such as Klaus Mann, Hermann Hesse, and Heinrich Böll, among others".³¹ It is fair to say that in Evans' research Bienek is undoubtedly conspicuous by his absence.

Of the Southern themes I will cover in this study, only the concept of poetic realism has received much critical attention in book-length secondary writing on Bienek since his death. This appears for the most part in four works. The most important of these is Hans-Joachim Hahn's "Wahrheit, Wirklichkeit und Geschichte – Aspekte von Horst Bieneks »poetischem Realismus«", contained in an edited collection of German and Polish research on Horst Bienek's life and work.³² Daniel Pietrek also explores the concept of poetic realism in two works, *Ich erschreibe mich selbst. (Autor)Biografisches Schreiben bei Horst Bienek*, mentioned above, and (briefly) in a 2023 essay "Horst Bieneks oberschlesische Bilder"³³ which also considers limited aspects of Bienek's literary debt to William Faulkner and Thomas Wolfe. Finally, the fourth work to consider poetic realism is Heng Barone's *Poetik der Einkreisung: Horst Bieneks Gefangenschaftstexte zwischen Erinnerung, Geschichte und Wahrheit*,³⁴ also mentioned above. While other book-length critiques since 1990, where Bienek is the major or at least a significant part of the work's remit,³⁵ are valuable studies providing insights into identity issues in the German/Polish border region, and discourses on *Heimat*—that particularly German concept of homeland

³¹ *Look Abroad, Angel, Thomas Wolfe and the Geographies of Longing*, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2020, p. 106.

³² In: *Horst Bienek – Ein Schriftsteller in den Extremen des 20. Jahrhunderts*, edited by Reinhard Laube und Verena Nolte, Göttingen: Wallstein (2012), 57-72.

³³ In *Handbuch der deutsch-polnischen Kommunikation. Teilband 3: Von Popkultur bis Stereotyp*, edited by Sylwia Dec-Pustelnik, Peter Klimczak, Arkadiusz Lewicki und Izabela Surynt, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz (2023), 139-162.

³⁴ Barone, pp. 31-35 and 47-49.

³⁵ (i) Schneiß; (ii) Pachura; (iii) Ahrens; and (iv) Eigler.

and belonging—none engages with poetic realism or other Southern influences in any more than a referential manner (Elwira Pachura indeed, while alluding to poetic realism, specifically excludes the topic from her study).³⁶

Finally, over and beyond the tricky subject of poetic realism, it is surprising that no scholar except for Linda Morita in a brief reference in her dissertation *Wandlungen von Stil und Themen im Werk Horst Bieneks* (1988)³⁷ has analysed (or indeed mentioned) the many occasions in the Gleiwitz tetralogy where Bienek intertextually appropriates specific plot lines, scenes, settings, events and character attributes he originally came across in the work of the four Southern novelists.³⁸ The practice of intertextuality for Bienek concerned the establishment of a link between his own literary texts, and those of writers from the American South.³⁹ In this way Bienek both honoured the Southern writers he admired, and denoted an analogical interconnection between Upper Silesia and the American South which would provide the (cognisant) reader with enhanced knowledge and related understanding. But more importantly, I would argue, Horst Bienek borrowed heavily from the American writers as a means of access to a new literary “vocabulary” with which to authentically narrate the complex political, social and cultural history of his childhood province, particularly (though not exclusively) during the war years. Ultimately, the Southern writers provided him with an acclaimed and bountiful literary source with which to achieve this goal, and ultimately, I believe, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*.

From the foregoing, therefore, it is readily apparent that the lack of engagement by scholars with the Southern influence on Bienek represents a significant gap in research. It is worth noting that this relative absence of scholarship is in marked

³⁶ Pachura, p. 105, Footnote 322: “Auf die Problematik des “Poetischen Realismus” wird nicht genauer eingegangen, weil diese Problematik nicht zu der Fragestellung dieser Arbeit gehört.”

³⁷ Linda Morita, *Wandlungen von Stil und Themen im Werk Horst Bieneks*, PhD Dissertation (1988), University of Southern California, p. 215. (Subsequently referred to as “Morita”.)

³⁸ For an analysis of intertextuality, a term which will appear frequently, see section 1.18 of this study.

³⁹ I have also included details of intertextual appropriations from other writers where relevant (such as the Australian author Patrick White).

contrast to that devoted to the influence of Joseph von Eichendorff in the tetralogy. As an integral part of Upper Silesia's literary heritage, it is of course not surprising that Eichendorff, born in the (Prussian) Upper Silesian village of Lubowitz in 1788, should be so frequently referenced in the tetralogy. In *Die erste Polka* and *Septemberlicht* in particular Eichendorff's cultural and spiritual importance to the region is unambiguous.⁴⁰ Several studies concerning Bienek's Eichendorff reception and the poet's significance for the tetralogy include those by Hubert Orłowski,⁴¹ Eugeniusz Klin,⁴² and Walter Dimter.⁴³ And yet, in comparison, the influence of Eichendorff on the tetralogy is very much less than that of the Southern US writers. The Southern works I contend with in this study appear much more relevant to the subject matters with which Bienek predominantly engages in the tetralogy. This study addresses this scholarly inconsistency.

1.4 US LITERATURE IN POST-WAR GERMANY

Bienek's interest in American literature appears to have begun in the immediate post-war period. Perhaps this was not surprising. The defeat of Nazism in 1945 marked a watershed with respect to the availability of American fiction in a liberated Germany. As Martin Meyer explained, publishing American views following the war was seen from Washington's standpoint as "essential to propagate democratic principles. The publishing machinery that had worked so well during the war was now used to reeducate Germans."⁴⁴ The Rowohlt periodical *Story* (1946–1951) which published short stories by contemporary authors from all over the world, many of which were by Americans, put it in a

⁴⁰ For example, Eichendorff's poem "Im Walde" is identified by the Gräfin Hohenlohe-Langwitz, an outsider to the province, as being noticeably congruent with the Upper Silesian "Seelenlandschaft" (SL, 261).

⁴¹ 'Zur Bedeutung Eichendorffs in den Romanen von Horst Bienek', *Studia Germanica Posnaniensia XIV, Literatur und Geschichtsbewusstsein*, 14 (1990): 105-117.

⁴² 'Literarische Tradition in der Gegenwart. Zum Brückenschlag Horst Bieneks zu Joseph von Eichendorff und anderen großen Schlesiern', *Tradition und Gegenwart: Studien zur Literatur Schlesiens*, Würzburg: Bergstadtverl. Korn (2001), 45-52.

⁴³ 'Kontrastierung und Mitexistenz. Zur Bedeutung Eichendorffs bei Bienek', *Horst Bienek Aufsätze, Materialien, Bibliographie*, edited by Tilman Urbach, Munich: Hanser (1990), 51-69.

⁴⁴ Martin Meyer, 'American Literature in Cold War Germany', *Libraries and Culture*, 36.1 (2001): 162-171 (p. 168). (Subsequently referred to as Meyer".)

somewhat more conciliatory fashion: the publication declared its intention, “den deutschen Leser aus seiner unfreiwilligen Isolierung zu befreien, ihn zu orientieren und ihm zu zeigen, wie draußen geschrieben wird”.⁴⁵ Washington’s policy also had perhaps unintended aesthetic (as opposed to morally instructive) consequences. “Many scholarly works, plays, and fiction by Americans were made available in English as well as in translation”, Meyer continued. “This clearly boosted American literature and had an effect on postwar writers in Germany on the lookout for new literary examples.”⁴⁶ And indeed Bienek, and many of his literary contemporaries—German writers who had experienced the war years as children or as young men or women—found inspiration in the American literature which flooded into the German western sectors in the post-war period (they included Alfred Andersch, Heinrich Böll, Siegfried Lenz, Günter Grass, and Wolfgang Koeppen). For Horst Bienek and Uwe Johnson in the GDR accessibility was of course much more difficult, but nonetheless possible, especially before the construction of the Berlin Wall.⁴⁷ Available novels and short stories by continental American writers included those by Sherwood Anderson, William Saroyan, Ernest Hemingway, John Steinbeck and F. Scott Fitzgerald, and from the Southern states, William Faulkner, Eudora Welty, Thomas Wolfe, Willa Cather, Carson McCullers, and of course Truman Capote. Of the Southerners, all were widely read and admired in the western sectors (later the Federal Republic). In June 1948 *Story*, for example, praised Capote, whose first novel *Other Voices, Other Rooms* had just appeared in English (the German translation *Andere Stimmen andere Stuben* was not published until

⁴⁵ Klaus Lubbers, ‘Zur Rezeption der amerikanischen Kurzgeschichte in Deutschland nach 1945’, *Nordamerikanische Literatur im deutschen Sprachraum seit 1945: Beiträge zu ihrer Rezeption*, edited by Horst Frenz und Hans-Joachim Lang, Munich: Winkler (1973), 47-64 (p. 48). (Subsequently referred to as “Lubbers”.)

⁴⁶ Meyer, p. 168.

⁴⁷ See Uwe Johnson in conversation with Horst Bienek regarding the availability of “western” writing in the GDR: “Es gibt Büchereien, in denen diese Werke enthalten sind, es gibt Alte, die sie in ihren Privatbibliotheken haben; die Deutsche Bücherei in Leipzig hat von jedem Buch in deutscher Sprache ein Exemplar [...]. Und bevor Berlin endgültig geteilt wurde, war es für jeden literarisch Interessierten nicht gerade eine finanzielle, aber eine technische Kleinigkeit, sich Paperbacks zu kaufen oder Taschenbücher.” *Werkstattgespräche mit Schriftstellern*, p. 114.

1950) as “den meistdiskutierten Autor der jungen amerikanischen Literatur.”⁴⁸ Bienek, therefore, in the early years of the GDR and the Federal Republic was not reading the literature of the Southern states in isolation. Some of the most prominent German writers were aware of the quality of Southern writing. Siegfried Lenz for example read Southern literature enthusiastically, and wrote several essays on Faulkner, and both he, Heinrich Böll and Heinz Piontek, like Bienek, wrote critically on Carson McCullers. Böll was particularly conversant with both Southern literature and the Southern experience and wrote several articles and book reviews on Wolfe and Capote in the early 1950’s, where he was never less than engaging. He also wrote a perceptive introduction to his wife’s translation of Anne Moody’s 1968 autobiography *Coming of Age in Mississippi* (*Erwachen in Mississippi*).

Of all the Southern authors, however, William Faulkner was in terms of his influence on postwar German fiction of overwhelming significance; in particular, his invention of the fictitious county of Yoknapatawpha (the seat of which, Jefferson, was based on his home town of Oxford, Mississippi) undoubtedly had consequences for post-war German fiction. Indeed, Günter Grass on one occasion felt obliged to justify his life-long literary preoccupation with Danzig by referring to Faulkner’s comparable use of Yoknapatawpha in his work, and included Johnson and Böll (themselves Faulkner devotees) in his argument. “Es gibt eine ganze Reihe von Autoren, die sich zeit ihres Lebens auf einen beschränkten Raum konzentrieren, auf den Raum ihrer Herkunft”, he told Ekkehard Rudolph, “Denken Sie an Faulkner, an Uwe Johnson oder an Heinrich Böll mit Köln und Umgebung [...]”.⁴⁹ Regarding Johnson, incidentally, many commentators agree that the author of *Mutmassungen über Jakob* (1959) and *Jahrestage. Aus dem Leben von Gesine Cresspahl* (1970-83) was Faulkner’s pre-eminent post-war German disciple. As Peter Nicolaisen for example commented, “[...] although he did not have a large

⁴⁸ Lubbers, p. 59.

⁴⁹ Rudolph, p. 84.

popular following, Faulkner's powers were widely recognised by postwar German writers. [...] But in no other German writer's work is Faulkner's impact more visible than in Uwe Johnson's [...].⁵⁰ Another Faulkner scholar was also convinced that, "On the map of world literature [...] "Jerichow" lies very close to Yoknapatawpha".⁵¹ In like manner, it is certain that on any comparable metaphorical map Horst Bienek's Upper Silesia also lies very close to Faulkner's fictional county. Bienek himself was certainly of this opinion; he even went as far as to compare Faulkner's county directly with his own similarly invented (but in his case not fictionally renamed) Upper Silesia. "Gleiwitz, Oberschlesien –", he wrote in his diary as he worked on *Zeit ohne Glocken*, "das ist ja mein Yoknapatwpha [sic]" (TB, 76).

1.5 HORST BIENEK AND SOUTHERN US WRITING

In secondary writings and interviews Horst Bienek often referred to the influence of writers from the Southern United States on the Gleiwitz tetralogy, and singled out William Faulkner, Thomas Wolfe, Carson McCullers, and Truman Capote as being of especial interest in this regard.⁵² In an interview with Ekkehart Rudolph in 1977, for example, he spoke of his fascination with the four Southern writers, naming them "ganz große Schriftsteller und vielleicht sogar Vorbilder".⁵³ Ten years later in his book *Das allmähliche Ersticken von Schreien* (1987) (sometimes referred to as *Münchener Poetik-Vorlesungen*) he spoke again about the writers (on this occasion omitting McCullers). Writing in the third person he commented on the seismic change in style he felt obliged to make as he began work on *Die erste Polka*. Faulkner, Wolfe, McCullers, and (the early) Capote were to be a central component of this endeavour. The narrative styles of his two previous works *Die Zelle* (1968)

⁵⁰ 'Faulkner and Southern History: A View from Germany', *Southern Cultures*, The South in the World, 4, (1998), 31-44 (p. 32).

⁵¹ Schlösser, p. 158.

⁵² It is clear from the *Bienek-Arbeitsbibliothek* at the *Horst-Bienek-Archiv*, from secondary writings, and from the author's recently published *Tagebücher*, that the author read the work of these four Southern writers in German translation. Bienek predominantly referred to—and quoted from—the works in German. The German and Swiss editions he used (where known) are identified at relevant points in this study.

⁵³ Rudolph, p. 42.

(on the theme of imprisonment) and *Bakunin, eine Invention* (1970) (his modernist narrative of a young man's attempt to research the life of Michail Bakunin), were inappropriate for his new project, the literary reconstruction of his lost childhood in Upper Silesia, where the city of Gleiwitz ("die Stadt") rather than any character or protagonist was to be the predominant theme:

Er hatte sich eine neue Erzähltechnik zurechtgemacht. Mit der monologischen Prosa der »Zelle« oder der Collageform der »Bakunin-Invention« kam er nicht an die *Stadt* heran. Ihm schwebte ein *poetischer Realismus* vor, für den er freilich in der deutschen Literatur kaum Vorbilder fand, eher in der amerikanischen der Südstaaten etwa, bei William Faulkner, bei Thomas Wolfe, beim frühen Truman Capote (AE, 103).

On many other occasions, too, Bienek spoke warmly of these Southern writers—the narrative never changed—often, as above, linking them to the concept of *poetischer Realismus* (of which much later). He also used quotations in German translation from Capote and Faulkner as epigraphs for two of the Gleiwitz novels, and in *Mein Lesebuch* (1984),⁵⁴ an anthology of texts chosen by Bienek for their importance to both his literary career and his life choices, he spoke of Faulkner whom, though banned in the GDR as a formalist, he had first begun to read during his time there, as the writer, "von dem ich am meisten gelernt haben möchte" (ML, 11). Thomas Wolfe and Carson McCullers too crop up often in Bienek's secondary writing. He wrote several newspaper reviews of McCullers's work in the early 1960s, and a perceptive review of Wolfe's letters for the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* in 1962.⁵⁵

1.6 UPPER SILESIA AND THE AMERICAN SOUTH

But were there any obvious parallels between Upper Silesia and the American South that permitted Bienek to consider Gleiwitz as "mein Yoknapatwpha [sic]", in other words his own version of Faulkner's invented city of Jefferson; and why

⁵⁴ Horst Bienek, *Mein Lesebuch*, Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1984. (Subsequently referred to in the text as "ML".)

⁵⁵ Horst Bienek, 'Beichte eines rastlosen Lebens: Zu den Briefen von Thomas Wolfe', *FAZ*, 14 February 1962.

would a German author seek as literary models four writers from the Southern US states, as opposed to novelists writing in German nearer home? Apart from *poetischer Realismus* there are several answers, many of them interconnected.

(i) Places Apart

While the Southern US Americans were quite different writers, all were similarly associated with a specific and distinctive region, and all evoked a powerful and illuminating sense of place in their work. Furthermore, the South and Upper Silesia were historically and temperamentally “places apart” within the borders of their respective countries and were typically seen as such by their fellow countrymen who lived in other regions. In essence, both regions can properly be described as borderlands. In “The Flowering Dream. Notes on Writing” (1959), published in *The Mortgaged Heart*, for example, Carson McCullers stressed the differences between the northern and southern parts of the USA, at one stage calling the South a “homeland within a homeland”,⁵⁶ and in another essay, “The Russian Realists and Southern Literature” (1941) from the same book, she was forthright in her view that the South had always been, “a section apart from the rest of the United States, having interests and a personality distinctly its own”.⁵⁷ Bienek was to judge Upper Silesia in similar terms. Upper Silesia to him was fundamentally a separate entity from the rest of the German Reich. In a 1978 review of Siegfried Lenz’s *Heimatismuseum* (1978) he spoke of a kind of affinity between the “East” (by which he meant the German Eastern provinces, including Upper Silesia) and the US South. “Nehmen wir den Osten”, he wrote, “für eine bestimmte Landschaft, für ein bestimmtes Temperament, eine spezifische Erfahrung, für eine geschichtsträchtige Provinz, wie es etwa der Süden für die Vereinigten Staaten war und noch ist [...]”.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Carson McCullers, *The Mortgaged Heart*, edited by Margarita G. Smith, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1971, p. 279. (Subsequently referred to as “*The Mortgaged Heart*”.) Some sections of this work perform the same type of function for McCullers as *Beschreibung einer Provinz* had for Horst Bienek.

⁵⁷ *The Mortgaged Heart*, p. 254.

⁵⁸ Horst Bienek, ‘Besuch im Heimatismuseum. Siegfried Lenz und sein neuer Roman aus einem verlorenen Land’, *Die Zeit*, 20 October 1978.

(ii) Liminal and Lost Worlds

There was also a compelling connection between Germany's "eastern provinces" and the American South, both historically, and as depicted in the Southern texts Bienek was familiar with, and that was their status as liminal regions, and ultimately as lost or (at least) disappearing territories: both were destined to become what we might call "lost provinces" of one type or another. For Upper Silesia the loss was absolute: German Upper Silesia no longer exists; and while the Confederate South was to re-join the Union following its decisive Civil War defeat, its traditional, feudal and slave-based way of life was changed forever, never to be restored to its former likeness. In *Look Homeward, Angel* one disgusted Civil War veteran—James Buchanan Pettigrew, a colonel during "the only war that mattered" (a telling comment in itself)—bitterly compares the antebellum South with the novel's present: "Not the same! Nothing the same!" (LHA, 288). For those like Pettigrew, as with so many figures who populate much of the Southern fiction Bienek specified as being influential to his writing, the traditional South was to survive only in the memories of a vanquished people futilely holding on to the concept of the so-called "Lost Cause", a post-war ideology promoting antebellum Confederate principles. The Civil War of 1861 to 1865 was long over, but not quite history: defeat and loss remained firmly in the collective mind of the white Southerner. The issue of liminality will turn up frequently in subsequent sections of this study. As Clemens Ruthner has pointed out, the concept of liminality can give new momentum to Area Studies, "indem sie *Zwischenräume* besser konzeptualisieren lässt: das Grenzland [...] vielerorts ebenso wie ganze Regionen, denen von jeher der Geruch des Heterogenen, der konfrontativen wie auch der friedlichen Angrenzung anheftet".⁵⁹ Ruthner specifically mentions Silesia in this

⁵⁹ Clemens Ruthner, *Die Kultur und ihre Ungeheuer: Fantastik, Liminalität und Kulturökonomie*, Vienna: Turia + Kant, 2024, p. 69. (Subsequently referred to as "Ruthner".)

regard, referring briefly to the region's mixed German, Polish and Czech heritage,⁶⁰ and his hypothesis (if we can describe the tetralogy, a literary memorial to a lost borderland province, as falling to some extent within the ambit of Area Studies) is certainly true of Horst Bienek's Gleiwitz. It is also true of the Confederate South in relation to the region's transition from slave-owning aristocracy to federal democracy.

(iii) Conflict between Religion and Race

On one occasion, in conversation with Marilyn Fries, Bienek was quite specific about an affinity he believed existed between Upper Silesia and the American South. Speaking of a renewed enthusiasm for William Faulkner as he worked on the Gleiwitz novels, he noted an analogy between the peoples of the two regions:

und interessanterweise [...] habe ich plötzlich entdeckt, als ich an [...] die Gleiwitzer Tetralogie heranging, [...] daß da gewisse Affinitäten sind, gewisse Gemeinsamkeiten, nämlich dieser besondere Menschenschlag, der in Schlesien zu Hause ist, [...] die Probleme zwischen Schwarz und Weiß, die Faulkner beschreibt, waren bei uns zwischen Katholiken und Protestanten oder zwischen Deutschen und Polen, die ja dann ganz nahe beisammen gelebt haben.⁶¹

That a culture of racial discrimination in particular connects the two regions is succinctly brought out in *Zeit ohne Glocken* when in conversation with Valeska Piontek, an acquaintance pointedly and disparagingly speaks her mind:

Zu Anfang des Krieges war einmal die Frau des Direktors der Wasserwerke zu ihr gekommen und hatte empört gesagt, in der Huldshinsky-Siedlung soll es Leute geben, die halten Polen für genau solche Menschen wie Deutsche! Da müsse man sich doch vorsehen, dann könnte man ja behaupten, ein Nigger sei genau so wertvoll wie ein weißer Amerikaner – und das würde wohl niemand in ganz Amerika einfallen (ZG, 101).⁶²

⁶⁰ Ruthner, p. 69.

⁶¹ Fries, Interview, 23 May 1989, Ahrens, pp. 117-118. Perhaps understandably there is no mention here of Jewish issues, as conflict involving the American Jewish community is not a major trope in Faulkner's work.

⁶² I have reluctantly included the deeply offensive N-word here (and in further instances in this study) when the word and other similarly offensive terms form part of a direct quotation from source material.

1.7 HISTORICAL ESSENTIALS AND THE HILL OF ANNABERG

Upper Silesia's credentials as "eine geschichtsträchtige Provinz" are certainly not in doubt. The following section explores Upper Silesian history since 1918 with reference predominantly to Bienek's largely neglected short story *Wallfahrt zu Sankt Anna*,⁶³ a narrative set in and around Gleiwitz in the immediate run-up to Germany's September 1939 invasion of Poland. The short story, published relatively early in Bienek's career some 11 years before the appearance of *Die erste Polka* (Bienek had not yet found the narrative style of *poetischer Realismus* which was to characterise the tetralogy) describes two trains arriving at the train station serving the hill of Annaberg, near Gleiwitz; it is July 1939. It soon becomes clear that the intentions of the passenger groups in each of the trains, one composed of Catholic pilgrims, the other of *Hitler Jugend (HJ)* members, are quite independent: one is visiting the church of St. Anna, the other the nearby German war memorial. For Annaberg was not only an important place of pilgrimage for both German and Polish Upper Silesian Catholics (in a later biographical work Bienek characterises it as Upper Silesia's "katholische[s] Herz")⁶⁴, it was also a significant battle site of the Third Polish Uprising which began in May 1921, where, following the disputed Upper Silesian plebiscite earlier in the year, German *Freikorps* troops re-captured the hill from Polish insurgents.⁶⁵ The scene at the train station therefore looks set for confrontation; and indeed as both trains pull into Annaberg there are disturbances. Later in the day there is a more troublesome incident: an exchange of blows between a local pilgrim and a *HJ* official, and a thwarted attempt by *HJ* members to detain the pilgrim. While the altercation appears to be amicably

⁶³ In: *Verteidigung der Zukunft: Deutsche Geschichten 1960-1980*, edited by Marcel Reich-Ranicki, Munich: dtv (1980), 165-172. The story was first published in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* on 10. October 1964. (Subsequently referred to as "*Wallfahrt*".)

⁶⁴ Horst Bienek, *Reise in die Kindheit: Wiedersehen mit Schlesien*, Munich: Hanser, 1988, p. 19. (Subsequently referred to as "*Reise in die Kindheit*".)

⁶⁵ The question as to whether the two opposing groups arriving at the Annaberg on the same day July day within minutes of each other could be a coincidence is actually answered by Bienek in *Reise in die Kindheit*, a non-fiction work describing Bienek's visit to Upper Silesia following the publication of the Gleiwitz tetralogy: "Die Nazis machten ihre großen Aufmärsche gern am Wallfahrtstag, um zu beweisen, daß sie mehr Menschen auf die Beine bringen konnten als die Kirche" (p. 21).

resolved by the apologies of a priest, on the following day it is reported that Polish provocateurs are responsible for the incident. This considerably ups the ante: reports of provocation on the German-Polish border are becoming more and more prevalent in the German press, and to be accused of provocation is potentially catastrophic. The accusation is of course false, part of a sustained attempt by the National Socialist regime to demonise Polish Upper Silesians in the run up to war. But the fact is that Franz Maria Pilaczek, the pilgrim accused of “provocation”, is not a Pole as reported, but a German (typically for Upper Silesia his allegiances are not necessarily all that clear-cut: while he is first and foremost a god-fearing Christian and regards the new regime with some scepticism, he is not entirely unsympathetic to some National Socialist policies). Eventually he is arrested, held for 14 hours by the Gestapo, and on the intercession of the parish priest, finally released. It is a lucky escape. The next day there is other news to report: “Es war der erste September 1939, und seit fünfuhrfünfundvierzig wurde, sechs Kilometer von Gleiwitz entfernt, »zurückgeschossen«”⁶⁶. The story anticipates and contextualises one of the central events of *Die erste Polka*, that of the false flag attack on the Gleiwitz radio station on the night of the 31 August 1939—“ein makabres Theaterstück”, as Bienek once called the operation⁶⁷—one of several such incidents in the region directly ordered by Himmler, specifically to insinuate Polish belligerence towards Germany. In fact, the Gleiwitz radio station raiders were members of the *Sicherheitsdienst* of the SS posing as Poles, entrusted with the brutal task of providing Hitler with a pretext for war.

Wallfahrt zu Sankt Anna was an early attempt to portray aspects of a complex historical dynamic in pre-war Upper Silesia; the hill of Annaberg itself, Bienek’s symbol of an ethnically and nationally diverse province, was of huge significance

⁶⁶ *Wallfahrt*, p. 172. A reference to Hitler’s cynical phrase announcing the commencement of war with Poland.

⁶⁷ Horst Bienek: “Einführung in *Die erste Polka*”, Undated typescript, p. 1, Horst-Bienek-Archiv, Biw 9,26. (Subsequently referred to as “Einführung”.)

both to German and Polish Catholics, *and* to German nationalists, as two *lieux de mémoire*—sites of remembrance symbolising or “holding” the discrete collective memories of each of the groups—were situated on it.⁶⁸ That the two sites, one a place of Catholic pilgrimage, the other a *Reichsehrenmal* for fallen *Freikorps* soldiers (and according to James Bjork and Robert Gerwarth one of the largest monuments ever built in National Socialist Germany),⁶⁹ were situated in locations within walking distance of each other appears historically and politically quite extraordinary. Not only in this early story, but also in the Gleiwitz tetralogy, Annaberg is a site of particular meaning and resonance to the Upper Silesian, and an important marker in the problem of conflicted identity of the region. The Church of St. Anne, dating back several hundred years, contained the iconic statue of St. Anne, the mother of the Virgin Mary. But why was the Annaberg *Reichsehrenmal* so important for the *HJ* in Bienek’s short story? For an answer we must go back to Germany’s defeat in the First World War, and the subsequent Versailles Peace Conference of 1919. As a way of resolving the rival claims of Weimar Germany and the new Polish state to the borderland province (economically Upper Silesia remained a highly attractive territory), the Versailles Treaty stipulated that the outcome was to be determined by a plebiscite (*Abstimmung*) of the province’s inhabitants.⁷⁰ This took place on 20 March 1921. Neither side had been able to take the votes of what could reasonably be regarded as their natural constituencies for granted; in this borderland area national identities were known to be unpredictable. T. K. Wilson aptly calls this “the existence of a floating constituency

⁶⁸ Pierre Nora defined a “*lieu de mémoire*” as “any significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community”. Pierre Nora, *Realism of Memory: Rethinking the French Past: Vol. 1, Conflicts and Divisions*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1996, p. xvii.

⁶⁹ James Bjork and Robert Gerwarth, ‘The Annaberg as a German-Polish *Lieu de Mémoire*’, *German History*, 25.3 (2007), 372-400 (p. 374).

⁷⁰ The small Hultschiner Ländchen district in the south of the province however was not part of the plebiscite zone. It was assigned to Czechoslovakia in 1920.

of the nationally uncommitted”,⁷¹ and another commentator, Otto Ulitz, attempted to explain the Upper Silesian identity conundrum as follows:

Im Grenzland ist es nicht möglich, die Volkszugehörigkeit nach objektiven Gesichtspunkten oder nach Staatszugehörigkeit zu beurteilen. Im Grenzland trifft der Einzelne den Entscheid über seine Volkszugehörigkeit ... Selbst die Sprache, sonst Bindung und Ausdruck volklichen Bewußtseins, verliert im Grenzland ihre Geltung. Ein Mensch, der mühsam deutsch radebrecht, erklärt: Ich bin ein Deutscher, ein anderer, der geläufig und rein deutsch spricht: Ich bin ein Pole.⁷²

What this indicates of course is a highly ambivalent, indeed liminal territory where identities and nationalities are unstable, and can potentially change over years and decades depending on historical and social situations. As it happened the plebiscite result was that 59.6% of the population voted to remain with Germany, and 40.4% to join a new Poland (but what it could have been a decade before or a decade after is anyone's guess). What is true is that the plebiscite campaign was riven with violent conflict. Two Polish uprisings took place before the vote, and the third soon afterwards. Wilson explains the rationale of the final insurrection: “the Third Uprising in May 1921 was an attempt to ‘correct’ a plebiscite result that Polish nationalists convinced themselves was not a genuine reflection of national identity in the region”.⁷³ Certainly the arithmetic favoured Germany, yet the voting patterns region by region were highly uneven; in some areas the majority vote was for Germany, in others for Poland.⁷⁴ Germany's claim on the whole province on the basis of the overall majority was challenged by the Polish Upper Silesian politician Wojciech Korfanty, a former member of the German Reichstag and the Polish commissioner for Upper Silesia during the plebiscite. On 3 May 1921

⁷¹ T. K. Wilson, *Frontiers of Violence: Conflict and Identity in Ulster and Upper Silesia, 1948 – 1922*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 205. (Subsequently referred to as “Wilson”.)

⁷² Quoted by Heinz Winfried Sabais, ‘Bieneks epischer Schauplatz’, *Bienek lesen*, edited by Michael Krüger, Munich: Hanser (1980), 50-63 (p. 57).

⁷³ Wilson, p. 63.

⁷⁴ August Scholtis in his highly unusual novel of Upper Silesia *Ostwind* (1932) describes in ironic tone the first reactions to the results in the streets of the province's towns. August Scholtis, *Ostwind, Ein schlesischer Schelmenroman*, Munich: dtv, 1986, pp. 232–234.

Korfanty called for and organised the portentous Third Uprising, during which Polish troops succeeded in occupying Annaberg and a considerable section of south-eastern Upper Silesia. The Germans successfully recaptured Annaberg (hence the *Reichsehrenmal*) but it was not enough. After a negotiated ceasefire a partition of the province was finally decided upon by the Council of the League of Nations. While Germany was assigned around three quarters of the plebiscite territory and over half of the population,⁷⁵ Poland was allocated a large section of eastern Upper Silesia, including the most valuable section of the province's coal, iron, zinc and lead ore resources, a loss keenly felt by the German population. Bienek described the harsh consequences for his own parents of the new political reality in his memorial poem "Baracke Deutschland" published in 1979:

1921 ging ein Stück Schlesien, in dem
meine Eltern wohnten, nach blutigen Aufständen
verloren. Jetzt wurde Polnisch gesprochen.
Also zogen sie westwärts über den Fluß
Bis nach Gleiwitz, wo ich geboren wurde [...] ⁷⁶

But Poland's tenure over eastern Upper Silesia was to be short lived. Following victory in the 1939 war against Poland, Germany annexed the eastern part of the province it had lost in 1922. For one character, the Gleiwitz *Zellenleiter* in *Zeit ohne Glocken*, the third novel of the Gleiwitz tetralogy, this went some way towards erasing the humiliation of Versailles: "Seitdem ganz Oberschlesien wieder deutsch war, hatte der Herr Thonk nicht mehr an Versailles gedacht. Damit war für ihn die Schmach getilgt" (ZG, 151).

Is there a historiographical link here with the Southern states? Certainly. In its own way, we might say, the American South had its own "Versailles" experience. One event like no other dominates the history of the South: the Civil War of 1861-1865. Defeat had left the Confederate states physically devastated and economically

⁷⁵ Wilson, p. 30.

⁷⁶ Horst Bienek, *Wer antwortet wem: Gedichte*, Munich: Hanser, 1991, p. 15.

impoverished. It had also left the population with an extraordinary emotional legacy. Louis D. Rubin, Jr., a Southern literary historian, spoke of the introspective mood of the crushed South in the period between the Civil War and World War I: “Almost every Southern family had felt the war, had shared in the defeat. The spectre of the Lost Cause was there to contemplate. The war, memories of the war, results of the war, dominated life in the South for four decades or more.”⁷⁷ Civil war remembrance is certainly a significant theme in much of Southern fiction, particularly throughout the Faulkner canon. Indeed, what we call postmemory—the traumatic experiences of a previous generation, now remembered by the current one, as if these memories were actually its own and not “second-hand”⁷⁸—is also a motif in Faulkner (for example in *Light in August*, where the undoing of the Reverend Gail Hightower predominantly derives from his obsessive remembrance of the death of his grandfather during a Civil War escapade, well before his own birth). In a sense it could be said that what Versailles, the Polish uprisings, the plebiscite and subsequent partition of the province represented for Upper Silesia was matched in the Southern states by the humiliation of an ignominious Civil War defeat, and the subsequent affront (seen from the Southern perspective) of the “Reconstruction” period when federal troops occupied the defeated Confederate states.

1.8 UPPER SILESIA AS A LIMINAL SPACE

I have called Upper Silesia a liminal province, that is, an in-between, fluctuating space comprised of numerous ambivalences. It is therefore not surprising that Bienek, in need of an appropriate discourse to capture a complex, transitioning territory, should deploy images and symbols of the liminal to describe his lost

⁷⁷ Louis D. Rubin, Jr., ‘The Historical Image of Modern Southern Writing’, *Journal of Southern History*, 22.2, (1956), 147-166 (p. 149). (Subsequently referred to as “Rubin”.)

⁷⁸ See Marianne Hirsch who defines postmemory as, “the relationship that the “generation after” bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before—to experiences they “remember” only by means of the stories, images, and behaviours among which they grew up”. Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2012, p. 5.

province, and the people who live there. For, as Ruthner makes clear, liminality, generally speaking, is productive (*wirksam*) on several levels. Ruthner specifies the following areas (and I would argue that these can safely be applied to Horst Bienek's Upper Silesian discourse):

- a) räumlich / geografisch: als Zwischenraum;
- b) persönlich / psychisch / emotional: als Zwischenzustand bzw. Ambivalenz;
- c) semantisch / rhetorisch / narrativ: als Ambiguität und Uneindeutigkeit.⁷⁹

And undoubtedly, in Bienek's tetralogy, a sense of the liminal is all-pervasive: in metaphorical description, in the subconscious mind, in the spoken word. Indeed in an unpublished manuscript in the Horst-Bienek-Archiv the author spoke of his preoccupation with specific transition- and border situations: "Was mich interessiert, sind die Übergänge, die Grenz-Situationen", he wrote, "und zwar nicht nur die politischen, sondern jene der Menschen, der Sprache, der Psychologie".⁸⁰ The "transitional character" of the Upper Silesian experience is very evident in carefully conceived scenes and descriptions throughout the tetralogy. In *Zeit ohne Glocken*, for example, where the confiscation of the bells from the Peter-Paul-Kirche for prospective use in the armaments industry is meticulously recounted, the removal of one bell by the Organisation Todt (OT)⁸¹ as it is tortuously lowered on a rope from the church tower is recounted very much as a liminal event:

Ein paar Sekunden lang war es, als schwebte die Glocke in der Luft [...]. Aber wenn die Glocke jetzt wahrhaftig *zwischen Himmel und Erde* schwebte, wie es in dem Kirchenlied heißt, so kam sie doch von Minute zu Minute ein Stück der Erde näher" (ZG, 199).

The image, a church bell with its associated Silesian history (apparently dating as far back as the Thirty Years War), becomes an emblem of Upper Silesia's impending (minute by minute) demise as a German province, and is an example of Bienek's

⁷⁹ Ruthner, p. 67.

⁸⁰ Horst Bienek, "Einführung in die Lesung", undated typescript. In: *Verschiedene Materialien zur "Polka"*, Horst-Bienek-Archiv, Biw 31,2. (Subsequently referred to as "Einführung in die Lesung".)

⁸¹ The construction and engineering unit founded in 1938, and named after its founder, the NSDAP member Fritz Todt. In 1940 Todt became *Reichsminister für Bewaffnung und Munition*. He died in 1942.

“poetic realism” at work: the bell is elevated to the status of symbol for the purpose of enhancing the author’s representation of Upper Silesia. What is as important, however, is the bell’s quality as an image of liminality. For several seconds in its downward trajectory the bell hovers in the air, in a kind of threshold state “*zwischen Himmel und Erde*”. For the onlookers in the church square below there is no certainty about the outcome; in fact there are several possibilities: the rope could snap and the bell could plunge to the ground (several onlookers are praying for this), the removal might be sabotaged by adolescents in the square below, or (which is what transpires), the bell might be delivered safely to the OT vehicle on the ground, and the threshold state ends. It is an arresting “betwixt and between” image, but not an incidental one; it is one of many in Bienek’s tetralogy specifically intended to mark the borderland province of Upper Silesia with an unmistakable liminal character, while simultaneously allowing the author a means of intimating the approaching end of the province. The same technique is used with an image of fluctuating sunlight in *Septemberlicht*, the second novel of the Gleiwitz series. A distinctly liminal moment between summer and autumn (pointing symbolically to the in-between border province) is deftly caught as a group of mourners converse outside the Coseler Straße cemetery in Gleiwitz:

Wie ein zerschlissenes Tuch hing ein Wolkenstreifen über ihnen, die Sonne brach immer wieder durch, mal schärfer, mal schwächer.

Das ist das Septemberlicht, sagte das Fräulein Bombonnek, es macht mich ganz fiebrig. Ich mag es nicht; der Sommer ist schon vorbei und der Herbst hat noch nicht angefangen (SL, 204).

1.9 THE LIMINAL POPULATION

Who are the Upper Silesians in the tetralogy who symbolise the liminality of the province? Most obviously we have the adolescent figures (Josel Piontek, Andreas Pilgrim, Ulla Ossadnik, and her brother Kotik) who straddle a borderland between child- and adulthood. However, there are also many adults who inhabit buffer zones between two states or situations. We have for example Anna Ossadnik, the

mother of five children—one of whom is a musical prodigy, another in a correction facility—with her various skin growths and physical ailments (is she healthy or ill?), or the Nieradczyk sisters in the same novel, veteran funeral attendees (are they mentally stable or unstable?). In *Die erste Polka* and *Septemberlicht* the *Wilder Mönch*, an itinerant priest, and Wassermilka, Leo Maria's wayward sister, exist in a "waiting zone" between social acceptability in their community and social exclusion. And in both *Zeit ohne Glocken* and *Erde und Feuer* there is the case of the Gleiwitz women surreally described as Macbeth witches, with the implication that they exist in a classic liminal state somewhere between the earthly and the supernatural. A sense of gothic liminality is also apparent when Tante Lucie (Widera)—not a real aunt, simply an old friend of Valeska Piontek (whose varnished green fingernails, incidentally, mark out her hand as a crocodile claw) (EP, 114)—speaks of her belief in the concept of "Scheintoten" (the apparently dead), and secretly places a hand bell into Leo Maria Piontek's coffin in *Septemberlicht*. In this instance, Bienek is not only highlighting a widespread Upper Silesian fear ("Die Angst vor Scheintoten bei einfachen Leuten. In Schlesien stark verbreitet", as he put it in *Beschreibung einer Provinz*),⁸² but is also hinting at a whole territory caught in a kind of symbolic suspended animation. This too is the rationale for the apparent suspension of time in selected Bienek chapters of the tetralogy. We have in *Erde und Feuer*, to quote just one example, Kotik Ossadnik's sojourn with Hedel Zock in the abandoned villa in Gleiwitz's Miethe-Allee as the Russians approach the city (EF, Chapters 13 & 19). Time stops in the villa, and all social norms for the couple (and their crazy adolescent visitors, Hannes Piechotta and Jochen Winter) appear suspended for the duration of their stay.

While he might not have named them as such, Bienek must also surely have noticed many aspects of the liminal in the writing of Faulkner, Wolfe, McCullers and

⁸² Horst Bienek, *Beschreibung einer Provinz*, Munich: Hanser, 1983, p. 95. (Subsequently referred to in the text as "BP".)

Capote. I shall outline these instances as we proceed through this study. For the moment, however, it is enough to say that Joel Knox in *Other Voices, Other Rooms* and almost every adolescent in the novels of Carson McCullers' exist in some kind of liminal state. And not only adolescents are implicated in this "betwixt and between" dynamic: several of Faulkner's "mixed race" characters also live out their lives in waiting areas of racial uncertainty, from which they might never emerge. We have, for example Lucas Beauchamp in *Intruder in the Dust* (1948),⁸³ a black farmer whose grandfather was white, and who enrages the white population of Jefferson by refusing to act in the manner typically expected of such a man, and Joe Christmas in *Light in August* (1932), who appears white—he is the son of a white woman and a man who may have been partly black (he or the reader never know for sure)—whose sense of identity fluctuates aggressively between black and white.

1.10 WASSERPOLNISCH/SCHLONSAK

It is interesting that language itself was included in Bienek's agenda of the liminal. At this stage it is important to speak of the Upper Silesian dialect, in German known as *Wasserpölnisch*, and the extent of its use in the borderland province. In Bienek's tetralogy, set principally in the industrial city of Gleiwitz, the use of German by the population is clearly predominant. However, it appears to have been a different situation in the Upper Silesian countryside. Heinz Winfried Sabais puts it this way: "Man sprach polnisch oder jedenfalls einen polnischen Dialekt auf den Dörfern, der hieß Wasserpölnisch, eigentlich Oderpölnisch, in den Städten hingegen sprach man ein hartes Deutsch".⁸⁴ According to Brendan Karch the term *Wasserpölnisch* was actually a pejorative name for the dialect (the more neutral term was *Schlonsak*⁸⁵ which Karch defined as a Polish-leaning dialect "which combined western Slavic grammar and structure with a smattering of German vocabulary").⁸⁶ For T. K.

⁸³ German: *Griff in den Staub* (1951).

⁸⁴ "Bieneks epischer Schauplatz", *Bienek lesen*, edited by Michael Krüger, Munich: Hanser, 1980, p. 53.

⁸⁵ Karch, p. 222.

⁸⁶ Karch, p. 3.

Wilson the dialect was “a vibrantly hybrid phenomenon, unmistakably the product of a zone of overlapping cultures.”⁸⁷

The fact that German rather than *Schlonsak* was predominantly spoken in Bienek’s Gleiwitz, however, did not mean that the German used by the author’s fictional protagonists was free from Slavic or Polish influence. Slavic and Polish words and phrases are very evident in spoken German in the tetralogy. Janusz Siatowski in his practical guide to Bienek’s use of loan words and linguistic borrowings in the Gleiwitz novels calls these “Slawismen”, or more specifically “Polonismen”.⁸⁸ In the tetralogy these words and expressions are more usually integrated into the German speech of everyday interaction. However, on one occasion in *Die erste Polka* Georg Montag, Bienek’s fictional amateur historian, provides a long list of words and terms—“oberschlesische Ausdrücke, *argot*, meist aus dem Wasserpolnischen” (EP, 253-254)—along with their German renditions, demonstrating the rich composite nature of the dialect. In the opinion of Siatkowski (despite some reservations),⁸⁹ Bienek was successful in his deployment of linguistic borrowings as a means of representing the Gleiwitz spoken word. Their use was an important constituent of the author’s overall artistic endeavour: “[...] dank den Polonismen [erreicht Bienek] sein künstlerisches Hauptziel — die Darstellung des programmatisch fokussierten, auch die Sprache betreffenden, polnisch-deutschen Übergangscharakter des alten Oberschlesiens”.⁹⁰

1.11 REGIONALITY AND RITE OF PASSAGE

Much can be learnt about Bienek’s province if its history and experience are understood as a kind of rite-of-passage following the tripartite separation, transition, and incorporation model as originated by Arnold van Gennep in *The Rites of Passage* (1909), and further elaborated by Victor Turner in *The Forest of*

⁸⁷ Wilson, p. 71.

⁸⁸ See *Slawismen in den schlesischen Romanen von Horst Bienek*, translated by Tadeusz Kachlak, Munich: Verlag Otto Sagner, 2000.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 106.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

Symbols (1967). Van Gennep categorises rites-of-passage into three discrete phases. The first, the pre-liminal phase, is where separation is initiated; the second, the intermediate (liminal) stage, is where transition takes place (the in-between phase of being neither here nor there), and the third is a phase of assimilation where the changes are understood as consummated. In applying van Gennep's tripartite model to Upper Silesia specifically (I am restricting my historical analysis of the province to the years between 1918 and 1945) it probably doesn't matter if we speak of either one prolonged rite-of-passage from German province to Polish "Woiwodschaft" lasting around 27 years, or secondly of a collection of three shorter rites: (a) between the end of the Great War and the partition of 1922, (b) from partition until the German invasion of Poland, and (c) the war years between 1939 and 1945). In either case, the result was the assimilation of the province into a new (Polish) structure (the "consummation"). In a sense the South, too, from the Civil War, through Reconstruction, until 1918 when World War I ended, was undergoing a transformative rite-of-passage of its own towards reintegration into the United States. And, as had happened in Upper Silesia (in its own discrete way), the Great War accelerated the process of change. As Louis D. Rubin, Jr. put it, "With the first World War, the South was back in the Union again. [...] Even before that, the South had been getting set for the change. Chambers of Commerce began to be introduced. Upon a basically agrarian ingrown, leisurely, impecunious society, industrial America moved in."⁹¹ Certain established social boundaries were ripe for transgression: *The Sound and the Fury*, for example, marks the definitive disintegration of the antebellum Southern version of aristocracy ("the South's un-American adventure in feudal fantasy",⁹² as C. Van Woodward describes it), just as *Erde und Feuer* marks the conclusive end of what had become an unsustainable German province.

⁹¹ Rubin, p. 151.

⁹² *The Burden of Southern History*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993, p. 22.

1.12 BIENEK'S AESTHETIC OF THE "GROTESQUE"

A close reading of the Gleiwitz tetralogy reveals consistent images and motifs of traditional Gothic literature, a genre which in its classic form typically encompasses aspects of both the supernatural and the grotesque. However, we should note that, as one commentator has pointed out, the supernatural, "is permitted but not essential to the Gothic".⁹³ Certainly in the specific "Southern Gothic" subgenre the supernatural is typically much less prevalent than the grotesque, and this is substantially true of the Southern novels Bienek champions in his secondary writing. While the Gleiwitz novels do embrace some elements of the occult, Bienek's emphasis is very much on the grotesque element of the genre. The presence of these motifs is not to say that the Gleiwitz novels can be described as traditional "gothic" works; nevertheless Bienek's novels do exhibit the principal components of the grotesque which are specifically associated with Southern Gothic writing: extraordinary and bizarre (but not necessarily otherworldly) spaces and venues, and a range of characters with physical deformities and mental disabilities of one kind or another. Just as in much of Carson McCullers' writing, we have in the tetralogy a profusion of misfits, freaks and eccentrics, many of whom not only display distinctive and ugly physical characteristics, but are also clearly mentally challenged. These are, of course, intended to enhance the reader's impression of Upper Silesia itself as a liminal space, for as Manuel Aguirre, writing in general terms on the formal properties of the Gothic, points out:

The broken, the worthless, the deprived, the misshapen count among the natural adjuncts of threshold space. Gothic characters, objects, actions, environments are regularly flawed or diminished with respect to an often implicit yet always compelling standard, thereby denoting the liminality of the domain in which they exist.^{94 95}

⁹³ *American Gothic: From Salem Witchcraft to H.P. Lovecraft, An Anthology*, edited by Charles L. Crow, Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013, p. 1.

⁹⁴ Manuel Aguirre, 'Thick Description and the Poetics of the Liminal in Gothic Tales'. In: *Orbis Litterarum*, 72.4 (2017), 294-317 (p. 309).

⁹⁵ Indeed, to outsiders to the province the mere fact of having roots in Upper Silesia imbues the population with a measure of freakishness. One such example in *Die erste Polka* is the reaction of the Feldwebel

The grotesque protagonist exists in a liminal state in the sense that he or she cannot live up to an accepted “standard” and cannot be neatly classified as one thing or the other: his or her status therefore appears ambiguous, ill-defined, and incomplete, a kind of analogue to the unfinished threshold province itself. Indeed, what Mikhail Bakhtin in *Rabelais and his World* (1965)—a work which engages with Rabelais’s sixteenth-century novel *Gargantua and Pantagruel*—defines as the grotesque body, could easily serve as a metaphor for Bienek’s unfinished German province: “The grotesque body [...] is a body in the act of becoming. It is never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body”.⁹⁶

Bakhtin’s theory of the grotesque is certainly worth considering in more detail. In *Rabelais and His World* Bakhtin concluded that the origins of the literary grotesque were to be found in the carnival tradition of the Middle Ages, in which authority and convention were temporarily suspended, social rank lost its relevance, and cultural boundaries were typically transgressed (carnival culture therefore opposed institutionalised governance). Carnivalisation was characterised by joyous laughter, and was preoccupied with corporeality (there is a strong emphasis on the functions of the lower stratum of the body such as “acts of defecation and copulation, conception, pregnancy and birth”).⁹⁷ But most especially, as we have seen in the quotation above, carnivalisation was distinguished by its regenerative qualities: the grotesque body “builds and creates another body”. For this reason the grotesque body in all its diverse forms in the Gleiwitz tetralogy is, with respect to Bakhtin’s theory of the grotesque, a key image for Bienek’s capricious and historically unresolved *Oberschlesien*, a province over history continually in flux,

Metzmacher, a “Reich” German, to Lucie (Widera) who incidentally is by no means a grotesque figure: “Ich tanze mit einem Mädel, das ist aus Biskupitz. Aus Biskupitz! Er zerrte Lucie (Widera) zu sich heran und zeigte sie vor wie ein Zirkusdirektor seine Abnormität: das Mädchen mit den zwei Köpfen”. (EP, 226).

⁹⁶ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1984, p. 317.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 21.

continually reborn—until, of course, its violent and irrevocable demise in 1945 when everything ends.

Bakhtin wrote *Rabelais and his World* partly as a critical response to Wolfgang Kayser's earlier work on the grotesque. Kayser's *Das Groteske* (1957) was, indeed, a very different theorisation, but interestingly it also has relevance to Bienek's use of the grotesque in the Gleiwitz novels. Whereas Bakhtin had proclaimed the grotesque "in terms of carnival which was regenerative, fearless and transgressive", as Mary Cosgrove put it,⁹⁸ Kayser's theory of the grotesque favoured the "the gravity of apocalypse and the accompanying immobility of fear".⁹⁹ And indeed Kayser's was an essentially menacing, indeed sinister perspective on the grotesque:

[...] so öffnet sich im Lächerlich-Verzerrten und Mönströs–Grauensvollen des Grotesken eine unmenschliche Welt des Nächtlichen und Abgründigen.¹⁰⁰

Kayser's concept also emphasized estrangement: "das Groteske ist die entfremdete Welt",¹⁰¹ he wrote, drawing attention to the existential alienation it fostered: "Die verfremdete Welt erlaubt uns keine Orientierung, sie erscheint als absurd".¹⁰²

For these reasons we can also apply Kayser's conceptualisation to Bienek's use of the grotesque in the Gleiwitz tetralogy. Bienek's Upper Silesia is a space of estrangement: his grotesque figures inform and uphold the sense of alienation and unease which inheres in much of the Gleiwitz population. In a sense, too, Bienek's grotesque mode was also a means of informing what Kayser in the quotation above terms the "inhuman world of the nocturnal and abysmal", in Gleiwitz terms the

⁹⁸ Mary Cosgrove, *Grotesque Ambivalence: Melancholy and Mourning in the Prose Work of Albert Drach*, Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2004, p. 36.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Wolfgang Kayser, *Das Groteske: Seine Gestaltung in Malerei und Dichtung*, Oldenburg: Gerhard Stalling Verlag, 1961, p. 61.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 198.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 199.

world of opportunism, callousness and racism which was ultimately to lead to Auschwitz.

1.13 THE MEANING OF THE BORDER

For Bienek the Upper Silesian border counted not only as a political line on a map, but also as a psychological borderline in the hearts and minds of the people. “Die Grenze ist es, die die Menschen prägt,” he explained in *Beschreibung einer Provinz*, “Ganz tief, bis ins Unbewußte” (BP, 55). Bienek was certainly aware of the consequences (ambiguity, ambivalence, equivocation) of growing up and living in the particular spatial circumstances that defined Upper Silesia. In the tetralogy the borderland condition manifests itself in the presentation of a population which is not easily read, and which cannot be taken for granted by one side or the other. In *Septemberlicht*, for example, we have the young Upper Silesian Janosch Przygoda who has just had a medical examination for German military service and dreads the prospect of fighting at the Polish front as he has so many Polish relatives in uniform on the other side. And there is the case of Herr Mazura, a neighbour of the Ossadniks in the Teuchertstraße apartment block where they live, who makes his first appearance in *Erde und Feuer* as the Russians approach Gleiwitz. Rumours circulate that Mazura is a former Communist Party member; conflicting rumours claim that he was recently seen collecting on the street for the WHW (the NS *Winterhilfswerk* association). In fact, the narrator intervenes to imply that the two claims may not necessarily be mutually exclusive—“[...] wahrscheinlich stimmte beides” (EF, 178)—and it is later confirmed in the novel that having left the Communist Party in 1933, Mazura later joined the NSDAP. The illogicality of Mazura’s political allegiance choices are notably not a surprise to his Upper Silesian neighbours.

The border is also present in the general aura of ambivalence and ambiguity surrounding the motivations and actions of the people. How often are we told in the four Gleiwitz novels of one perspective, only for it to be, if not rescinded, then

quickly thrown into doubt, and a new option advanced. In the opening pages of *Die erste Polka* Valeska Piontek's memory of her sick husband's habit of piling up his pillows on his bed is a case in point: "er liebte es damals schon, seinen Kopf hoch zu betten, so könne er besser durchatmen, sagte er, so könne er besser träumen, aber vielleicht war es deshalb so hoch aufgeschichtet, weil er gern am frühen Morgen, nach dem Erwachen, die Welt [...] von oben überblickte" (EP, 8): nothing is certain, nothing can be taken as read. We have a similar situation as Valeska observes her son as he makes his way upstairs in the family home: "Valeska staunte, mit welcher Leichtigkeit sich der Junge bewegte, als er wegging, wie schön und harmonisch seine Bewegungen waren, wie bei einem Tänzer, dachte sie, oder lag es nur daran, daß er auf seinem Weg zur Treppe mehrmals durch Streifen von Licht und Schatten hindurch ging [...]" (EP, 24).

The border was also Bienek's rationale for including so many adolescents in the Gleiwitz tetralogy. He speaks in *Beschreibung einer Provinz* of "Grenzsituationen. Übergänge. Ambivalenzen", as important indicators of the Upper Silesian situation and character, before adding, "Nicht ohne Grund ist es die Pubertät, die ich immer wieder beschreiben will" (BP, 92). Caught in classic transition between childhood and adulthood (the in-between phase of Van Gennep's ritual process) the adolescent was to become an effective literary means of symbolising Upper Silesia's status as a province in flux,¹⁰³ just as it was a means for Truman Capote and Carson McCullers in *Other Voices, Other Rooms* and *The Member of the Wedding* respectively to portray the liminal nature of the changing South.

1.14 THE SOUTHERN MYTH OF THE LOST CAUSE

There was also another important aspect of the Southern writing (and we are talking predominantly about William Faulkner here) which was to influence the character of Bienek's Upper Silesian project: Faulkner's use of myth in his Southern fiction. In *A Second Flowering* Malcolm Cowley praised William Faulkner for his

¹⁰³ See also McIvor 1986, pp. 205-208.

invention of a “Mississippi county that was like a mythical kingdom, but was complete and living in all its details”.¹⁰⁴ As we know, Faulkner named this fictional region Yoknapatawpha (his “little postage stamp of native soil”, as he called it),¹⁰⁵ and set his most acclaimed novels in the region. Yoknapatawpha was “mythical” in the sense that its people and experience seemed to ratify (rightly or wrongly) a common narrative or collective belief that had developed in respect of the Southern states following Civil War defeat. We are again referring to the myth of the “Lost Cause”. The myth is this: a slaveholding planter aristocracy engages in a just war with its Northern US neighbours that cannot be won; nonetheless the war is an honourable endeavour, fought not about slavery but about the Southern states’ constitutional rights. The Southern confederacy fights heroically, against all odds. Despite abject defeat and ruin the South can justifiably claim moral superiority over its opponents, and its antebellum way of life remains something of which to be rightfully proud.

The myth was well known and securely established in the Southern states in the 1920s and 30s, when Faulkner published *The Sound and The Fury* (1929),¹⁰⁶ *As I Lay Dying* (1930),¹⁰⁷ *Light in August* (1932),¹⁰⁸ and *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936),¹⁰⁹ and many of its tenets are also to be found in other Southern writing, including novels Horst Bienek admired, such as Thomas Wolfe’s *Look Homeward, Angel* (1929) and Truman Capote’s *Other Voices, Other Rooms* (1948); but in historiographical terms the myth was of course extremely suspect. Malcolm Cowley had rightly warned in

¹⁰⁴ Malcolm Cowley, *A Second Flowering: Works and Days of the Lost Generation*, London: Andre Deutsch, 1973, p. 131. (Subsequently referred to in the text as “*A Second Flowering*”.)

¹⁰⁵ *Writers at Work: The Paris Review Interviews, First Series*, edited by Malcolm Cowley, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985, p. 141. (Subsequently referred to as “*Writers at Work*”.)

¹⁰⁶ William Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury*, London: Vintage, 1995. (Subsequently referred to in the text as “SF”.) German translation: *Schall und Wahn* (1956).

¹⁰⁷ William Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, London: Vintage, 2004. (Subsequently referred to in the text as “AD”.) German translation: *Als ich im Sterben lag* (1961).

¹⁰⁸ William Faulkner, *Light in August*, London: Vintage, 2005. (Subsequently referred to in the text as “LA”.) German translation: *Licht im August* (1935).

¹⁰⁹ William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*, London: Vintage, 2005. (Subsequently referred to in the text as “AA”.) German translation: *Absalom, Absalom!* (1938).

an 1962 essay on myth in American writing that myths can be and often are “false to history”,¹¹⁰ and another Faulkner commentator, Irvine Howe, also struck a cautionary note about the use of myth in literature: “The writer often comes to a myth eager for acquiescence, but after articulating its assumptions he may begin to wonder about its meaning, its value”.¹¹¹ Howe believes this was the case for Faulkner. While Faulkner admired many aspects of the antebellum South (Malcolm Cowley defined Faulkner’s position on his homeland as that of “an antislavery Southern nationalist”),¹¹² the Southern myth is thoroughly tested in his writing and found to be wanting. As Howe put it, “the truth is that he [Faulkner] writes in opposition to his tradition as well as in acceptance, that he struggles with the Southern myth even as he acknowledges and celebrates it”.¹¹³ Faulkner’s *Flags in the Dust* (1927), and *The Unvanquished* (1938), two works concerning the Sartoris family dynasty (Faulkner based John Sartoris, a Confederate colonel, on his own grandfather), for example, reveal instances of Faulkner simultaneously in both opposition and acceptance modes (“Faulkner always turns romantic when writing about the Sartorises”, Malcolm Cowley claimed).¹¹⁴ However it is *Absalom, Absalom!* Faulkner’s great and tragic novel to which we must turn for the author’s most unequivocal statement about the “Lost Cause” narrative. According to Louis D. Rubin, Jr. the novel, its theme the catastrophic collapse of a Southern plantation, was “heretical” when it first appeared.¹¹⁵ Comparing *Absalom, Absalom!* in passing to Stark Young’s myth-amenable Civil War novel *So Red The Rose*, Rubin was able to show where Faulkner’s sympathies were ultimately to be found:

¹¹⁰ Malcolm Cowley, ‘Cycles of Myth in American Writing’, *The Portable Malcolm Cowley*, edited by Donald W. Faulkner, New York: Penguin (1990), 371-385 (p. 372).

¹¹¹ Irving Howe, ‘The Southern Myth and William Faulkner’, *American Quarterly*, 3.4 (1951), 357-362 (p. 361). (Subsequently referred to as “Howe”).

¹¹² *A Second Flowering*, p. 146.

¹¹³ Howe, p. 360.

¹¹⁴ ‘The Unvanquished: Editor’s Note’. In: *The Portable Faulkner*, edited by Malcolm Cowley, New York: Penguin (2003), 97-98 (p.97).

¹¹⁵ ‘The Dixie Special: William Faulkner and the Southern Literary Renaissance’. In: *Faulkner and the Southern Renaissance: Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha*, edited by Doreen Fowler and Anne J. Abadie, Jackson: University Press of Mississippi (1982), 63-92 (p. 82).

He [Faulkner] was, after all, proposing to portray the Old South, the Lost Cause, the institution of antebellum slavery, the planter aristocracy and the like, in ways that were quite unlike, and highly subversive of, the Southern mythos. This was not going to be a treatment of the community's history along the order of *So Red The Rose* (1934) by his fellow Mississippian Stark Young; the evil in Faulkner's novel was not going to be composed entirely of what was imported from outside by the Yankees.¹¹⁶

What is remarkably clear here is the ascription of the evil described in *Absalom, Absalom!* Wickedness and wrongdoing do not simply, as if by definition, come from the outside. In other words, the scapegoat could not simply be the North. Rubin sees Faulkner, in defiance of the myth, placing the blame for the South's ruinous collapse on its own internal social and racial structures.

Surely there was an analogy here with Upper Silesia (though it was not necessarily an analogy which Horst Bienek took fully on board, as we shall see below). The South's culture of blame resonates strongly with an almost identical situation in Upper Silesia, where much of the population is convinced that the province's problems are not of its own making, that outside forces down through the years are actually to blame for continual political and social conflict and upheaval, and eventually for the province's ultimate collapse.

1.15 THE UPPER SILESIAN MYTH

Horst Bienek was certainly impressed by Faulkner's ability in *Light in August*, *The Sound and the Fury*, and *Absalom, Absalom!* to mythicise his invented Mississippi county ("jene Mythisierung", he wrote approvingly in his diary of the three novels (TB, 287). Given his admiration for Faulkner, and his aesthetic goals, it was not surprising that Bienek also wished to do the same for his representation of the Upper Silesian experience; after all, for Bienek, as we know, Upper Silesia was in literary terms the equivalent of Yoknapatawpha: an invented space. In "*Das allmähliche Ersticken von Schreien*" he spoke of inventing (*erfinden*) for himself,

¹¹⁶ Ibid. p. 81.

“eine mythische Zeit, um darin die Saga von diesem Grenzvolk der Oberschlesier [...] zu erzählen” (AE, 101), and in *Beschreibung einer Provinz* he similarly understood his task as an attempt, “[...] eine mythische Landschaft, und die Menschen, die darin leben (Seelenlandschaft?!) erlebbar, nachvollziehbar zu beschreiben” (BP, 31). For Bienek mythicisation was an attempt to bring about an enhanced realism in his writing, consistent with his concept of “poetischer Realismus”. “Mir schwebte vor, mit diesen Romanen die Wahrheit, die Realität zu beschreiben”, he told Walter Hinck, “– sie aber ins Mythische zu entrücken. Ich bin daran interessiert, dieses Oberschlesien nicht zum Mythos im klassischen Sinne zu machen, aber sozusagen ins Mythische zu erhöhen, wo es den Rang eines großen Bildes, einer großen Metapher hat (und das ist auch meine Vorstellung von großer epischer Literatur).”¹¹⁷ Myth creation was therefore a poetic technique to achieve an enhanced reality, a new invented reality, somewhere between memory and imagination, summed up by the author in a single striking (yet paradoxical) sentence: “Der Autor schafft eine neue Realität, die am Schluß wirklicher ist als die Wirklichkeit.”¹¹⁸ My understanding of the myth is as follows: German Upper Silesia is a place apart, with a separate ethos from the main country (the Reich). The borderland status of the province prescribes that to survive the people must adapt to prevailing political circumstances (“Anpassung”) for the sake of well-being and family security. This entails a trade-off between the aspiration for national identity (i.e. between feeling either Polish or German) and simply getting the best from any particular constitutional situation. The province’s borderland status (as a region populated by a distinctive people with a unique German, Polish,¹¹⁹ Catholic, and Jewish heritage) also means that no political outcome or settlement—not even

¹¹⁷ “‘Wörter – Meine Fallschirme...’: Werkstattgespräch zwischen Horst Bienek und Prof. Dr. Walter Hinck, Köln’. In: *Auf der Suche nach dem verlorenen Land: Loccumer Autorentagung mit Horst Bienek*, edited by Karl Ermert, Rehberg-Loccum: Evangelische Academie Loccum (1983), 28-41 (p. 39). (Subsequently referred to as “Hinck”).

¹¹⁸ Hinck, p. 39.

¹¹⁹ Bienek rejected the accusation of some Silesian expellees (itself based on the “Vertriebene” myth that Polishness was seldom evident in German Upper Silesia) that he had portrayed the German province as “zu polnisch” (BP, 76).

(conceivably) autonomy—can be satisfactory to everyone; as Georg Montag (quoting the Upper Silesian writer August Scholtis) put it in his Korfanty biography (found buried in Valeska Piontek’s garden in the final novel of the tetralogy), “*daß ihm [the Upper Silesian] in jedem Fall Unrecht getan wird, wenn er Polen oder Deutschland zugeschlagen wird*” (EF, 130). The myth further suggests that as a consequence of borderland circumstances the Upper Silesian is essentially a victim, especially of forces external to its borders (wickedness is visited upon him or her, not the other way around). Finally, there is the mythic nature of the people’s connection with the earth: the Upper Silesian enjoys a mystical “Slavic” relationship with the Silesian soil (“[...] diese von Gott geweihte Erde, die gehört Dir, da gehörst Du hin, und in sie wirst Du wieder eingehen”, as Bienek once described it).¹²⁰ This relationship is however not a happy one. The soil, along with the teachings of the church,¹²¹ has engendered a harmful culture of submission; as Kotik Ossadnik articulates it in the final chapter of *Erde und Feuer*, “Es ist die Kirche, die einen dazu erzieht, ja, aber ich glaube, es ist auch die Erde hier, diese schlesische Erde, die einen dazu zwingt: knie hin, duck dich, laß dich schlagen [...]” (EF, 326).

This is Bienek’s Upper Silesian myth, but how should we read it? From the outset it is fair to say that Bienek does not critically engage with the viability of the myth in the way that Faulkner was to challenge the Southern mythos; that he appears to accept it is clear from an entry in *Beschreibung einer Provinz* where he discusses the inclusion at the end of *Erde und Feuer* of a short address to a young reader, an appeal to have faith in what he, the author, had written about the lost province (in the end the address was not used). He adds a word of warning to the young person,

¹²⁰ ‘Nur mit dem Kopf im Westen: Ein Gespräch mit dem aus Schlesien stammenden Schriftsteller Horst Bienek von Adam Krzemiński’, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 30 January 1988. (Subsequently referred to as “Nur mit dem Kopf im Westen”).

¹²¹ In *Das allmähliche Ersticken von Schreien* Bienek speaks “von den Fesseln des Katholizismus, von der Dumpfheit des schlesischen Erd-Mythos” (AE, 105).

perhaps in response to those readers of *Die erste Polka* who several years before had disputed the veracity of his memorial:¹²²

Ja, so ist es gewesen.

Ich habe es dir erzählt mit vielen Stimmen, und nun weißt du wie es dort unten zugegangen ist, und wie die Menschen dort gelebt und geliebt und gelitten haben, in einem Land, das es nicht mehr gibt und an das sich nur noch wenige erinnern, und einige Leute, die das gelesen haben, behaupten ja auch, es sei anders gewesen, aber glaub mir, es war so, eine Wahrheit, ein Mythos, und beides zusammen (BP, 252).

This would seem to confirm Bienek's belief in the integrity of the Upper Silesian myth as he presented it in the tetralogy. And indeed some of the myth is verifiable; Upper Silesia was a place apart, with a unique population profile, and the tradition of "Anpassung" in a border region is certainly plausible, and is historically acknowledged;¹²³ in Bienek's view it was essential to survival.¹²⁴ He had noticed instances of the practice in August Scholtis's 1932 novel *Ostwind, Roman der Oberschlesischen Katastrophe* (a work frequently mentioned in *Beschreibung einer Provinz*), and later spoke of the tradition (with regard to *Ostwind's* principal character, Kaschpar Theophil Kaczmarek) in an afterword to the 1986 edition of the novel:

Kaczmarek ist einer, der gelernt hat, zwischen den Fronten zu leben, zwischen den Sprachen, zwischen den Göttern. [...] Er muß sich anpassen. Mit List. Mit Verschlagenheit. Und mit Tücke auch. Hauptsächlich aber mit Mutterwitz. Er wechselt auch schon mal die Fronten, wechselt die Sprachen, wechselt die Götter. So kommt er durch Krieg, Abstimmung, Inflation.¹²⁵

¹²² See BP, 76; BP, 81-82.

¹²³ See James E. Bjork on germanising and polonising forces in Upper Silesia: "Nationalist competition also provided opportunities for serial adaptation and accommodation, allowing bilingual Silesians (and Silesian Catholics in particular) to operate as both Germans and Poles and thus avoid the most horrific fates meted out to groups whose categorization was less fluid." James E. Bjork, *Neither German nor Pole: Catholicism and National Indifference in a Central European Borderland*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008, p. 272. (Subsequently referred to as "*Neither German nor Pole*".)

¹²⁴ "[...] Grenzvölker müssen sich anpassen, sonst können sie nicht überleben", he told me in a private letter of 11 May 1982.

¹²⁵ August Scholtis, *Ostwind*, mit einem Nachwort von Horst Bienek, Munich: dtv, 1986, p. 294.

Where Bienek's Upper Silesian myth falters (or in Cowley's words is "false to history") is in its quite nostalgic promotion of the Upper Silesian as a victim. The impression is that the Upper Silesian is more sinned against than sinning. The teaching of the Church has facilitated this process (turn the other cheek, accept subjugation), and even the Silesian earth is elevated to mythic status: it too is a kind of helpless victim. As the Pionteks, fleeing the Russians, trek westwards in the final Gleiwitz novel, for example the earth is torn apart by bombs from Soviet war planes, and becomes a symbol of victimhood, appearing to Valeska as, "[...] der sichtbare Ausdruck dafür zu sein, was dieser Erde hier schon immer angetan wurde" (EF, 166). Sometimes the earth is even a willing victim. Kotik Ossadnik for instance speaks of the Upper Silesian earth as drawing the population into "die Wollust des Leidens" (EF, 326), giving the impression of a masochistic element in the dynamic, and a sense of the actual willingness of the people to accept subjugation and suffering. Apart from the interpolated history of Wojciech Korfanty, the (Polish) Upper Silesian activist in *Die erste Polka*, the emphasis in Bienek's tetralogy is predominantly on an Upper Silesia of non-antagonistic, blameless players. Consider the declarations of several members of a local group sheltering in a Gleiwitz housing block at the end of *Erde und Feuer* as the Russians make house-to-house enquiries (it's not clear who the second interlocutor is):

Schlimm waren eigentlich nur die Fanatiker, sagte Frau Zielonka. Und davon gab es bei uns nicht so viele. Dazu sind die Leute hier viel zu fromm.

Die Fanatiker, ja, das waren die höheren Parteiführer, die haben sie aus dem Reich zu uns geschickt, und mit denen wollten wir allemal nichts zu tun haben (EF, 295-296).

Although one might be tempted to read this as an ironic declaration by the narrator that the Upper Silesian lacks all sense of self-insight, rather, when read in conjunction with a 1998 interview conducted in Poland with Adam Krzemiński, it indicates that Bienek himself believes the Upper Silesian was rarely a Nazi, a racist or an anti-Polish perpetrator. In the interview Bienek's tendency was to play down

the animosity between Upper Silesian Germans and Poles (while acknowledging the obviously difficult plebiscite and uprising periods), as if tolerance in the province was historically more often the norm, and hatred, where it raised its head, always came from the outside:

Bienek: [...] Haß entsteht ja nur, wenn man den anderen nicht kennt.

Krzeminski: Nun, aber es gab auch genügend Gründe zum Haß.

Bienek: Ich weiß es nicht. Ich glaube es nicht. Natürlich, es gab die Aufstände, es gab das Plebiszit. Doch es gab auch immer wieder Gesten der Versöhnung. [...] Nein, der Haß kam immer von draußen.

Krzeminski: Es muß aber gewaltige Unterschiede zwischen den deutschen und polnischen Oberschlesiern gegeben haben...

Bienek: Gar nicht so gewaltige.¹²⁶

Yet historically this can scarcely be the whole truth. It is hard to reconcile Bienek's statements above with the violent province depicted in T. K. Wilson's comparative history *Frontiers of Violence: Conflict and Identity in Ulster and Upper Silesia, 1918-1922* (even allowing for the exceptional violence of the plebiscite and partition period),¹²⁷ or indeed with the Upper Silesia of *Wallfahrt zu Sankt Anna*, where, as we have seen, *Hitler Jugend* members insistently rehearse vile anti-Polish rhetoric of a kind and vehemence not replicated in the tetralogy. And where indeed in the tetralogy are the Gleiwitz NSDAP members Bienek as a child remembers marching in Gleiwitz (the *Partei-Aufmarsch*, for example, he mentions in *Reise in die Kindheit*)?¹²⁸ Those capable of stirring up hatred such as these are barely represented in the tetralogy. While there are some instances in the four novels where (as far as we can tell) *local* adult protagonists engage in anti-Polish/anti-Jewish agitation in Gleiwitz (for example the police who humiliate the dispossessed Jewish businessman Herr Karpe on the day of his wife's funeral) (ZG, 137), incidents

¹²⁶ Nur mit dem Kopf im Westen.

¹²⁷ Wilson, p. 218: "Although the violence of the period of the plebiscite and partition was clearly exceptional, friction continued throughout the inter-war years on both sides of the new frontier."

¹²⁸ *Reise in die Kindheit*, p. 116.

of violence against Poles and Jews are the exception rather than the rule in Bienek's imagined, fictionalised Gleiwitz.

It is interesting to note that in his history of Upper Silesia, the historian Brendan Karch identifies two categories of Upper Silesian: "German or Polish nationalist activists and state actors on the one side and those locals in Upper Silesia skeptical of these dueling national projects on the other side."¹²⁹ Apart from the historical figure of Korfanty, Bienek has chosen in the tetralogy to present the reader with almost no "nationalist activists" on either side of the German/Polish divide (and as the novels are set in post-partition German Upper Silesia the reader might well have expected at least one principle German "activist"). Again, in conversation with Adam Krzemiński Bienek spoke of the importance of stressing positive aspects of the Polish/German relationship:

Wenn Sie heute Romane schreiben, sind Sie als Schriftsteller ja auch in der moralischen Pflicht. Sie dürfen nicht lügen. Aber die Vorurteile, die Feindschaft, der Haß, den es zweifelsohne zwischen unseren Völkern gegeben hat, wurde doch von bestimmten politischen Richtungen ausgenutzt. Es gab ja auch viele Gemeinsamkeiten, und mir lag daran, auf diese hinzuweisen, die Möglichkeit des Zusammenlebens zu zeigen.¹³⁰

For Bienek it was a "moral duty" to memorialise shared German/Polish characteristics in the Gleiwitz novels, though this would not necessarily have prevented him from also introducing significant "nationalist activists" (in addition to Korfanty) to the novels. In any case, where Upper Silesian German activists do appear in the tetralogy they either remain in the background (for example the extremely insensitive Blockwart Koslowski, a Nazi mentioned only twice in *Zeit ohne Glocken* (ZG, 145 & 147), and the brewer Graudenz who does not even appear in the tetralogy, but whose Nazi propaganda is rehearsed by his 11-year-old son, Karlheinz) (EF, 67). Alternatively, they are in some way exonerated, i.e. they are depicted as bad, but with unmistakable redeeming features. A case in point is the

¹²⁹ Karch, p. 4.

¹³⁰ Nur mit dem Kopf im Westen.

local Gleiwitz Zellenleiter Thonk, a rare Upper Silesian Nazi. Thonk accepts that his progress in the party has been hampered by his decision not to leave the Church, and he has faithfully kept quiet about some political indiscretions in the past of Leo Maria Piontek, whom he regarded as a friend. And though he clearly tolerates political violence (he has heard what is happening to partisans and Jews in the Ukraine) he is not terribly enthusiastic about it, “dazu war er doch zu alt und zu katholisch.” (ZG, 150). He is clearly not the worst kind of Nazi and therefore does little to counter Bienek’s (mythic) hypothesis that hatred in Upper Silesia “kam immer von draußen”. There is, however, the case of the odious and mocking Doktor Kamenz, a director of the Gleiwitz public library, who sits on the commission that will germanise Polish names, and like Thonk is a party member, but one without a redeeming backstory. Does this Upper Silesian Nazi racist negate Bienek’s hypothesis that hatred comes from outside the province’s boundaries? Not really: Kamenz is from the left bank of the Oder. As Heinz Piontek points out in a review of *Die erste Polka* this region of the province was agricultural rather than industrial, “hatte seinen eigenen, vor allem durch große Wälder und weite Horizonte bestimmten Charakter”.¹³¹ More significantly, its people were more oriented towards the west, “sie hatten mittlerweile (das heißt seit zweihundert Jahren) auch viel Preußisches angenommen [...]”.¹³² The Upper Silesia Bienek describes in the tetralogy is almost exclusively the industrial heartland situated on the right bank of the Oder (which includes Beuthen, Hindenburg and Gleiwitz).¹³³ The implication in the terms of the novel is that Kamenz can be properly categorised as an “outsider” in the well-defined Upper Silesia Bienek describes. It is therefore not surprising that at Irma Piontek’s wedding reception Kamenz

¹³¹ Heinz Piontek, ‘Oberschlesische Polka’, *Das Handwerk des Lesens: Erfahrungen mit Büchern und Autoren*, Munich: Schneekluth (1979), 182-185 (p. 183). (Subsequently referred to as “Piontek”).

¹³² Piontek, p. 183.

¹³³ Piontek, p. 182.

appears included in the reprimand served up by the archpriest Pattas to those “Reich” outsiders who mock Polish influence and custom:

Auch Sie, meine Herren, auch Sie und Sie und Sie! Er sah sich um. Sie haben dieses Land nicht begriffen, und Sie werden’s nicht begreifen, und es wird Zeit, verzeihen Sie mir, wenn ich das sage, daß Sie dieses Land bald wieder verlassen (EP, 228).

The tetralogy concentrates almost exclusively on the “sceptical locals”, i.e. those who are ambivalent about their identity, and who want to make the best of the political situation for their own benefit and that of their families. While they are not nationalist activists, however, some of these “sceptical locals” are very much opportunists, seeking personal advantage in schemes and activities which tend to derive from and ease the way for National Socialist crime. Franz Ossadnik is one such figure. The father of Ulla Ossadnik, he is the working-class train driver promoted to “Oberlokführer” who transports Jews to Auschwitz-Birkenau (only party members are deployed to drive these trains), some of whom he recognises as local men and women as they disembark his train. If he (in all likelihood) is unaware of the ultimate fate of these oppressed people, he does know that the transportation is a criminal enterprise in itself: the victims are packed into cattle carriages, and not all survive the journey. “Die sterben dort wie die Fliegen”, he tells his wife Anna (ZG, 377). There is no doubt about his collusion with the regime, and yet he, like Zellenleiter Thonk, is somehow absolved; in a sense his severe remorse, and his voluntary application to join the Wehrmacht to avoid further implication in the transports, partly redeem him. And there is the case of Valeska Piontek and her brother Willi Wondrak, some aspects of whose property speculation (it appears they might well have exploited Jewish vendors) certainly seem morally reprehensible. Bienek however refuses to clarify how far their home-grown abetment actually goes. His reluctance to tackle their very probable complicity appears to be one way of upholding the myth that the Upper Silesian is fundamentally always the victim, never the perpetrator, despite errors of

judgment. There is no sense here that during Bienek's research for the Gleiwitz novels he began—to use Irving Howe's phrase regarding the Southern myth—“to wonder about its meaning, its value”¹³⁴ in the way that Faulkner tests the “Lost Cause” mythology in *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Go Down Moses*. In the same way the myth—which suggests (ironically after the horse has bolted) that what could have saved the province from downfall was less submission (“immer den Kopf gesenkt halten, immer auf dem Boden knien, immer auf die Brust schlagen, immer das Leid auf sich nehmen”), and more resistance (“die Empörung, die Auflehnung”), as the fifteen-year-old Kotik Ossadnik puts it to his mother in the final chapter of *Erde und Feuer* (EF, 326)—appears highly unrealistic given the complexity of the German/Polish dynamic in the province. The myth presupposes that the province's allegiance issues could somehow have been settled (perhaps by the establishment of an autonomous Upper Silesia?), and that both communities could “resist”, not separately as Germans or Poles, but as one Upper Silesian people. Realistically, however, given what was industrially and economically at stake, and the powerful players on either side of the border and beyond, this was never on the cards. In practice the only practical means of “resistance” was to leave the province altogether, which is Kotik Ossadnik's prescription for his own future in the final page of the tetralogy.

1.16 NOSTALGIC TENDENCIES

I have used the word “nostalgic” above in relation to Bienek's adherence to the myth of victimhood. Though the word is not one used very often in Bienek scholarship (one of the few critics to use it—and she qualifies it—is Marilyn Sibley Fries who in a study of Lenz's *Heimatismuseum* speaks in passing of the “questionably nostalgic historical novels of Bienek and Kempowski”),¹³⁵ Bienek's acceptance of the myth of the Upper Silesian as essentially blameless, indeed as

¹³⁴ Howe, p. 361.

¹³⁵ ‘The Interlocutor and the Narrative Transmission of the Past: On Siegfried Lenz's “Heimatismuseum”’, *Monatshefte*, 79.4 (1987), 449-462 (p. 455).

being him- or herself a victim of political and social circumstance, presents in the novels very much as nostalgia, and more specifically, to use a definition originated by Svetlana Boym, as “restorative” nostalgia. In her monograph *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001) Boym distinguishes between “restorative” and “reflective” nostalgia tendencies, the former a longing to restore in memory the past as it was in the belief that “truth and tradition”¹³⁶ are to be found there, even if they are not or never have been; as Boym puts it, restorative nostalgia, “attempts a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home”.¹³⁷ Reflective nostalgia represents a more melancholic tendency about the longing itself, which, acknowledging the unreliability of memory, questions the truth and tradition of the past or the lost home (“longing and critical thinking are not opposed to one another”).¹³⁸ That Bienek’s nostalgia is restorative in orientation is not to say however that “critical thinking” is absent in the tetralogy: it is clearly not, and the vehement animosity of Upper Silesian expellees towards *Die erste Polka* described in *Beschreibung einer Provinz* would seem to corroborate this. Yet in this aspect of Bienek’s Gleiwitz memorial the reader might have expected a much more critical portrayal of local responsibility for the fate of Upper Silesia, especially from an author whose avowed intention was to write “critical” rather than “affirmative” *Heimat* novels.¹³⁹ In a sense Bienek’s acceptance of the Upper Silesian myth marks in this instance a failure of poetic realism to enhance the reader’s understanding of the province, or to create in Bienek’s words that sense of reality, “die am Schluß wirklicher ist als die Wirklichkeit”.¹⁴⁰

1.17 THE CONCEPT OF INTERTEXTUALITY

Bienek’s relationship with and response to the four Southern writers regularly expressed itself in the Gleiwitz tetralogy intertextually in the form of

¹³⁶ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, New York: Basic Books, 2001, p. XVIII.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid., pp. 49-50.

¹³⁹ Hinck, p. 37: “Ich wollte Heimatromane schreiben, aber nicht einfach affirmativ, sondern kritisch”.

¹⁴⁰ Hinck, p. 39.

appropriations from their works (many unacknowledged). Graham Allen, a dependable analyst on the concept of intertextuality, understands the theory and its implications for interpretation in general terms as follows:

Texts, whether they be literary or non-literary, are viewed by modern theorists as lacking in any kind of independent meaning. They are what theorists now call intertextual. The act of reading, theorists claim, plunges us into a network of textual relations. To interpret a text, to discover its meaning, or meanings, is to trace those relations.¹⁴¹

The term intertextuality itself was coined in the mid-1960s by the poststructuralist Julia Kristeva who, influenced by several literary theorists including Mikhail Bakhtin, argued that no text is original, that “any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another. The notion of *intertextuality* replaces that of intersubjectivity, and poetic language is read as at least *double*”.¹⁴² Kristeva’s pronouncement on texts is significant when we come to their interpretation. Influenced by Bakhtin’s theories of the carnivalesque and dialogism (as elucidated in the Russian author’s *Rabelais and His World* and *Problems of Dostoyevsky’s Poetics*), Kristeva signified that all texts inevitably derive from past writings, and therefore a kind of dialogue or interdependence existed between them.

The meaning of a text for Kristeva is no longer “intersubjective” (i.e. a matter of agreement between reader and writer), but rather, as understanding ensues from the dialogic relationship between texts, an abundance of meanings is possible (“at least *double*”).¹⁴³ Meaning is therefore typically unstable. To quote Graham Allen again, meaning “becomes something which exists between a text and all the other

¹⁴¹ Graham Allen, *Intertextuality*, London: Routledge, 2000, p. 1. (Subsequently referred to as “Allen”.)

¹⁴² Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, edited by Leon S. Roudiez, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984, p. 66.

¹⁴³ Roland Barthes, also an important contributor to the intertextuality discourse, would appear to corroborate this view. “We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a ‘theological’ meaning (the ‘message’ of the Author-God)”, he wrote in his essay ‘The Death of the Author’, “but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture.” In: Roland Barthes, *Image-Music-Text*, New York: Hill and Wang, 1977, p. 146.

texts to which it refers and relates, moving out from the independent text into a network of textual relations”.¹⁴⁴ In a sense we might therefore conclude that the concept of intertextuality is inherently liminal in character: meaning takes shape between texts, resulting in the potential of transitional “betwixt and between” interpretations.

The motivations for one writer consciously to intertextually reference the work of another are complex and various. In some instances, the use of intertexts may simply be to honour an admired author; more often, however, it is for creative, transformative purposes, such as the reappraisal of a canonical text (which can, as might be expected, also include subverting it), or the provision of new perspectives capable of contributing new layers of meaning in new contexts. The imaginative use of the intertext therefore derives from differentiation and modification; as Julie Sanders argues in her monograph *Adaptation and Appropriation*, “it is at the very point of infidelity or departure that the most creative acts of adaptation take place”.¹⁴⁵ Another writer on intertextuality, Mary Orr, identifies how the benefits of intertextuality come about: “Among intertextuality’s most practical functions is (re-)evaluation by means of comparison, counter-position and contrast.”¹⁴⁶

In practice the use of intertextuality works for the most part in forward terms—a source text (the hypotext) will impact upon a new text (the hypertext).¹⁴⁷ However, the phenomenon can also happen in reverse where, in consideration of what the hypertext can reveal, the hypotext itself can be understood in a different way or can elicit a new interpretation. Jay Clayton sees this phenomenon as a way of defining what differentiates the concept of “influence” from that of intertextuality:

¹⁴⁴ Allen, p. 1.

¹⁴⁵ Julie Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation*, Second Edition, London and New York: Routledge, 2016, p. 24. (Subsequently referred to as “Sanders”.)

¹⁴⁶ Mary Orr, *Intertextuality: debates and contexts*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003, p. 7.

¹⁴⁷ The terms “hypotext” and “hypertext” were coined by the French literary theorist Gérard Genette in his 1982 work *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997.

The intertextual network is “open” in a way that the relationship of influence is not. Influence is unidirectional, flowing from an earlier to a later author, whereas intertextuality establishes a flexible relationship among texts.¹⁴⁸

1.18 INTERTEXTUALITY AND APPROPRIATION

In the Gleiwitz tetralogy there is a strong and prolific intertextual presence particularly in the form of “appropriation”, which along with “adaptation” is considered a “specific manifestation” of intertextuality.¹⁴⁹ My emphasis in this study is specifically on Bienek’s creative use of intertextual appropriations from the four US Southerners, William Faulkner, Thomas Wolfe, Carson McCullers, and Truman Capote. However, as observed earlier, Bienek’s source texts are not confined to the Southern authors mentioned above, but to a wide range of other writers, including most prominently Joseph von Eichendorff, F. M. Dostoyevsky, the Korfanty historian Ernst Sontag, and in one important instance (see section 4.5 of this study) the 1973 Australian Nobel laureate Patrick White, the author of *Voss* (1957) and *Riders in The Chariot* (1961). Regarding the essential concepts of adaptation and appropriation I follow for the most part the arguments of Julie Sanders. Much of the specialised vocabulary I use in this study also derives from this work.

It is important from the outset to establish in what way Sanders defines the two key terms “adaptation” and “appropriation”. She admits that distinguishing between the twin terms is not an exact science, as “both the practice and the effects of adaptation and appropriation intersect and are interrelated”.¹⁵⁰ Nevertheless, in the descriptive opening remarks of her monograph, she does indicate some essential differences, while simultaneously indicating the nature of intertextuality:

¹⁴⁸ Jay Clayton, ‘The Alphabet of Suffering: Effie Deans, Tess Durbeyfield, Martha Ray, and Hetty Sorrel’, *Influence and Intertextuality in Literary History*, edited by Jay Clayton & Eric Rothstein, Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press (1991), 37-60 (p. 50).

¹⁴⁹ See Sanders, p. 1.

¹⁵⁰ Sanders, p. 35.

From the apparently simple adaptation of a text into film, theatre, or a new literary work, to the more complex appropriation of style or meaning, it is arguable that all texts are somehow connected to a network of existing texts and art forms.¹⁵¹

A novel made into a film for example (or indeed into any genre), which retains fidelity or a close association with the original work is an adaptation. Deviations from the original text do not change this status; indeed, Sanders admits that many of the film, television or theatre adaptations she quotes in her monograph, “openly declare themselves as an interpretation or re-reading of a canonical precursor”.¹⁵² Appropriation, on the other hand, represents a somewhat more radical use of the precursor text. “[A]ppropriations tend to have a more complicated, intricate and sometimes embedded relationship to their intertexts than a straightforward film version of a canonical or well-known text would suggest”,¹⁵³ Sanders suggests. Certainly, appropriation involves a decisive re-purposing of the intertext—which goes beyond adaptation—to produce something creative and unique, and of exclusive relevance to the successor text. From my understanding of the two terms, then, I should say that what we are dealing with, as far as the Gleiwitz tetralogy is concerned, is appropriation. In his habitual intertextual borrowings in the novels Bienek not only transposed the imagery and literary discourse of the Southern texts he admired to a different historical time and setting, he also transformed them creatively into something new and distinct, making them relevant and meaningful to his specifically Gleiwitz agenda. The appropriations offered Bienek an innovative means of access to the vocabulary, motifs, images and characters of the South—which, we must remember was to Bienek, by virtue of apparent common resonances, a kind of “sister territory” to Upper Silesia—on route to his specific goal: the depiction of a borderland German province negotiating the fractious period following the First World War, the rise of National Socialism, the Holocaust,

¹⁵¹ Sanders, p. i.

¹⁵² Sanders, p. 3.

¹⁵³ Sanders, p. 36.

and ultimately total defeat and permanent expulsion. And in a way the Southern appropriations assisted Bienek in depicting what in its heinousness is practically unrepresentable.

CHAPTER 2: POETISCHER REALISMUS

Du hast versucht, den Lebens- und Leidensweg unserer Generation auf die meiner Ansicht nach einzige Weise, die überzeugt, nacherlebbar zu machen: auf die poetische. Keine historische Quelle kann zutage fördern, was der Poet, was der Erzähler vergegenwärtigt [...]. Du bist ein Fanatiker der poetischen Wahrheit.¹⁵⁴

2.1 POETIC REALISM AS AN AESTHETIC PREFERENCE

In the first instance it was poetic realism that attracted Bienek to Southern writing. However, his regard for the style was not simply a matter of aesthetic preference: it was also a protest against the literary indoctrination prevalent in the *Sowjetische Besatzungszone* (SBZ) where he ended up in the late 1940s. In his 1986 address in honour of the novelist Martin Gregor-Dellin on the occasion of his friend's sixtieth birthday Bienek spoke of his emotions and memories as a 20-year-old aspiring writer in the SBZ. "Als wir anfangen," he proclaimed, speaking both for himself and his generation, "wollten wir alles ganz anders machen. Und wir wollten ganz anders sein. Das ist wohl in jeder Jugend so."¹⁵⁵ Understandably, given his traumatic childhood and adolescence during the war years, and the harrowing experiences he underwent soon after the war ended (as we know in 1946 he left Gleiwitz and made his way alone, initially to Köthen, and from there to Potsdam), Bienek was keen to make a break with the immediate past. Defeat in war (which he welcomed) had changed everything: "[...] damals, gleich nach dem Krieg, war nichts mehr so wie es einmal gewesen war", he commented, "Und das gefiel uns. Was schon gestürzt am Boden lag, wir traten es noch mit den Füßen. Das Chaos, um uns herum, wir rühmten es. Daß Ordnung, Maß und Wert verlorengegangen waren,

¹⁵⁴ Heinz Friedrich, at the time president of the *Bayerische Akademie der Schönen Künste*, in a letter (7.5.1990) to Horst Bienek. Quoted in Pietrek, pp. 444-445.

¹⁵⁵ Horst Bienek, 'Nähe und Ferne. Eine Rede auf Martin Gregor-Dellin'. In: *Pathos und Ironie: Ein Lesebuch von und über Martin Gregor-Dellin*, edited by Elisabeth Endres, Munich: Piper (1986), 16-26 (p. 16). (Subsequently referred to as "Bienek, *Nähe und Ferne*".)

darüber jubelten wir”.¹⁵⁶ However, while his stance on Nazi defeat was in accord with the standard East German narrative,¹⁵⁷ Bienek’s youthful ambitions for a new beginning (perhaps ironically given that he had chosen the *SBZ* in which to live and work) were not to be of a socialist colour. It was soon apparent that life in the *SBZ* would not advance the changes that he and many of his generation so fervently wished for.¹⁵⁸ “O ja,” he declared to his audience, “wir waren zornig und schrill, Nihilisten und Existentialisten, Empörer und Verweigerer, ach, wir waren alles, nur nicht Sozialisten. Das, was man von uns verlangte.”¹⁵⁹ It is fair to say, however, that politics were not Bienek’s primary concern. “[...] natürlich lehnten wir das Ulbricht-Regime als eine Art Besatzungsregime ab”, he had told Jo Wünsche some years before his Gregor-Dellin address, “aber wir wehrten uns hauptsächlich gegen die künstlerische Indoktrinierung.”¹⁶⁰ He was more specific in a 1988 interview with Karol Sauerland and Cezary Jenne in Warsaw for the underground magazine *Europa* when he spoke of his specifically aesthetic preferences, and referred to an article published in *Neues Deutschland* the official pro-Soviet newspaper of the ruling *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschland (SED)*:

Ich war kein politischer Gegner. Ich war ein Oppositioneller, um es so auszudrücken, auf dem Gebiet der Kunst. Mir paßte dieser sozialistische Realismus nicht. Damals galt die Shdanow-Doktrin. Es gab im *Neuen Deutschland* einen berühmten Artikel – seinen Titel habe ich noch heute im Kopf: “Gegen den Formalismus und ideenlosen Kosmopolitismus in der Kultur”.

¹⁵⁶ Bienek, *Nähe und Ferne*, p. 16.

¹⁵⁷ As Susan Neiman points out the East German take on defeat was very clear: “NAZIS WERE BAD, DEFEATING THEM GOOD was never in doubt [...]”. In: *Learning from the Germans: Confronting Race and the Memory of Evil*, UK: Penguin, 2020, p. 85.

¹⁵⁸ See Bienek’s description of the inexorable rise of censorship in the *SBZ*: “Ehe wir es begriffen, mündete alles wieder in eine neue Diktatur. Und die – cum grano salis – verdammt viel Ähnlichkeit mit der alten hatte” (AE, 31).

¹⁵⁹ Bienek, *Nähe und Ferne*, p. 16.

¹⁶⁰ ‘Horst Bienek, ‘Gefangenschaft, Kindheit, Provinz. Interview von Jo Wünsche’. In: *alternative*, 20.113 (1977), 73-78 (p. 74). (Subsequently referred to as “*alternative*”).

Ideenloser Kosmopolitismus – das waren natürlich die Juden, sicher deswegen, weil sie kein Vaterland hatten.¹⁶¹

Bienek was speaking out against two Soviet conventions here. Firstly, against socialist realism itself, the essence of which had been defined by Andrei Zhdanov at the Soviet Writers' Congress in Moscow of 1934, and which had dictated the prescriptive ideological parameters within which creative work and artistic endeavour could operate in the Soviet Union. In practice, according to Zhdanov's biographer, the introduction of socialist realism, "heralded an attack on most literary experiments and the suppression of any genuine creativity and inspiration",¹⁶² and to political scientist and historian Archie Brown, the creed meant, "exposing the degradation of capitalism, glorifying Soviet life, and maintaining an obligatory optimism about the society's future".¹⁶³ In East Germany itself the *SED* took the Soviet dictates very seriously indeed: in March 1951 the Central Committee singled out formalism specifically for particular attention, as Wolfgang Emmerich points out:

Die Partei startete jetzt explizit den Kampf gegen den sog. Formalismus in Kunst und Literatur. Formalismus wurde definiert als "Zersetzung und Zerstörung der Kunst selbst. Die Formalisten leugnen, daß die entscheidende Bedeutung im Inhalt, in der Idee, im Gedanken des Werkes liegt. Nach ihrer Auffassung besteht die Bedeutung eines Kunstwerks nicht in seinem Inhalt, sondern in seiner Form. Überall, wo die Frage der Form selbstständige Bedeutung gewinnt, verliert die Kunst ihren humanistischen und demokratischen Charakter."¹⁶⁴

And secondly, what of the "unimaginative cosmopolitanism in culture" mentioned in the *Neues Deutschland* article Bienek spoke of in the Warsaw interview? In his comments on the dictum Bienek was enunciating his distaste for the postwar

¹⁶¹ 'Ein Interview mit Horst Bienek über Workuta für die polnische Untergrundzeitschrift *Europa*'. In: Karol Sauerland, *Literatur- und Kulturtransfer als Politikum am Beispiel Volkspolens*, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang (2006), 131-137 (p. 135).

¹⁶² Kees Boterbloem, *The Life and Times of Andrei Zhdanov, 1896—1948*, Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004, p. 116.

¹⁶³ Archie Brown, *The Rise and Fall of Communism*, London: The Bodley Head, 2009, p. 70.

¹⁶⁴ Wolfgang Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR*, Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 2009, pp. 118-119.

campaign against what the Soviets termed *Kosmopolitismus* in the arts (culture that valued, drew on and imitated Western and formal—as opposed to Soviet, Russian, and ideological—values). In a way the campaign represented an intensification of the socialist realism demanded by Zhdanov in the 1930's. For Bienek, however, for the reasons he outlined in his conversation, the campaign was essentially anti-Jewish in nature, and to a man who remembered the dreadful consequences of Nazi antisemitism it was therefore, not surprisingly, anathema. Indeed, at this point it is fair to say that throughout his life Bienek deplored racism of all kinds, and consistently called it out from whatever source it came. In the tetralogy he was notably determined to memorialise the life experiences of the three main ethnic groups of which Upper Silesia was comprised. The novels were also envisaged as “ein Requiem auf die Gleiwitzer Juden” (BP 17).

Bienek's literary reading matter in the SBZ/GDR reflected his rejection of aesthetic indoctrination; he defied the state's embargo on certain writers (for example Koestler and Kafka), and read the unpreferred Hans Henny Jahnn's *Perrudja* with a remarkable sense of youthful engagement (“wir waren trunken davon, überwältigt, betäubt, wie man es nur mit 18 Jahren sein kann”)¹⁶⁵. There was some danger in this, as Bienek explained:

Die Klassiker hatten uns nichts zu sagen. [...] Wir schmuggelten die *Sonnenfinsternis* von Koestler unterm Hemd in die Zone, wären wir erwischt worden, hätte man uns gleich nach Bautzen geschickt. Wir weinten dem toten Ben in *Schau heimwärts, Engel* nach (»O verlorenes, vom Wind gekränktes Gespenst, kehre zurück«), und unsere Seelen wurden erschüttert vom *Perrudja* des Hans Henny Jahnn. Vor Kafka waren wir wie versteinert. Den wir in verbotenen, zerfledderten, alten Ausgaben nein, nicht lasen, sondern erlebten: »Die Strafkolonie«.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁵ Horst Bienek, *Der Blinde in der Bibliothek: Literarische Portraits*, Munich: Hanser, 1986, p. 152. (Subsequently referred to in the text as “BB”.) Bienek went on to explain the significance of the writer: “Jahnn galt in der DDR als ein dekadenter, bürgerlicher, formalistischer Autor, auch wenn man ihm zugute hielt, daß er im Dritten Reich ins Exil ging” (BB, 152).

¹⁶⁶ Bienek, *Nähe und Ferne*, p. 16.

On the face of it, however, the reference to *Schau heimwärts, Engel* appears curious. Unlike Koestler, Kafka and Jahn, Thomas Wolfe was not actually proscribed in the SBZ/GDR, and *Look Homeward, Angel* was not a particularly political novel; it was therefore interesting that Bienek included him in the list of authors he singled out to articulate his opposition to the prevailing aesthetic order. The reason of course was quite straightforward: Wolfe's inclusion can be clearly understood in terms of Bienek's disaffection for the Soviet doctrine of socialist realism. For Bienek *Look Homeward, Angel* represented a means to boldly (maybe too boldly, given the tense literary situation in the GDR) declare his opposition to an imported Soviet aesthetic. In 1987 he spoke of his aversion to socialist realism in greater detail in *Das allmähliche Ersticken von Schreien*. Referring to his attendance at a training course in Bad Saarow organised for aspiring GDR writers in the autumn of 1950 (the seminar referred to in an earlier part of this study), he recalled conversations with like-minded delegates and spoke specifically of his rejection of the officially-prescribed doctrine, in favour of a different kind of literary realism, a "poetic realism".

Wir sprachen ziemlich offen. Nicht über unsere Weltanschauung. Aber darüber, daß uns allesamt der verordnete *sozialistische* Realismus gleichgültig ließ. Ich verteidigte einen *poetischen* Realismus mit Thomas Wolfes »Schau heimwärts, Engel«, das gerade im *Mitteldeutschen Verlag* in Halle erschienen war (AE, 38).

As it was not published until 1955,¹⁶⁷ Bienek could not have been reading the Mitteldeutscher Verlag's edition of Wolfe's novel at the time (in fact the edition he speaks of in that 1987 lecture was almost certainly given to him by his friend, the writer Christa Reinig in November 1955 to mark his return from Vorkuta).¹⁶⁸ Nevertheless, the fact that Bienek was willing to champion what amounted to an

¹⁶⁷ The first German edition of Wolfe's *Schau heimwärts, Engel* was published in Berlin in 1932, and was available in Germany until the publication in 1940 of the posthumous *Es führt kein Weg zurück* (*You Can't Go Home Again*), which contained criticism of Jewish persecution in Germany.

¹⁶⁸ The handwritten inscription reads: "Zur Rückkehr zu uns/Von Christa/Am 25.11.55". The book is available in the Bienek-Arbeitsbibliothek at the Horst-Bienek-Archiv: Bia 23/396.

antithetical literary style against “das Shdanowsche Diktat des Sozialistischen Realismus” (BB, 151), even in the lion’s den, does demonstrate the extent of Wolfe’s influence on Bienek’s understanding of literature and narrative aesthetics at this formative point in his literary career. Tragically, however, it seems clear that his opposition to the *Diktat* resulted in (or contributed to) his arrest in Potsdam in November 1951 by Russian authorities. According to David Childs who interviewed Horst Bienek in May 1980, the author was arrested for distributing a leaflet criticising “cultural policy”.¹⁶⁹ Bienek himself was more specific about the reasons for his arrest. In the interview with Jo Wünsche, he admitted delivering (with other participants), “[...] die Reden des <Kongresses für kulturelle Freiheit> heimlich in die Briefkasten von Funktionären [...], Reden von Ernst Reuter und Luise Schröder”,¹⁷⁰ the rationale for which was to demonstrate his rejection of the cultural aims of the prevailing regime in a way his parent’s generation during the period of German fascism had not. It was a remarkable act of non-compliance, overwritten with a moral sense of doing the right thing, however futile. The consequences, however, were to change his life.

2.2 POETIC REALISM AND THE US SOUTH

But where did the phrase poetic realism in relation to Wolfe’s *Schau heimwärts, Engel* originate? In an early essay entitled “Mit einem Rucksack voll Dämonen”¹⁷¹ on the work of Carson McCullers, and published in November 1962, Bienek attributed the term to the American literary historian Malcolm Cowley (1898-1989), a preeminent American literary critic, and the editor of *The Portable Faulkner* (1946) which was to revitalise William Faulkner’s reputation as a major writer. Naming the Southern States in the article as the melting pot (*Schmelztiegel*) of American literature, Bienek compiled a working list of significant Southern

¹⁶⁹ David Childs, *The GDR: Moscow’s German Ally*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2015, p. 29.

¹⁷⁰ *alternative*, p. 74. The Congress for Cultural Freedom was an anti-communist organisation, founded in Berlin in 1950. Ernst Reuter and Louise Schröder were prominent SPD politicians.

¹⁷¹ ‘Mit einem Rucksack voll Dämonen: Die amerikanische Erzählerin Carson McCullers’, *Das Schönste*, 8.11, (1962), 106-111. (Subsequently referred to in the text as “MR”.)

writers (the list was not limited to genre as the poet John Peale Bishop and dramatist Tennessee Williams were also included):

[...] von hier kommen zumindest in den letzten zwanzig Jahren die fruchtbarsten und gewichtigsten Autoren. Schon früher waren es neben Faulkner der frühverstorbene Ekstatiker Thomas Wolfe und der sozialkritische Robert Penn Warren. Eine Generation später sind es die besten Namen der amerikanischen Literatur: die Erzähler Katherine Anne Porter, Carson McCullers, Eudora Welty, Erskine Caldwell, William Styron, Truman Capote und Gore Vidal; der Lyriker J. B. [sic] Bishop, der Dramatiker Tennessee Williams [...] (MR, 106).

While acknowledging that as writers the group was quite diverse (*verschieden*), Bienek nonetheless identified a shared stylistic common denominator, namely, “das, was der Kritiker Malcolm Cowley einmal den »poetischen Realismus« genannt hat” (MR, 106). Two years later in a newspaper review of McCullers’s first novel *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* (1940) (*Das Herz ist ein einsamer Jäger*) (1963) Bienek again attributed the phrase to Cowley, claiming that the novel, “hat [McCullers] mit einem Schlage berühmt gemacht und den „poetischen Realismus des Südens“ (Cowley) begründet”.¹⁷² However, I have found no evidence that Cowley ever coined the “poetic realism” term in relation to Carson McCullers or, indeed, to any of the writers Bienek quotes above. It was true, nevertheless, that Cowley was an admirer of *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*. In a paper delivered at the University of Kent in 1973, long after Bienek’s Carson McCullers’ articles were published, Cowley praised the novel as “brilliant and mature for an author in her early twenties”,¹⁷³ and included it in a tentative list of works written during the 1930’s (actually up to 1942, when the USA entered the Second World War) that would “reward a second reading”.¹⁷⁴ Actually, Cowley’s opinion was that Southern writing was richly diverse. “It is not confined to a single method or style or group

¹⁷² Horst Bienek, ‘Geweb aus südlicher Erde’, Carson McCullers, *Das Herz ist ein einsamer Jäger*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 11. January 1964. (Subsequently referred to as “Geweb aus südlicher Erde”).

¹⁷³ Malcolm Cowley, ‘What Books Survive from the 1930s?’ *Journal of American Studies*, 7.3 (1973), 293-300 (p. 296).

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 295. Other works listed included Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath*, *Pale Horse*, *Pale Rider* by Katherine Anne Porter, and Hemingway’s *For Whom the Bell Tolls*.

of beliefs”, he wrote in an introduction to a 1955 collection of Southern short stories which included writing by Faulkner, Caldwell, Porter, Williams, Welty and Capote,¹⁷⁵ i.e. many of the writers Bienek claimed in “Mit einem Rucksack voll Dämonen” were poetic realists. Bienek’s was clearly a very wide brush. For Cowley, Southern writers included “traditionalists”¹⁷⁶ (he counted Faulkner and Welty in this group), and also “skeptics and rebels, as well as realists, naturalists, and “magic realists” like Truman Capote and Tennessee Williams”.¹⁷⁷ He added that Capote and Williams were “actually romantics in the Southern manner of Edgar Allan Poe”.¹⁷⁸

2.3 GERMAN POETIC REALISM

Wherever the “poetische[r] Realismus des Südens” phrase had its origin, it is clear that Bienek also drew on the nineteenth-century literary epoch in German literature roughly understood to have existed between 1848 and 1890, also known for *poetischer Realismus*. In relation to German literature the term was defined by Otto Ludwig (1813-1865) in his posthumously published *Shakespeare- and Romanstudien*. Ludwig was himself a key writer associated with the style (principally in his 1856 novel *Zwischen Himmel und Erde*); other representative practitioners (writing predominantly in the novella form) included Clemens Brentano in *Geschichte vom braven Kasperl und dem schönen Annerl* (1817), an early “transitional” poetic-realist work, marking a stylistic break from Romanticism (according to Walter Silz the story is a “Brentanian blend of Romanticism, Realism, myth and “Märchen”, with a touch of religious allegory”),¹⁷⁹ Annette von Droste-Hülshoff in *Die Judenbuche* (1842), Gottfried Keller in *Romeo und Julia auf dem*

¹⁷⁵ *Great Tales of the Deep South*, with an introduction by Malcolm Cowley, New York: Lion Library, 1955, p. xi.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Walter Silz, *Realism and Reality: Studies in the German Novelle of Poetic Realism*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1954, p. 18. (Subsequently referred to as “Silz”.)

Dorfe (1856), C. F. Meyer in *Der Heilige* (1879), and Theodor Storm in *Der Schimmelreiter* (1888).

For the most part German poetic-realist works play out against provincial, bourgeois backdrops; all to various degrees are realist in style, though actual descriptions of the random, the ugly and the sordid were avoided as inartistic (perhaps for this reason social or political critiques of the status quo are not in the foreground but are implicit). Nor, even in the late stages of the “epoch”, did the realism characteristic of these works preclude the authors’ occasional use of the supernatural and the gothic, or an engagement with memory, superstition, myth and fairy tale. As G.H. Hertling put it, “The Poetic Realist, as a *creative* writer, is incapable of avoiding memories and recollections, of excluding myths, legends, and folktales”.¹⁸⁰

From a literary historical point of view, according to Silz, nineteenth-century poetic realism was a compromise, “between pure “Romantik” at the one extreme and “Naturalismus” at the other, between the poetisation of the world and the stark reflection of things as things, without symbolical valuation or interpretation”.¹⁸¹ “While Naturalism professes to take things at their face value”, he writes, “Poetic Realism has a strong leaning towards symbolism, for it believes that things have deeper meanings than appear on their surfaces”.¹⁸² Ludwig himself put it this way:

Es handelt sich hier von einer Welt, die von der schaffenden Phantasie vermittelt ist, nicht von der gemeinen; sie schafft die Welt noch einmal, keine sogenannte phantastische Welt, d.h. keine zusammenhangslose, im Gegenteil, eine, in der der Zusammenhang sichtbarer ist als in der wirklichen [...].¹⁸³

¹⁸⁰ G.H. Hertling, ‘Reflections on the “Poetic Real”’: The Transcendent in Nineteenth-Century German Realism’, *Pacific Coast Philology*, 31.2 (1996), 135-157, (p. 142).

¹⁸¹ Silz, p. 12.

¹⁸² Silz, p. 15.

¹⁸³ *Otto Ludwigs Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. 5, Leipzig: Fr. Wilh. Grunow, 1891, p. 458. (Subsequently referred to as “Ludwig, Vol. 5”.)

What distinguished poetic realism was the aesthetic enhancement and even intensification of the material (i.e. “reality”), by the creative imagination. Enhancement was achieved firstly by the use of symbolism, metaphor and leitmotif, in addition to a deployment of the mythical and the gothic: all were perfectly legitimate means if they facilitated the creation of an ultimate poetic truth; and secondly by the careful selection of only relevant material. “Die Poesie gründet sich auf Nachahmung”, Ludwig wrote. “Aber sie ahmt nur das Wesentliche nach, sie wirft das Zufällige weg. Sie ahmt den Weltlauf nach, wenn sie erfindet, aber in ihm eben nur das Wesentliche, dasjenige, was sich jederzeit als wesentliches Zubehör ausweist”.¹⁸⁴ Walter Silz confirmed the rationale for this as follows:

By selecting from among the raw materials of experience the significant things, Poetic Realism invested them with a higher reality, indeed, as Ludwig thought, achieved something more real than reality, for it caught the essence underlying accidental appearances.¹⁸⁵

The outcome was an artistic representation of reality—in Ludwig’s words a “künstlerisches Spiegelbild”,¹⁸⁶—which was (paradoxically) in Silz’s phrase “more real than reality”.¹⁸⁷

2.4 POETIC REALISM AND THE TREATMENT OF MEMORY

Given that the tetralogy is a work of personal and historical commemoration, it is interesting to note that in his analysis of poetic realism Otto Ludwig compared the process of poeticisation to what he considered to be the laws of memory. “Die Poesie”, he wrote, “verfährt nach den Gesetzen der Erinnerung; sie ändert nicht,

¹⁸⁴ *Otto Ludwigs Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. 6, edited by Adolf Stern, Leipzig: Fr. Wilh. Grunow, 1891, p. 38. (Subsequently referred to as “Ludwig, Vol. 6”.)

¹⁸⁵ Silz, p. 15.

¹⁸⁶ Ludwig, Vol. 6, p. 10.

¹⁸⁷ Alexander Sorenson put this in a quite interesting way, and hinted at the literary benefits of German (poetic) realism: “Serene, quotidian, and even beautiful things were not to be depicted for their own sake; instead, the truths prone to hide behind and within them were to be *realized*, made “real” on the page, for the sake of a deeper good that might ramify out of their representation and into the minds, the homes, and (ideally) the communities of readers”. In: *The Waiting Water: Order, Sacrifice, and Submergence in German Realism*, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2024, p. 6.

was geschehen, aber sie mildert es künstlerisch”.¹⁸⁸ The statement suggests that the reconstruction of memory was (instinctively) subject to a benign poeticising dynamic,¹⁸⁹ and that reality should be treated similarly. The statement also indicates that Ludwig was somewhat selective regarding the limits of poetic reconstruction: *mildert* (softens) suggests that idealisation should only go so far. Comparing the practice of the idealist to that of the (poetic) realist, Bruno Markwardt interprets Ludwig here as follows, “[...] der Idealist liebt nur seine „idealisierte Vorstellung“ vom Gegenstand; der Realist aber liebt den Gegenstand mit allen „seinen Mängeln und Schwächen“”.¹⁹⁰ In its practice therefore poetic realism was a kind of middle ground.

2.5 WOLFGANG PREISENDANZ AND POETIC REALISM

While the actual term “poetic realism” for Walter Siltz was “akward and unsatisfactory, like most literary labels”,¹⁹¹ Wolfgang Preisendanz, one of the most influential scholars of the style, found the designation to be appropriate, and certainly more suitable than the term *bürgerlicher Realismus*: for him that designation possessed what he called a *Signatur*, “die mir in literatursoziologischer wie in stilkritischer Hinsicht recht unzugänglich zu sein scheint”.¹⁹² In any case, for Preisendanz *poetischer Realismus* hinted at the charged relationship between imaginative creation and (its polar opposite) the imitation of reality: the style signalled the “Polarität von Poiesis und Mimesis, von freier Phantasieschöpfung und Bindung an die gegebene Wirklichkeit”.¹⁹³ For Preisendanz the endeavour to reconcile the tension between *Poiesis* and *Mimesis* was a distinguishing factor of German 19th century poetic realism.¹⁹⁴ A key concern in Preisendanz’s

¹⁸⁸ Ludwig, Vol. 6, p. 42.

¹⁸⁹ The statement amounts to an acknowledgment—if we needed one—that the remembrance of events is essentially a subjective matter rather than an objective one.

¹⁹⁰ Bruno Markwardt, *Geschichte der deutschen Poetik, Band IV, Das neunzehnte Jahrhundert*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1959, p. 294.

¹⁹¹ Siltz, p. 10.

¹⁹² *Wege des Realismus: Zur Poetik und Erzählkunst im 19. Jahrhundert*, Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1977, pp. 68-69.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

understanding of poetic realism was also the concept of *Verklärung*, by which he meant the poetic transfiguration of art. It was a term he had encountered in Theodor Fontane, as well in Stifter, Storm, Keller and Raabe. For Preisendanz “transfiguration” was essential in the creation of poetic realist art (indeed, as he explained, it represented for Fontane “das innerste Wesen der Kunst”).¹⁹⁵ In a formal description of “transfiguration” in Preisendanz’s essay, there are clear resonances with Silz’s view that poetic realism tended to invest the raw materials of experience with a higher reality:

Verklärung meint [...] eine Schreibweise, die den Unterschied zwischen dem vom Leben gestellten Bilde und dem dichterischen Gebilde nicht verwischt, sondern verbürgt, eine Schreibweise, in der Darstellung mehr als Nachbildung oder Bestandsaufnahme, in der sie Grund und Ursprung einer Wirklichkeit ist.¹⁹⁶

For good measure Preisendanz also offered the corroborative opinion of Jean Paul (1763-1825), for the benefit of “jeden, der das Prinzip eines poetischen Realismus erörtern will”:

In der poetischen Nachahmung, so meint [Jean Paul], enthalte das Abbild mehr als das Urbild, übertreffe die Nachahmung das Nachgeahmte [...].¹⁹⁷

2.6 POETIC REALISM, HISTORICAL EVENTS, AND DOKUMENTARLITERATUR

What then were the consequences of poetic realism for Horst Bienek’s Gleiwitz tetralogy? Certainly, it allowed him the artistic freedom to invent and fictionalise, and simultaneously to describe real historical events; this dictated that the tetralogy became much more than a straight re-telling of Bienek’s childhood in Gleiwitz, and the history of Upper Silesia. The importance of the imagination was paramount for Bienek even when dealing with historical authenticity. “Ich habe Geschichte, Authentizität nur dann benutzt”, he told an audience in Melchingen in

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 83.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 73.

1983, “wenn sie meine Phantasie beflügelt hat”.¹⁹⁸ His presentation of the false flag raid on the Gleiwitz radio station, for example, foregrounds a poeticised reality, where the invented story of Ulla Ossadnik’s and Andreas Pilgrim’s fictional bicycle excursion from the home of Marga Zoppas plays against a geographical and historical background based on competently researched historical fact. It is both factual and poetic, real and invented.

It is important to note, in addition, that Bienek’s concept of poetic realism also brought with it the entitlement to what we might call poetic licence, allowing him to adapt or re-work his historical research for the purposes of clarity and enhanced understanding. This was actually not incompatible with Otto Ludwig’s concept of poetic realism: because Ludwig differentiated between poetic and historical truth, he permitted the writer, as William McClain has pointed out, “many liberties which a historian does not enjoy”.¹⁹⁹ In his historical novella *Der Heilige* (1879), set in the twelfth century, and based on the complex relationship between Henry II and Thomas Becket (the king’s chancellor and later the archbishop of Canterbury), for example, the Swiss nineteenth-century writer Conrad Ferdinand Meyer took many such liberties with the historical figure of Becket. Walter Silz reports on Meyer’s “sovereign” attitude to history as follows (he quotes Meyer in conversation with his biographer Adolf Frey):

“Die Geschichte benutze ich natürlich nach Möglichkeit” [he said to Adolf Frey with regard to *Der Heilige*], “verfahre aber ganz souverän mit ihr, indem ich nicht ruhe, bevor ich das Materielle der Historie der Willkür der Poesie unterworfen habe”.²⁰⁰

It was all part and parcel of getting to the kernel, to an ultimate poetic truth, even if that necessitated a creative reshaping of memory or documented history.

¹⁹⁸ “BIENEK LIEST AUS “GLEIWITZER KINDHEIT”, Melchingen, 6.-8. V. 1983, p. 12. Horst-Bienek-Archiv, Biw 17,16. (Subsequently referred to as “Melchingen”).

¹⁹⁹ William H. McClain, *Between Real and Ideal: The Course of Otto Ludwig’s Development as a Narrative Writer*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1963, p. 96.

²⁰⁰ Silz, p. 94.

It is important at this stage, however, to say that while Bienek made extensive use of historical documents and texts in the tetralogy, he nonetheless rejected what he called *Dokumentarliteratur*. This, he believed, stifled creativity, and by its very nature disallowed metaphor (AE, 103); it could therefore never be of long term relevance or significance.²⁰¹ His vision for the tetralogy was firmly focused on the creation of a “historischer Roman”, seemingly to Bienek, documentary literature’s binary opposite.²⁰² “Die Erzähltechnik in meinen Romanen ist eine epische, eine poetisch-realistische, sie ist eine der Phantasie, der Erfindung. Doch der historische Hintergrund ist sehr genau. Ich habe sehr viel recherchiert zu diesen Büchern”,²⁰³ he explained in a 1984 interview about the process of writing the Gleiwitz novels. He was never going to be a slave to his historical research. The fact that he could amend documented history, and add fictional content represented the telling difference between his poetic realist work and what he understood as *Dokumentarliteratur*. “Was ich damit sagen will,” he went on, “ist, daß ich das Dokument benutzte, mich aber nicht dem Dokument untertan mache. Ich gebrauche es da, wo es wichtig ist zur Erkenntnis, zur Schlußfolgerung aus Geschichte, aber nicht, um es dem Leser als fertiges Blatt der Geschichte vorzulegen. Das ist ein entscheidender Unterschied.”²⁰⁴ It’s worth noting that Bienek’s was a particularly narrow conceptualisation of documentary literature, given the quite complex nature of the genre.²⁰⁵ In case as far as Bienek was

²⁰¹ “Meiner Meinung nach hat hier der Autor einfach abgedankt, hat eine zweifelhafte Dokumentation erstellt, und das Echo konnte deswegen auch nur aktuell und peripher sein”. ‘Horst Bienek’, *Butzbacher Autoren-Interviews 3*, edited by Hans-Joachim Müller, Darmstadt (1985), 26-40 (p. 36). (Subsequently referred to as “*Butzbacher*”).

²⁰² “Wichtig für mich ist das Problem: historischer Roman oder Dokumentarliteratur.” (*Butzbacher*, p. 36).

²⁰³ Butzbacher, p. 37.

²⁰⁴ Butzbacher, p. 37.

²⁰⁵ See the highly nuanced definition of *Dokumentarliteratur* in the *Reallexikon der Deutschen Literaturwissenschaft*, Vol. 1, edited by Klaus Weimar, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2010, pp. 383-384: “Der Begriff meint – ebenso wie der verwandte Terminus *Dokumentarismus* – literarische Texte, die aus nichtliterarischen Vorlagen und Quellen komponiert sind und diese ausdrücklich als unbearbeitete Dokumente präsentieren. Der SEMI-DOKUMENTARISMUS konzidiert dabei, daß das Rohmaterial mit fiktionalen Passagen durchsetzt wird. Allerdings ist auch Dokumentarliteratur immer vom arrangierenden Eingriff des Autors geprägt und insofern nie das, was sie letzten Endes vom Anspruch her sein möchte: unmittelbare, unverfälschte, unbearbeitete und somit authentische und „wahre“ Wiedergabe von Realität”.

concerned it and poetic realism were mutually exclusive. Perhaps because of this Bienek was always conscious about specifying that his literary debt was to the early work of Truman Capote, i.e. to the author of *Other Voices*, *Other Rooms* and *The Grass Harp*, rather than, presumably, to the author of Capote's better known, later "nonfiction" novel *In Cold Blood* (1965).

2.7 SOUTHERN US POETIC REALISM

It was never clear how Bienek related the American version of poetic realism to the nineteenth century German one, or indeed if he saw much of a connection at all. In *Beschreibung einer Provinz* he appears to see little correspondence between the two: the *poetischer Realismus* he envisioned for the Gleiwitz project was one, "wie er allerdings in der deutschen Literatur kaum Vorbilder hat, eher in der amerikanischen [...]" (BP, 11). Yet in an interview some years later he does speak vaguely of some kind of interrelationship between the German and the American variants, while insisting on his own indebtedness to the American version. "Ich glaube, daß ich eine Tradition aufgenommen habe, die in Deutschland verschüttet war", he told Ekkehard Rudolph, "und das ist der poetische Realismus. Den habe ich von den amerikanischen Südstaatlern gelernt."²⁰⁶ Yet Bienek's vagueness appears a little disingenuous for a man whose professional life centred on literature and literary matters; surely he was not unaware of the likes of Ludwig, von Droste-Hülshoff, Keller, Meyer or Storm (he was at least aware of the nineteenth century realists Gustav Freytag and Wilhelm Raabe, whose works Valeska Piontek remembers reading as a schoolgirl) (ZG, 183-184).

As it transpires, there were actually many similarities between the nineteenth-century German and the twentieth-century American variant. American poetic realism, as we shall see, also represented essentially a realist style of writing, receptive to fictional, mythic, and poetic input, which also had as its objective the creation of an enhanced or "enriched" reality. It easily lived up to Otto Ludwig's

²⁰⁶ Rudolph, p. 42.

statement on German poetic realism, “Die Kunst soll nicht verarmte Wirklichkeit sein, vielmehr bereicherte”.²⁰⁷ In contrast to German poetic realism, however, there was no “Otto Ludwig” style spokesperson in Southern or US letters to give such detailed expression to the specific nature of the American style. However, Carson McCullers comes close in “The Flowering Dream: Notes on Writing” an essay about aspects of the creative process. The essay was published in German in *Über Carson McCullers*, edited by Gerd Haffmans (1974), a copy of which Bienek owned, and indeed reviewed for *Die Zeit*. Though she does not use the term “poetic realism” itself in the essay, McCullers, it could be argued, describes one aspect of the style succinctly when she speaks of the specific relationship between memory and truth in connection with her early work “Wunderkind” (1936), a short story outlining the painful realisation of a young pianist, originally considered a child prodigy by her music teacher, that she will not measure up to expectation:

[...] I wrote “Wunderkind” when I was seventeen years old, and it was a memory, although not the reality of the memory—it was a foreshortening of that memory. It was about a young music student. I didn’t write about my real music teacher—I wrote about the music we studied together because I thought it was truer. The imagination is truer than the reality.²⁰⁸

This would seem to accord seamlessly with Ludwig’s advocacy for the creative enhancement of reality by a process of adaptation of memories or established facts. “Reality alone has never been that important to me”,²⁰⁹ McCullers wrote in the same essay. What was significant for her art was the power of the imagination. “The imagination combines memory with insight, combines reality with the dream”,²¹⁰ she wrote, presenting in this phrase a quite striking definition of “poetic realism” itself. Occasionally McCullers used alternative signifiers for “imagination”

²⁰⁷ Ludwig, Vol. 5, p. 265.

²⁰⁸ *The Mortgaged Heart*, p. 281.

²⁰⁹ *The Mortgaged Heart*, p. 279.

²¹⁰ *The Mortgaged Heart*, p. 279.

and “reality” to reiterate her message: “A writer’s main asset is intuition; too many facts impede intuition”.²¹¹

The term “poetic realism” itself proves elusive once we cross the Atlantic. Apart from the work of one literary critic, Tony Hilfer (1936 – 2008) discussed below, references in critical discourse to the American variant of the style are few and far between, and when the term is mentioned, few commentators explain what is meant by it. Susan Goodman in her biography of Southern novelist Ellen Glasgow, the author of *Barren Ground* (1925), asserts that Glasgow’s poetic realism influenced the writing of other novelists including Robert Penn Warren’s *Night Rider* (1939), Eudora Welty’s *A Curtain of Green* (1941), and William Faulkner’s *Go Down, Moses* (1942),²¹² but offers no explanation as to what the term signifies. Elizabeth Savery Taylor on the other hand does cast a little light on the nature of the style when she claims that it was Sherwood Anderson, the author of *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919), who created what she called the “modern American style of poetic realism”, describing the style as, “distinguished by colloquial idioms, repeated phrases, the use of ordinary objects, a natural lyricism, all voiced by a particularly observant, compassionate person on the street.”²¹³ This, however, only gets us so far, though it does highlight firstly the obvious importance of lyricism for the style, and secondly the fact that we are dealing with the basic tenets of realism here, with all that that might imply: a focus on ordinary people, genuine down-to-earth dialogue, plots and situations within the bounds of possibility, and true representations of location and surroundings. It is noteworthy that few commentators other than Bienek have used the term *poetic realism* in relation to *Look Homeward, Angel*. One such however was Jonathan Daniels, a university acquaintance of Wolfe and a novelist himself. Writing in the *Raleigh News and*

²¹¹ *The Mortgaged Heart*, p. 276.

²¹² Susan Goodman, *Ellen Glasgow: A Biography*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998, p. 168.

²¹³ Elizabeth Savery Taylor, *Sherwood Anderson’s Legacy to the American Short Story*, Ph.D. Thesis, Brown University, May 1989, p. ix.

Observer of 20 October 1929, Daniels spoke of Wolfe's novel as, "[...] a book written in a poetic realism", and though he added in uncomplimentary terms that it was, "the poetry of dissolution and decay, of life rotting from the womb, of death full of lush fecundity",²¹⁴ the reference to Wolfe's style was, at least, something of a turn up for the books.

If "poetic realism" was used infrequently, other commentators use a similar term, namely "symbolic realism" in relation to Southern writing of the mid-1900s. Lucinda H. MacKethan for example uses this phrase in a short essay contained in *The History of Southern Women's Literature* claiming that one of the features of the modern novel in the period from 1900 to the end of World War II was, "a heightened, often symbolic realism".²¹⁵ Referring to Thomas Wolfe, Heinrich Böll according to Gabriele Sander admired "die vielfach symbolisch überhöhte Realistik von Wolfe's Erzählkunst."²¹⁶ The term is also used by Ute Müller in connection with William Faulkner. Müller claims that Siegfried Lenz found in Faulkner's work what he felt was lacking in Ernest Hemingway, that is to say (among other things), "ein anderes Realismus-Konzept, das keine „Nachahmung“, sondern eine „Umformung“ der Geschehnisse beinhaltet (Faulkners ‚symbolischer‘ Realismus)",²¹⁷ a view which surely accords with Ludwig's explanation of the two key facets of poetic realism. "Auch er vertritt - vergleichbar Steinbeck - eine Art symbolischer Realismus", for example, was Hermann Wiegmann's claim for Faulkner in a short submission on the writer.²¹⁸ Other commentators realised (without coining the term "poetic realism") that something enhanced and new was

²¹⁴ Quoted by Floyd C. Watkins in *Thomas Wolfe's Characters: Portraits from Life*, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1957, p. 42.

²¹⁵ Lucinda H. MacKethan, 'The Modern Novel', *The History of Southern Women's Literature*, edited by Carolyn Perry and Mary Louise Weaks, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press (2002), 251-257 (p. 251).

²¹⁶ 'Die Last des Ungelesenen. Heinrich Böll und die literarische Moderne', *Das Werk Heinrich Bölls: Bibliographie mit Studien zum Frühwerk*, edited by Werner Bellmann, Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, (1995), 61-88 (p. 78).

²¹⁷ Ute Müller, p. 202.

²¹⁸ Hermann Wiegmann, *Abendländische Literaturgeschichte*, Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2003, p. 529.

being created. Richard Gray for example felt that Carson McCullers' ability to "reorder, rearrange and so metamorphose" her material, facilitated her creation of "another country out of her own known home",²¹⁹ and in his essay on William Faulkner in *Selected Essays* (1958), the novelist and poet Robert Penn Warren wrote perceptively of William Faulkner's work: "The fact is that he writes of two Souths: he reports one South and he creates another. On the one hand he is a perfectly straight realistic writer, and on the other he is a symbolist".²²⁰ The quality of realism which also incorporates poetic intent and sensibility is clearly an important component of poetic realism. Hyatt H. Waggoner, another influential commentator made a related assertion:

Any claim of greatness for Faulkner must rest primarily on the way he has rendered the local, the particular, and the concrete with amazing vividness while evoking the most far-reaching symbolic implications. The historian of "Yoknapatawpha" has both recorded and created a world [...].²²¹

In many ways Bienek is the poetic realist historian of Gleiwitz and has similarly "both recorded and created a world", a world which combines realism and historical accuracy with poetic and imaginative input to create a construct more "real"—that is, more penetrating—than reality.

2.8 THE POETIC ASPECT OF THE STYLE

For Horst Bienek the specifically "poetic" (i.e. lyrical) aspect of poetic realism was also an important component of the style. And it is certainly clear that for Bienek there was nothing incompatible about a specifically "poetic" realism; historical accuracy could comfortably exist within a lyrical narrative. "Ich komme von der Lyrik her, der man stets etwas unbestimmt Gefühlvolles nachsagt", he told his audience when he was honoured in 1969 with the Bremer Literaturpreis for *Die*

²¹⁹ Richard Gray, *The Literature of Memory: Modern Writers of the American South*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977, p. 268.

²²⁰ Robert Penn Warren, *Selected Essays*, New York: Random House, 1958, p.59. (Subsequently referred to as "Robert Penn Warren").

²²¹ Hyatt H. Waggoner, *William Faulkner: From Jefferson to the World*, Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1959, p. 253.

Zelle, “- große Lyrik, und hier kann ich Brecht ebenso wie Benn zitieren, hat es immer mit der Genauigkeit zu tun... Ich will das lyrische Element auch in meinem Romanprojekt nicht verleugnen, mir schwebt ein *poetischer Realismus* vor, wie er allerdings in der deutschen Literatur kaum Vorbilder hat, eher in der amerikanischen, so etwa bei Faulkner, Thomas Wolfe, der Carson McCullers, dem frühen Capote” (BP, 11). There are certainly echoes in Bienek’s statement of Carson McCullers’ own view of what makes good prose, as expressed in “The Flowering Dream”. “I don’t like the word prose; it’s too prosaic”, she wrote. “Good prose should be fused with the light of poetry [...]”.²²²

There is no doubt that the prose writing of the four Southerners Bienek repeatedly invoked was decidedly poetic (Cowley went so far as to call Faulkner “an epic or bardic poet in prose”,²²³ and spoke of the author’s use of symbols and metaphors in *Absalom, Absalom!*).²²⁴ Heinrich Böll, however, taking a sidelong look at Carson McCullers, found her style difficult to categorise. “[...] freilich ist sie weder so eindeutig romantisch wie Truman Capote noch so eindeutig naturalistisch wie Mailer”,²²⁵ he wrote in a 1952 review. Ultimately, he proposed that her writing constituted realism, but somehow not quite as he knew it. Her style appeared almost elusive, a hair’s breadth beyond realism, where a quiet, yet hard-edged magical quality was permitted. “[...] nicht einmal das Adjektiv realistisch würde ihre Eigenart kennzeichnen”, he continued, “es herrscht ein merkwürdig stiller und doch harter Zauber in ihrem Werk [...], jene winzige und doch so wesentliche Distanz, ein grauer, dünner Schleier, der mich zögernd nur das Wort Wirklichkeit anwenden läßt.”²²⁶ The phrase he was looking for was surely, I would argue, “poetischer Realismus”.

²²² *The Mortgaged Heart*, p. 277.

²²³ *A Second Flowering*, p. 152.

²²⁴ *A Second Flowering*, p. 142

²²⁵ Heinrich Böll, ‘Ein Wort für Carson McCullers: Über »Das Herz ist ein einsamer Jäger« und »Das Mädchen Frankie«’, *Werke. Essayistische Schriften und Reden I, 1952 – 1963*, edited by Bernd Balzer, Cologne: Kiepenheuer und Witsch (1977), 26-27 (p. 26).

²²⁶ *Ibid.*

2.9 SYMBOLISM AND POETIC REALISM

In his *American Fiction Since 1940*, Tony Hilfer saw US fiction from 1940 to 1990 taking literary form in one of four modes: naturalistic social protest, poetic or modernist realism (for Hilfer modernist realism appears to be simply another name for poetic realism), traditional realism, and postmodernism.²²⁷ Hilfer's definition of poetic or modernist realism (which he saw as the dominant mode of the 1940s and 1950s) is "fiction in which though character and plot follow predominantly realistic conventions much of the meaning inheres in subtextual webs of symbolism that intimate interior states of the character and/or metaphysical concepts about the world".²²⁸ I deduce from Hilfer's analysis that poetic realism is writing in the realist tradition, enhanced by symbolic and figurative elements, as well as modernist characteristics. That symbolism was an important issue for Bienek as he prepared the ground for *Die erste Polka* is evident from an entry in *Beschreibung einer Provinz*, where he considers aesthetic options for the first novel of the Gleiwitz series. He rejected the language of *Die Zelle* as inappropriate for his new subject matter and stressed the importance of symbolism as a means of enhancing reality in his new writing. "Vor allem mußte ich einen neuen Stil, ein neues Erzählen für dieses Thema finden", he wrote, "Mit der asketischen, monologischen Sprache der *Zelle* ging es nicht; Wirklichkeit war hier nicht symbolisch zu überhöhen" (BP, 10). On the contrary, what was required was "eine umfassendere, komplexere und wohl auch vitalere Art erzählerischer Vergegenwärtigung" (BP, 10), i.e. the heightened realism he called "*poetischer Realismus*".

2.10 MODERNISM AND POETIC REALISM

While there is some evidence of the use of interior monologue, and an endeavour to convey psychological depth in German *poetischer Realismus* (most notably in

²²⁷ See Tony Hilfer, *American Fiction Since 1940*, London: Longman, 1992, pp 10 -11.

²²⁸ Ibid., p. 11. Contrary to Elizabeth Savery Taylor's assertion about Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*, Hilfer specifically defines Carson McCullers's first novel *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* as "a prototype of poetic realism" (p. 15). He also defines James Baldwin's novels as "poetic realist" (p. 12). (Bienek reviewed Baldwin's *Giovannis Zimmer* for the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* on 07.12.1963).

Otto Ludwig's *Zwischen Himmel und Erde*), where nineteenth century German *poetischer Realismus* and the twentieth century Southern US variant materially diverge is in the latter's very much more radical utilisation of modernist literary techniques. Of the Southern writers Bienek lists in his Carson McCullers' review quoted above most display evidence of modernist experimentation in some form or another in their works. And that Bienek's poetic realist writing in the tetralogy also contains many familiar modernist characteristics is not in doubt: a lack of foregrounded authorial omniscience, for example, multiple narrative perspectives, internalised perception (free indirect discourse and interior monologue), and thus psychological insight—all modernist traits—are significant stylistic features of the Gleiwitz tetralogy and belong to Bienek's concept of *poetischer Realismus*. In conversation with Walter Hinck (and elsewhere),²²⁹ Bienek himself acknowledges the presence of these narrative techniques in the tetralogy (naming them as “new formal methods” rather than as “modernist”):

Ich habe auch, wie ich glaube, eine ganze Reihe von neuen formalen Mitteln in diese Romane eingebaut, ich erinnere mich z. B. daran, daß ich alles an einem Tag erzählen lasse – was ja auch eine Kunstentscheidung ist, gewiß nicht so neu, aber immerhin; die Dialog-Ebene ist aufgehoben, oft weiß man nicht, soll man nicht wissen, wer spricht, wer kommentiert; ich erzähle die Personen von Innen nach Außen [...].²³⁰

As indicated above, the first of these modernist techniques Bienek mentions is the handling of narrated time: he sets three of the four Gleiwitz novels on one day (by way of contrast the final novel *Erde und Feuer* spans several weeks). There were of course artistic reasons for restricting the narrative to a twenty-four hour period: “so erhalten sie [die Romane] eine höhere Intensität”, he explained at a reading in Melchingen.²³¹ (He realised, however, that the particular dates he chose on which to set the novels were therefore extremely important: “dazu brauchte ich

²²⁹ For example, in Bienek's interview with Ekkehard Rudolf (Rudolf, pp. 42-43, Footnote 74).

²³⁰ Hinck, p. 34.

²³¹ Melchingen, p. 10.

ungewöhnliche Tage”).²³² One way to achieve the kind of intensity he wished for, it appears, was to figuratively bring time to a standstill: “Es war ja nicht nur formale Spielerei, die Romane jeweils an einem Tag festzumachen” Bienek claimed in *Das allmähliche Erstickten von Schreien*, “Es war, als wollte er die Zeit anhalten”, (AE, 101). In this way he could get the most out of every second, or rather out of every second that mattered. In the same publication Bienek also quoted a variation of the William Faulkner phrase he had used as an epitaph for *Septemberlicht*: “Ach, wenn man sich doch in die Zeit hineinweben könnte”, going on to explain what the phrase meant for him: “Das bedeutete für ihn nichts anderes, als die Zeit auszudehnen, so lange bis sie zerspringt” (AE, 101). Tilman Urbach explained what this stretching of narrated time signified in practice:

Drei der vier Romane spielen jeweils in einem Zeitraum von 24 Stunden, wobei verschiedene Handlungsstränge parallel zueinander ablaufen. So erfährt die erzählte Zeit an Stellen detaillierter Beschreibung eine Ausdehnung, während sie bei weniger relevanten Ereignissen gerafft erscheint.²³³

2.11 HETEROGLOSSIA IN THE GLEIWITZ TETRALOGY

The stretching of time “until it shatters” was certainly fostered by Bienek’s parallel plotline procedure: multiple narrative threads relating to a diverse range of protagonists course through each of the four novels. The parallel plotline technique also, as it happened, facilitated numerous voices, viewpoints and appraisals to be heard (including that of the narrator): the Gleiwitz novels are very much characterised by what Mikhail Bakhtin termed as “heteroglossia” in his essay “Discourse in the Novel” (1981), the fourth part of Bakhtin’s *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. The novel as a whole, Bakhtin wrote:

²³² Melchingen, p. 10.

²³³ Tilman Urbach, ‘Ewigkeit des Augenblicks: Anmerkungen zur Behandlung der Zeit im Werk Horst Bieneks’. In: *Horst Bienek: Aufsätze, Materialien. Bibliographie*, edited by Tilman Urbach, Munich: Hanser (1990), 112-124 (p. 118).

is a phenomenon multiform in style and variform in speech and voice. In it the investigator is confronted with several heterogeneous stylistic unities, often located on different linguistic levels and subject to different stylistic controls.²³⁴

Heteroglossia refers to what Graham Roberts in *The Bakhtin Reader* calls the “conflict between ‘centripetal’ and ‘centrifugal’, ‘official’ and ‘unofficial’ discourses within the same national language.”²³⁵ Heteroglossia is, however, as Roberts explains, also present at “the micro-linguistic scale”:

[...] every utterance contains within it the trace of other utterances, both in the past and in the future. The discursive site in which the conflict between different voices is at its most concentrated is the modern novel. One way of representing heteroglossia in the novel is by a hybrid construction [...], which contains within it the trace of two or more discourses, either those of the narrator and character(s), or of different characters.²³⁶

Bienek’s discourse in the tetralogy is dominated by this type of “hybrid construction”, indeed as we know from his statement to Hinck quoted above (see p. 83 of this study), and from other interviews and secondary writings, the author often commented that this practice constituted an important aspect of his writing.

It is evident that Bakhtin’s concept of heteroglossia is also exemplified by Bienek’s use of a variety of diverse stylistic devices in the Gleiwitz tetralogy. By way of illustration, we can point to various excerpts from poems, hymns, and songs scattered throughout the novels, and to the inclusion of personal letters in the text (such as Arthur Silbergleit’s correspondence with Herman Hesse reproduced in *Septemberlicht*) (SL, 38-40). These tend to offer new appraisals of Bienek’s Upper Silesia. In addition, in Chapter 12 of *Die erste Polka* (EP, 124-126) we have two lists: the first, Valeska Piontek’s observance of a series of name changes among relatives

²³⁴ M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, edited by Michael Holquist, translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990, p. 261.

²³⁵ *The Bakhtin Reader: Selected Writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev, Voloshinov*, edited by Pam Morris, with a glossary compiled by Graham Roberts, London: Arnold, 2003, p. 248.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 249.

and acquaintances as a result of the Nazi policy of Germanisation, the second the narrator's register of renamed Gleiwitz streets and squares. In the same novel (EP, 253-254) we also have (as previously mentioned) Georg Montag's schedule of *Wasserpolnisch* words and their translations. All of these are heteroglot in nature in that they express a multitude of voices and multiple perspectives (and simultaneously promote the sense of ambivalence and irresolution with which Bienek wished to imbue Upper Silesia in his Gleiwitz memorial).

2.12 HETEROGLOSSIA AND MEMORY

As Andrea L. Smith has pointed out, Bakhtin's ideas on heteroglossia were well suited in a general sense for the analysis of memory:

Multiple representations of the past exist and confront each other in any given society as each of its constituent subgroups—communities, localities, classes, ethnic groups, and families—promotes it[s] own interpretations of past events. Even in one community, members may present widely varying accounts of the past, depending on audience and contextual factors.²³⁷

Smith's perspective appears particularly apposite in Bienek's Gleiwitz when we consider the multiplicity of personal and historical memories which arise and are articulated in the tetralogy (often in the important "assembled group" scenes in each of the first three Gleiwitz novels, i.e. Irma Piontek's wedding reception in *Die erste Polka*, Leo Maria Piontek's funeral meal in *Septemberlicht*, and on the occasion of the removal of the bells in *Zeit ohne Glocken*). In Bienek's portrayal of these divergent memory "voices" the reader is reminded that memory is seldom objective; rather it is shaped by political, social, and religious considerations, and a wide range of cultural and linguistic elements. In line with the tenets of *poetischer Realismus* the heteroglot "memory mix" also tended to provide—due to its

²³⁷ 'Heteroglossia, "common sense", and social memory', *American Ethnologist*, 31.2 (2004), 251-269 (p. 265).

diversity—a more encompassing, enhanced truth about the Upper Silesian experience than might otherwise have been possible.

2.13 THE LIMITS OF BIENEK'S MODERNISM

Bienek's utilization of the literary techniques outlined above did not mean that the author would employ the whole panoply of features that modernism potentially offers. He eschews, for example, the "disruption of time" convention in his Gleiwitz novels. While there are certainly flashbacks for the purpose of illuminating aspects of character, history and situation, Bienek's plots in all four novels unfold chronologically, without the kind of temporal disorder encountered say in Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, where the reader is obliged of necessity to unravel an unclear and often bewildering event chronology, or even in *Go Down Moses* where whole chapters are arranged out of chronological sequence. And there is no second-tier or multi-layered narration in the Gleiwitz novels, where events in the past are commented on or interpreted by a narrator in the present. Questioned by Hinck about this technique (as adopted by Uwe Johnson in *Jahrestagen*), Bienek felt the method was a step too far ("eigentlich schon ein bißchen zu modisch")²³⁸ for what he was trying to achieve. He claimed to have been influenced (and emboldened) in this decision by the opinions of American poets and writers he met on a 1972 reading tour of the USA. "[...] ich habe dort bei den Amerikanern gelernt", he told Hinck, "daß man ungeheuer modern [...], ungeheuer zeitbewußt und mit modernen Mitteln schreiben kann, ohne immer wieder den Erzähler von Heute rückblickend einzuschalten. Ich dachte mir, daß muß doch auch bei uns möglich sein".²³⁹ Thoughts of locating Georg Montag (or Josel Piontek) in the present in *Die erste Polka* and allowing him to comment critically within the novel on past events was on reflection rejected: "Das findet man überall in den neueren Romanen", he wrote, adding with remarkable self-assurance that the technique, "ist längst zum Cliché geworden" (BP, 37). What he ultimately preferred

²³⁸ Hinck, p. 34.

²³⁹ Hinck, p. 34.

to do was to provide a kind of reflective level or tier to the Gleiwitz tetralogy by publishing a workshop diary relating to his work on the four novels (it appeared as *Beschreibung einer Provinz* a year after the publication of *Erde und Feuer*). This contained what he described to me in 1981 as “Aufzeichnungen zu diesem Komplex [...], d.h. also, Recherchen, Probleme beim Schreiben, meine Ästhetik, Studien etc”, as well as “einen Einblick in den Schaffensprozeß” [...],²⁴⁰ and it obviated the necessity, if any were needed, for a much more complex narrative method. “Ich habe mich entschlossen, tradiert, also mit traditionelleren Mitteln zu erzählen”, he told Hinck, who was pressing him to account for his aesthetic choices, “Aber das, was die anderen Autoren an Reflexion in den Roman einbringen, nachzuliefern. Und “Die Beschreibung einer Provinz” war ja auch von Anfang an geplant”.²⁴¹

²⁴⁰ Private letter of 27 October 1981.

²⁴¹ Hinck, p. 32.

CHAPTER 3: WILLIAM FAULKNER

Faulkner gelesen, Schall und Wahn. Unerschöpflich. Es ist für mich wirklich das bedeutendste Buch dieses Jahrhunderts.²⁴²

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Of all the Southern USA authors, William Faulkner exerted the most significant influence on Horst Bienek. He certainly admits to having learnt much from him, and to a lifelong engagement with the author. “[...] ich began ihn zu lesen, als ich noch in der DDR lebte”, he wrote in *Mein Lesebuch*, “wo er in den fünfziger Jahren als Formalist verboten war, und ich lese ihn immer noch und immer wieder” (ML,11). Jean Stein’s interview with Faulkner, initially published in 1956 in the *Paris Review*²⁴³ was particularly instructive for Bienek. Faulkner’s comprehensive answers were, “ein Schlüssel, eine Art authentischen Kommentars zur Struktur seiner Romane: ich erfuhr mehr daraus als aus allen Essays über ihn”.²⁴⁴ On another occasion Bienek respectfully named Faulkner, “- falls es nicht zu vermessen ist, das zu sagen - als einen meiner großen Lehrmeister”.²⁴⁵ This deference to Faulkner (even if he realised the novels were not all of equal quality),²⁴⁶ and the personal empowerment Faulkner’s work inspired in him (by which he meant encouragement and validation of his own writing) was quite typical of Bienek’s response to the American: “Aber mit F. will ich mich erst gar nicht in Beziehung bringen”, he wrote in his diary in January 1982, the year he published the final Gleiwitz novel *Erde und Feuer*, “Er ist so über allem Maß... Dabei bei Mosquitos

²⁴² Bienek’s assessment of Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury* (at the time he was working on the final Gleiwitz novel *Erde und Feuer*). Diary entry of 3.1.1982 (TB, 376).

²⁴³ Subsequently published in German in *Wie sie schreiben: Writers at Work: sechzehn Gespräche mit Autoren der Gegenwart*, edited by Malcolm Cowley, Gütersloh, 1960.

²⁴⁴ *Werkstattgespräche mit Schriftstellern*, p. 7. As briefly mentioned above, the *Paris Review* interview with Faulkner also provided the motivation for Bienek’s *Werkstattgespräche mit Schriftstellern*: “So entstand [...] der Gedanke zu diesem Buch: Werkstattgespräche nun mit deutschen, deutschschreibenden Autoren zu führen”.

²⁴⁵ Einführung, p. 2.

²⁴⁶ See Bienek’s comments on Faulkner’s *Mosquitoes* in a diary entry of 15.9.1981: “Es ist sein zweiter Roman. Flott geschrieben, amüsant, hat aber freilich nicht jene Dimension wie die späten Romane [...]”. (TB, 287).

kapituliert, wie bei Sartoris. Ich will es jetzt noch mit Soldatenlohn probieren... Sonst lese ich besser noch einmal Schall + Wahn parallel zu meinem Schreiben. Das gibt mir Kraft!" (TB, 384). And on another occasion in a diary entry of 10.02.1984, referring to Faulkner's civil war novel, *The Unvanquished* (1938), he spoke of his own recent writing (presumably *Königswald oder Die letzte Geschichte*): "Gut gearbeitet. Dazwischen allerdings furchtbare Probleme. [...] Trost + Bestätigung bei Faulkner geholt. (Die Unbesiegten.) Er ist so modern!" (TB, 685).

3.2 CHAPTER OVERVIEW

The central theme of Chapter 3 concerns the complexity of Upper Silesian identity as depicted by Bienek in the Gleiwitz tetralogy, with particular reference to three Faulkner novels, *Light in August* (1932), *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936), and *The Sound and the Fury* (1929). The chapter, however, will focus firstly on the politics of identity in Bienek's tetralogy, in connection with two Upper Silesian figures in *Die erste Polka* crucial to the reader's understanding of Bienek's province, Wojciech Korfanty and Georg Montag. The two characters' struggle for identity and selfhood is subsequently examined in the light of the person and experiences of Joe Christmas, the central protagonist of Faulkner's *Light in August*. I will argue that Christmas's identity struggle, and its eventual resolution, while certainly comparable to that of Korfanty and Montag, features a quite different dynamic. The discussion then turns to an analysis of identity as a fate to which one must succumb (i.e. as a pre-ordained matter), or as a self-conscious, political matter (i.e. something a person can decide).

The chapter continues with a comparative analysis of Bienek's Irma Piontek and Faulkner's Caddy Compson (from *The Sound and the Fury*), which concentrates on the politics surrounding gender and identity in the two regions (Upper Silesia between 1939 and 1945 and Faulkner's American South of the late 1920s). Irma, the tormented daughter of Leo Maria and Valeska Piontek has been largely overlooked by commentators on Bienek's tetralogy. Despite her thematic and

symbolic importance in the novels she is scarcely mentioned in critical works on Bienek (for example in Schneiß and Ahrens), and only fleetingly in the critical analyses of Pachura and Eigler. This section attempts to redress this neglect.

The third section of the chapter will analyse some specific examples of how Bienek's constructed representation of Upper Silesia in the Gleiwitz tetralogy can be understood in the light of his reception of Yoknapatawpha, Faulkner's invented Mississippi county. This section embraces Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses*, the work from which Bienek borrows the American writer's implied designation of the South as fundamentally "cursed" and applies the expression to Upper Silesia. The section also compares the liminal status of Yoknapatawpha—outlined in *Go Down, Moses* as essentially a Southern "frontier" county—with that of Bienek's own borderland province and draws specific conclusions from this.

Finally, Chapter 3 addresses Bienek's *Septemberlicht* and Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*, including matters relating to narrative style and technique, and the precise nature of the influence Faulkner's modernist technique exerted on Bienek's writing. It also evaluates the intertextual link between Chapter 14 of *Septemberlicht* (Bruno Ossadnik's frustrated attempt to buy a motorcycle) and an *As I Lay Dying* monologue (Jewel Bundren's purchase of a horse) to demonstrate Bienek's capacity for appropriation. In this section I will show how Bienek transcends Faulkner's account of domestic strife to produce a very different, and much more politically charged narrative of Upper Silesia.

3.3 IDENTITY PROBLEMATIC (WOJCIECH KORFANTY)

While undertaking research for *Die erste Polka* Horst Bienek described how he stumbled upon a fragmentary 1954 biography of Wojciech Korfanty (1873 - 1939) compiled by Ernst Sontag, a retired regional court councillor. Sontag's biography was not unbiased; he was a right-wing nationalist whom Bienek surmised was antipathetic towards his subject ("Das Ganze ist parteiisch, strotzt von Ungerechtigkeiten, ja, der Verfasser scheut auch nicht vor Fälschungen zurück")

(BP, 37). However, it was a compelling document for Bienek as he embarked on the first novel of the Gleiwitz series. Bienek's memory from his own Upper Silesian childhood was that Korfanty had traditionally been regarded by German Upper Silesians (including Bienek's own parents) as reprehensible, a politician who had instigated the Third Polish Uprising of 1921, and had facilitated the subsequent delivery of eastern Upper Silesia to Poland. Conversely, to the Polish Upper Silesians who were the beneficiaries of his agitation, Korfanty was regarded as no less than "eine Art Volksheld" (BP, 37). Ernst Sontag was firmly in the former camp, and for this reason Bienek was fascinated that the more Sontag considered Korfanty's life and circumstances, the more sympathy he felt for his subject, "[...] vor allem nach der Verhaftung K.s durch Pilsudski, nach seiner Ausweisung aus Polen und im Exil", as Bienek put it (BP, 36-37).²⁴⁷ These events referred to Korfanty's 1930 imprisonment in Brest-Litowsk (he was released after a few weeks), and to a period of emigration in Czechoslovakia and Paris between 1935 and 1939).²⁴⁸ It is not difficult to identify specific instances of Sontag's unexpected sympathy for Korfanty from the biography excerpts included in *Die erste Polka*. Sontag appears impressed by Korfanty's rejection of the corruption prevalent in the governing party of the (Polish) Silesian Voivodeship²⁴⁹ (EP, 251) (much of whose territory had been ceded to Poland as a result of the plebiscite outcome), and by Korfanty's use of German during the 1928 Silesian Sejm election campaign (EP, 251). He also appears to have been disconcerted by the censorship imposed on Korfanty by the voivode²⁵⁰ Michał Grażyński (EP, 251) and appalled by Korfanty's treatment in Polish custody in Brest-Litowsk in 1930 (EP, 33). However, independently of *Die erste Polka*, Bienek cautioned that the reader should not make too much of Sontag's apparent concern. In a letter to the Polish literary

²⁴⁷ Marshal Józef Piłsudski, the effective leader of Poland and the instigator of the 1926 Warsaw coup which unseated the national government of Prime Minister Witos, was a bitter political opponent of Korfanty.

²⁴⁸ Bienek does not include an excerpt from Sontag/Montag's biography concerning Korfanty's exile. It is, however, briefly mentioned in the Stanisław Sopicki letter (EP, 107).

²⁴⁹ An administrative area/province in Poland.

²⁵⁰ Governor of a Voivodeship.

researcher Bożena Chołuj, Bienek stressed Sontag's limited and pragmatic sense of empathy: "Er war auch ein großer Reaktionär, und die gewisse Sympathie, die er dem spätem K. entgegenbringt, kommt ja nur daher, weil er damit das offizielle Polen (Piłsudski) anklagen konnte".²⁵¹

While conducting his research for *Die erste Polka* it was clear to Bienek that Wojciech Korfanty was an extremely complex and conflicted man whose true identity would not easily be pinned down by Ernst Sontag. From another source, Stanislaw Sopicki, Korfanty's last secretary, who was still alive and living in London, Bienek gained a much more positive image of Korfanty than had appeared in the Sontag biography. He corresponded with Sopicki, and in a highly unusual initiative persuaded him to write a letter describing Korfanty's final imprisonment on his return to Poland in 1939, and his death in a Warsaw hospital, as if he were writing at the actual time of the events (BP, 52-54). The contents of this letter, used verbatim in *Die erste Polka*, certainly paint an altogether more balanced and positive image of Korfanty. Sopicki claims that Korfanty understood the psychology of the German nationalist and the divided politics of Upper Silesia like no other Polish statesman (he mentions Piłsudski particularly), and that descriptions of him as a German-hater were actually quite inaccurate.

Korfanty's public life was characterised by a transnational German/Polish dynamic, and his elected offices reflected ongoing geopolitical change. In the years before the partition of Upper Silesia he was a member of both the German *Reichstag* (indeed he was the province's first Polish member) and simultaneously of the Prussian *Landtag*, and following partition (again concurrently) he was a member of both the Silesian *Sejm* and the Polish *Sejm*. He was also the Polish commissioner for Upper Silesia during the plebiscite period. With all this history at his fingertips

²⁵¹ The letter dated 30.10.1978 is published as a facsimile in *Horst Bienek – Ein Schriftsteller in den Extremen des 20. Jahrhunderts*, edited by Reinhard Laube und Verene Nolte, Göttingen: Wallstein, 2012, p. 257. (The letter is subsequently referred to as "Letter to Chołuj").

it was therefore not surprising that Bienek, searching for an appropriate narrative means to explore Upper Silesia's recent past in *Die erste Polka*, found a solution in the person of Sontag, and his Korfanty biography. However, he was to make a significant amendment. His fictional biographer was not to be a right-wing nationalist; in the interests of gaining a Jewish perspective in *Die erste Polka*, Bienek reimagined Sontag in the novel as Georg Montag, a half-Catholic, half-Jew:

Und so machte ich aus Sontag einen Landgerichtsrat Montag, einen Halbjuden (um die Zerrissenheit der Oberschlesier darzustellen), der an dieser Korfanty-Biographie schreibt – und mit dieser Biographie kann ich zugleich die Geschichte Oberschlesiens erzählen (BP, 37).

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In some ways, however, this was not a perfect solution to the problem of exploring the province's recent past. Despite reconceiving Sontag as Georg Montag, the excerpts Bienek used in *Die erste Polka* from Sontag's biography remain largely unaltered from Sontag's original text,²⁵³ even though in the novel they now become the work of a very different protagonist.²⁵⁴ There was bound to be some discordance between how a German reactionary would judge Korfanty, and how he would be judged by the sensitive and, as it transpires, the quite scrupulous amateur historian Georg Montag. Bienek attempts to offset any sense of irreconcilability between the biographical excerpts and the new writer firstly by choosing the excerpts he includes carefully, and secondly by simply allowing Montag to revise his judgement on what he had previously written;²⁵⁵ in effect the

²⁵² To include a Jewish perspective in the Gleiwitz tetralogy had been an aspiration for Bienek from the outset (BP, 17).

²⁵³ Some small changes are listed in Bożena Chołuj's 'Wojciech Korfanty und die Identitätsfrage', *Auf der Suche nach dem Verlorenen Land: Loccumer Autorentagung mit Horst Bienek*, edited by Karl Ermert, Rehburg-Loccum (1985), 22-27, (p. 26).

²⁵⁴ "Vergessen Sie am besten diesen Sontag", Bienek wrote in another letter to Bożena Chołuj, "Der war für mich nur ein Stichwortgeber. Halten Sie sich an den von mir erfundenen Montag, der ja mit Sontag nicht mehr viel gemein hat". Letter of 17 June 1978, published as a facsimile in *Horst Bienek – Ein Schriftsteller in den Extremen des 20. Jahrhunderts*, edited by Reinhard Laube und Verene Nolte, Göttingen: Wallstein (2012), 255-256 (p. 256).

²⁵⁵ For example, when he claims that early sentences in the biography suddenly appear to him to be too simple, and too straightforward (EP, 38), when he ponders on the imperfections of what he has written (EP, 250), and when he claims that some of his earlier arguments actually go too far (EP, 253).

biography becomes an open-ended—essentially liminal—work in progress, not, as in the case of Ernst Sontag, a done and dusted work. Bienek seems to be saying that identity is actually not fixed; on a meta-level it involves a dynamic state of transition.

In *Die erste Polka* Bienek portrays Korfanty as the embodiment of an archetypal Upper Silesian predicament. “Ich habe [...] den K. auf meine Weise interpretiert”, he wrote to Bożena Chołuj, “- als einen Protagonisten für das geteilte Oberschlesien, das ja nicht nur geografisch geteilt war, auch in der Sprache, in den Köpfen, in den Seelen”, adding so as to be perfectly understood, “In seiner Person wollte ich diese Suche nach der Identität [...] inkarnieren”.²⁵⁶ Although we are only given what amounts to a potted history of Korfanty in *Die erste Polka* there is certainly enough substance to recognise a typical and distinctive Upper Silesian German/Polish border symbiosis at play. The future Polish politician was born Adalbert Korfanty in Laurahütte (Prussian Upper Silesia) in 1873 into a Catholic family favourably disposed towards Germany (Montag records that an uncle wore his Prussian war medals proudly); he spoke German, attended local German schools and studied at the University of Breslau (in German-speaking Lower Silesia). Language, however, was an important marker in the contested territory of Upper Silesia, and it was not unexpected that as a child Korfanty would also learn Polish. His mother had taught him to read Polish using Piotr Skarja’s *Zywoty Swietych* (“Lives of the Saints”), and he had also studied the language secretly as an extracurricular subject, “in einer illegalen polnischen Schülervereinigung” (EP, 112), indicating plainly official Prussian disapproval. Issues of national allegiance in his life were also complicated by religious affiliation. In Upper Silesia over 90% of the population was Catholic. As Brendan Karch points out, this contrasted with the situation in most neighbouring German/Polish borderland regions where Germans were by and large Protestant, and Poles Catholic. “Crucially,” in Upper Silesia,

²⁵⁶ Letter to Chołuj.

however, as Karch puts it “confessional loyalties crossed linguistic lines: German and Polish speakers prayed in the same churches”.²⁵⁷ In *Die erste Polka* Montag notes that Korfanty grew up in the years of the “Kulturkampf” (the Prussian policy of subjecting the Catholic Church to state control), and he speculates that this must have left its mark on the boy. Prussian policy in the region was drawn up in Breslau and Berlin by Protestants who had never really understood the depth and extent of the combined Upper Silesian population’s Catholic faith and heritage. For Montag this was a catastrophe, “das Verhängnis der preußischen Oberschlesien-Politik” (EP, 112).

Montag is fascinated by this confection of transcultural and bilingual experience in what he sees as Korfanty’s conflicted upbringing. For him it was the early influences that mattered: the key to Korfanty’s ultimate choice of allegiance was to be found in his childhood. Weighing up the evidence Montag deduces that Korfanty’s identity decision was not inevitable; it could conceivably have gone either way:

K. war am Anfang so polnisch wie er deutsch war. Oder umgekehrt. Daran gab es keinen Zweifel. Niemand wird begreifen, der nicht in dieser Gegend aufgewachsen ist oder hier längere Zeit gelebt hat, was das bedeutet: polnisch zu sprechen und Deutscher zu sein. Oder umgekehrt: deutsch zu sprechen und Pole zu sein (was freilich viel seltener vorkam) (EP, 113).

Understandably the question of why Korfanty should in fact identify as Polish preoccupies Montag, who is himself struggling with the nature of his own identity. “War es Familie, Erziehung, Geschichte?” he muses, “Waren es die polnischen Lieder, die ihm die Großmutter vorgesungen hatte, die Erzählungen der Bauern beim Kartoffelfeuer an den Herbstabenden, die kleinen roten Hefte mit der *Historia Polski* in 25 Bildern” (EP, 112) that made Korfanty the Polish nationalist he became. Or was it the polarising intolerance of germanising Hakatist²⁵⁸ teachers in Korfanty’s grammar school, “die alles Polnische verächtlich machten” (EP, 38), or

²⁵⁷ Karch, p. 3.

²⁵⁸ Supporters of the *Deutscher Ostmarkenverein* (German Eastern Marches Society) whose goal was the germanisation of Poles living in eastern Prussia.

could it simply have been his enthusiasm for the glory of Poland's past? Montag eventually resolves the identity conundrum in what might appear to be quite simplistic terms. Korfanty had a choice, and taking all things into consideration, he simply opted for Poland; he was a Pole, "weil er ein Pole sein wollte" (EP, 113):

So einfach war das. [...] Da war jemand, der seine Identität suchte, der zwischen Polen und Deutschland gesetzt war, und der sich dann für eine Seite entschieden hat. Weil er es wollte! (EP, 113).

Straightforward though it may seem, to Montag it is a ground-breaking resolution of the vexed question of Korfanty's borderland identity; it is also crucial for him personally in his parallel search for his own identity, made clear in his reaction to his discovery: "Er setzte sich hin und schrieb das erst einmal auf. Er begriff K. jetzt besser. Und auch sich selbst" (EP, 113). For Korfanty's existential identity decision is one he will presently have to make for himself, though not about his nationality—Montag never doubts his German Upper Silesian identity²⁵⁹ (he is a German war veteran, and the holder of an Iron Cross)—but rather regarding his religious and ethnic affiliation.

3.4 THE FICTIONAL FIGURE OF GEORG MONTAG

From the outset Bienek was very clear about the role the fictional Montag would play in *Die erste Polka*. "Die Leidengestalt des Juden im Nazireich ist oft genug in der Literatur nach 1945 dargestellt worden", Bienek claimed in *Beschreibung einer Provinz*, describing how he wished his depiction of Montag to be something quite different, a man whose suppressed Jewish identity becomes more and more dominant the more Jews are persecuted:

Ich möchte mit der Figur Georg Montag etwas ganz anderes: einer, der sein Judentum abgeleugnet (oder besser: verdrängt hat, als Halbjude war es leichter), der aber angesichts

²⁵⁹ According to James E. Bjork, Upper Silesia's Jewish community were "overwhelmingly germanophile". *Neither German nor Pole*, p. 243.

der Judenverfolgungen auf einmal Gemeinsamkeiten entdeckt und zu ihnen gehören will (BP, 36).

Born in Myslowitz in Prussian Upper Silesia to a Jewish father and a Catholic mother, Montag's early childhood influences are Jewish (from his grandfather): he has childhood memories of anti-Semitic insults, and of incidents when victims of pogroms in distant Odessa or Lemberg take refuge in his Silesian home. On his grandfather's death his father converts to Catholicism and is instrumental in suppressing his son's sense of his Jewish origins. He sends him to a Catholic boarding school in Breslau, where his sense of identity is confused and confounded: "ich verstehe das nicht", he tells his father during a school holiday, "jeden Abend beten wir im Konvikt gemeinsam zu Jesus Christus, unserm Herrn, der von den Juden ans Kreuz geschlagen wurde, aber der Großvater hat mir einmal gesagt, Jahwe der Gott der Juden, ist auch dein Gott" (EP, 76). With time, Montag is assimilated into his new faith, marries a Catholic woman and brings up his daughter as a Catholic. So much so that in adulthood he appears genuinely perplexed when he is scolded for being a Jew by a work colleague, and when, as a civil servant in 1937 (the year minority rights legislation in Upper Silesia was annulled), proof of his Aryan credentials is demanded by the authorities. He has never even visited a synagogue. Indeed, during the *Kristallnacht* in Gleiwitz we are given to understand that his revulsion would have perhaps been much greater if a local Catholic church had been destroyed rather than the Gleiwitz synagogue. Yet the more he is confronted with the persecution of Gleiwitz Jews, the more conscious he becomes of his own Jewish heritage. "Niemals zuvor hatte sich Montag als Jude gefühlt. [...] Jetzt aber brach etwas in ihm auf, ein kleiner Furunkel, und er kratzte und rieb und drückte so lange daran herum, bis es ein großes Geschwür war [...]" (EP, 131). Very much like Korfanty, Montag makes an identity choice; after years as a practising Catholic he decides in favour of Judaism. It is his way of acknowledging and sharing the suffering of the Gleiwitz Jews whose persecution now seems unstoppable. But it is 1939 and he has nowhere to turn. He buries what he has written of his Korfanty

biography in the garden outside. Later that night he commits suicide. An integral part of Upper Silesia dies with him, as it had with Korfanty.

But that is not the end of the Montag story. In *Erde und Feuer*, the final novel of the tetralogy, set in January 1945, Montag's biography is dug up by members of the Piontek family as they bury silver cutlery in advance of the arrival in Gleiwitz of the Red Army. A page from the biography dated 30 August 1939 (over 5 years previously) is read out by Willi Wondrak, Valeska Piontek's brother. This provides the reader with a final summation of Montag's long deliberations on the Upper Silesian identity conundrum. As well as reiterating his position on what he believes was Korfanty's rationale for his identity choice, and rehearsing again the reasons for his own identity metamorphosis, Montag also quotes a phrase from the Upper Silesian writer August Scholtis: "*Die Tragödie des Oberschlesiers besteht darin, daß er weder Pole noch Deutscher ist, sondern eben Oberschlesier, und daß ihm in jedem Fall Unrecht getan wird, wenn er Polen oder Deutschland zugeschlagen wird*" (EF, 130), and to this statement he adds what appears to be his own final political declaration: "*Es müßte einen Freistaat O/S geben.*" His final statement is a clear endorsement of Upper Silesian autonomy as a means of solving the province's allegiance issues. Realistically, however, given the players on either side of the border, and what was at stake, independence for Upper Silesia was never on the cards. Ultimately, the conflicted province was marked for oblivion on the portentous night of the Gleiwitz radio station raid on 31 August 1939.

3.5 THE FIGURE OF JOE CHRISTMAS IN FAULKNER'S *LIGHT IN AUGUST*

Montag is a major presence in *Die erste Polka* and has become one of Bienek's most critically acclaimed characters. On his shoulders Bienek places much of the Upper Silesia identity problematic integral to the tetralogy as a whole. As we have seen, Montag's identity is highly conflicted in matters of faith, and in tandem with his faith, his ethnicity: he is half Catholic, half Jew. In his struggle Montag's identity dilemma resembles that of one of the most enigmatic and compelling figures in the

whole Faulkner canon. His name is Joe Christmas, and the identity conflict which goes to the heart of his being concerns not his religion but rather his race, as represented by the colour of his skin. His central dilemma is: is he black or white?

From the outset an acknowledgement: comparing Bienek's Georg Montag to Faulkner's Joe Christmas in most other respects would be an extremely difficult undertaking (as we shall see, wherever Christmas goes as an adult, antagonism and violence ensue). Nevertheless, that Bienek was influenced in his depiction of Georg Montag (and indeed Wojciech Korfanty) by Faulkner's protagonist seems clear. In Montag's struggle for selfhood, particularly, there are undeniable parallels with the identity-conflict dynamic which also defines the figure of Joe Christmas. Perhaps the first thing to say on this point is that Bienek was extremely conversant with Faulkner in general, and with *Light in August* in particular (by 1978 he claimed to have read "den ganzen übersetzten Faulkner") (TB, 90), and when working on *Septemberlicht* he admitted reaching for Faulkner to get him into the right frame of mind before settling down to write. "Ich lese Faulkners Licht im August", he noted, "in dem ich immer ein paar Seiten lese, bevor ich anfangen zu schreiben. Das stimmt mich ein".²⁶⁰ Indeed *Light in August* was to become a lifelong preoccupation; even in his final years Bienek stood firm with the novel. "Weiter im Faulkner gelesen, Licht im August", he wrote in a diary entry on 18.02.1987, "Fasziniert mich stark. Das ist so anregend" (TB, 1232). Given his professed agenda for *Die erste Polka*, he had every incentive to engage with *Light in August*: it seems clear that the central trope of identity—vacillating, always uncertain—dominating Faulkner's narrative could not have escaped the consciousness of a man whose intention for the Gleiwitz novels was to reproduce in a literary memorial the concept of the inner turmoil inherent in the Upper Silesian's quest for identity, "die Zerrissenheit der oberschlesische Seele" (BP, 55) as Bienek termed it once (on that occasion in relation specifically to Montag). It seems clear that in *Light in*

²⁶⁰ Horst Bienek, "Verschiedene Materialien zur Polka", Horst-Bienek-Archiv, Biw 31,2, p. 57.

August he had found a remarkable analogue of the conflicted identity he was so keen to replicate in the hearts and minds of the Upper Silesian people.

It is important to say, however, that unlike Bienek's Upper Silesia the representation of identity we encounter in Faulkner's Mississippi is predominantly a binary issue, a mutually exclusive choice between black and white, and to all appearances "blood"-based: in *Light in August* there are persistent references to white blood and black blood as a metaphorical racial signifier. In one incident in the novel, for example, Joe Christmas is assaulted by an unnamed stranger who can scarcely believe his victim is black: "*We'll find out*" he remarks, as he strikes Christmas one more time. "*We'll see if his blood is black*" (LA, 161). In Bienek's Upper Silesia, however, the issue of identity comes across as much more complex and nuanced, determined by such variables as national affiliation (German, Polish, even "Upper Silesian"), by religious confession (Catholic, Protestant, Jewish), and by language (German, Polish, *Schlonsak/Wasserpolnisch*). And of course, the Upper Silesian border identity also tended to shift and evolve in accordance with the pragmatism demanded by prevailing political and social circumstances. With the figures of Wojciech Korfanty and Georg Montag in *Die erste Polka* Bienek presents the reader with two similar—yet in their distinctions quite different—identity narratives, each from discrete Upper Silesian periods. The period prior to the 1922 division of the province is represented by Korfanty, the period thereafter by Georg Montag. It is clear in Bienek's construct that the 1933 Nazi accession of power has changed Upper Silesia, in particular that the National Socialists' radical Germanisation programme, anti-Polish bias, and virulent hatred of Jews has profoundly unsettled the province's traditional and relatively stable sense of identity since the 1922 division²⁶¹ (live and let live, adapt to changing circumstances

²⁶¹ See Sebastian Mrozek: "Die Eingriffe v.a. „externer Faktoren“ zerstörten in seiner [Bieneks] Darstellung die jahrhundertealte, relative stabile Koexistenz der polnisch- und deutschsprachigen Oberschlesier samt des jüdischen Bevölkerungsanteils". Sebastian Mrozek, 'Horst Bienek's "Gleiwitzer Tetralogie – eine provokante Literarisierung Oberschlesiens', *CONVIVIUM: Germanistisches Jahrbuch Polen*, Bonn: DAAD (2001), 155-171 (p. 168).

for the sake of a peaceful and prosperous existence, learn to be pragmatic). For Upper Silesians, both Polish and German, the Nazis are relentless and dangerous identity disrupters. For the province's Jews, however, they are also the harbingers and perpetrators of destruction and death: Judaism for National Socialism was not primarily a religion or a culture, but a *race*: in its terms it was blood that mattered (just as it did for the white Mississippi supremacists in *Light in August*).

Joe Christmas himself is a violent and alienated Mississippi drifter and bootlegger in *Light in August* whose mother (who died in childbirth) was white, but whose late father's race was never established. However, several childhood experiences in an orphanage and as an adopted son have instilled doubt in the boy's mind about his racial identity, and have corrupted his understanding of the nature of justice and punishment. As an orphan his virulently racist and demented grandfather, known as Doc Hines, suggests to him (without evidence) that the boy is black. This opinion is subsequently "corroborated" by a dietician in the Memphis orphanage where he lives, whom he accidentally discovers having sex with a medical intern; the outraged and fearful woman, again without evidence, brands him a "little nigger bastard!" (LA, 90) and subsequently, confounding his expectation of punishment, unsuccessfully offers him a bribe not to divulge what he has witnessed (in fact the five-year-old has not understood what he has seen). As well as filling him with doubt about his heritage, this early formative experience triggers what is to develop into a dangerously unhealthy and intensely ambivalent attitude towards women. Anxious that he is removed from the institution, the dietician briefs the matron on her suspicions about the child's race, and he is eventually adopted by Simon McEachern, a farmer who knows nothing of his (supposed) racial background. McEachern, a fanatical Calvinist, repeatedly and brutally punishes Joe for failing to learn his catechism. With heavy-handed discipline Joe knows where he stands. As a consequence, he learns to repulse McEachern's wife's well-meant acts of goodwill and hospitality, "[...] that soft kindness which he believed himself

doomed to be forever victim of and which he hated worse than he did the hard and ruthless justice of men” (LA, 124). At eighteen Joe Christmas flees his adoptive parents; as Faulkner puts it, he enters, “the street which was to run for fifteen years” (LA, 164). It remains unclear whether he kills McEachern in their final meeting. At the age of 33 Christmas arrives in Jefferson, Mississippi. Subsequently, in an act of brutality he murders his white lover Joanna Burden with whom he has become involved in a mutually abusive relationship, and who, against his will, attempts to define for him his racial identity. He is murdered for the crime in horrific circumstances by Percy Grimm, a white supremacist national guardsman, meaningfully dubbed by Faulkner, speaking at the University of Virginia some years after the publication of *Light in August*, as a “Nazi Storm Trooper”²⁶² (“I wrote that book in 1932 before I’d ever heard of Hitler’s Storm Troopers”, Faulkner quipped).²⁶³

3.6 THE IDENTITY OF JOE CHRISTMAS

Christmas can pass for white but must live his life never knowing whether he possesses any “black” blood (meaning, in Mississippi parlance, never knowing whether he is black or white). While he wrestles compulsively with the dilemma, it is ultimately a futile exercise: he can never know, and neither can the reader, as the novel itself provides no definitive answer. Faulkner explained Christmas’s identity predicament and its consequences in an interview at the University of Virginia: “I think that was his tragedy—he didn’t know what he was, and so he was nothing. He deliberately evicted himself from the human race because he didn’t know which he was”.²⁶⁴ Nevertheless, being “nothing” was not an option for Joe Christmas, and his search for self-identity transpires to be obsessive and unrelenting. On that “street which was to run for fifteen years”, and during his

²⁶² *Faulkner in the University*, edited by Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner, Charlottesville and London: The University Press of Virginia, 1995, p. 41. (Ironically, Percy Grimm is not the kind of Nazi individual the reader predominantly encounters in Bienek’s *Gleitwitz*.)

²⁶³ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

subsequent period in Jefferson thoughts of his indeterminate identity preoccupy his consciousness, engendering bizarre behaviour that presents as markedly liminal. Among blacks, for example, he aggressively claims to be white, among whites, black. "Sometimes", the narrator tells us, "he would remember how he had once tricked or teased white men into calling him a negro in order to fight them or be beaten, now he fought the negro who called him white" (LA, 166). He is "betwixt and between" and refuses to act exclusively as either a black man or a white man, as is traditionally demanded in the Southern states. After his capture in Mottstown following the murder of Joanna Burden, gossip in the town emphasises this stubborn recalcitrance: "'He never acted like either a nigger or a white man. That was it. That was what made the folks so mad'" (LA, 259-260).

However, for Faulkner, Joe Christmas is not simply an aggressor; in some ways he is also a victim. His inability to identify as either black or white (and it is his practice to divulge his (imagined) equivocal racial heritage to numerous protagonists in the novel)²⁶⁵ dictates that he is *de rigueur* black (with all that that implies) in the eyes of a Southern community who determine race in purely dichotomous terms: any other interpretation would threaten the supremacy of the (white) status quo. As Rebecca Nisetich puts it, "In Jefferson, trouble begins when racial ambiguity [...] disrupt[s] whiteness."²⁶⁶ One drop of black blood is enough, and in Yoknapatawpha County being black is a generic byword for degeneracy, dissipation, criminality, and baseness. Certainly, Joanna Bundren's murder is the catalyst that ultimately confirms Christmas's black identity for the people of Yoknapatawpha. That the black community in general should be considered the embodiment of these characteristics is of course nonsensical, nevertheless the myth is so pervasive that

²⁶⁵ For example, to his first lover, Bobbie Allen, a waitress and part-time prostitute, who early in their relationship believed he was a foreigner: "'I think I got some nigger blood in me' [...] 'I dont know. I believe I have'" (LA, 145).

²⁶⁶ Rebecca Nisetich, 'When Difference Becomes Dangerous: Intersectional Identity Formation and the Protective Cover of Whiteness in Faulkner's *Light in August*', *The Faulkner Journal*, 31.1 (2019), 43-66 (p. 48).

Joe Christmas appears to adopt it himself as a means of resolving his racial identity crisis (or rather, as Lee Jenkins suggests, he acquiesces to, “a mythic conception” of his blackness: “That is what life in the community requires of him as the defiling black one, insofar as such life reflects the operation of psychohistorical determinants that govern black-white behaviour in society”).²⁶⁷ On his way to Mottstown, Christmas muses on “[...] the black shoes smelling of negro” he had swapped with a woman earlier, “that mark on his ankles the gauge definite and ineradicable of the black tide creeping up his legs, moving from his feet upward as death moves” (LA, 252), which appears to symbolise Christmas’s acceptance of his blackness. It is a portentous decision and can be seen as marking the end of Christmas’s liminal quest to settle the issue of his identity. On the run following Joanna’s murder, he allows himself (to all intents and purposes) to be captured, “as though he had set out and made his plans to passively commit suicide” (LA, 329). In the end he is ritually murdered and castrated as an archetypal, true-to-myth black man by the fanatically racist national guardsman Percy Grimm. In particular, Bienek was impressed with the powerful and intense unfolding of Christmas’s inescapable fate, preferring the novel for this reason to Faulkner’s later work *The Unvanquished*:

Faulkner: Die Unbesiegten beendet. Diese barbarische, archaische Welt des Südens (während des Bürgerkriegs) durch die Perspektive der Kinder Bayard [sic] + Ringo gemildert. [...] – Freilich, die Wucht, das mit unerbittlicher Konsequenz ablaufende Verhängnis, die geradezu antikische Verdammnis großartiger in Licht im August oder Sound & Fury (TB, 255).

3.7 THE AGENCY OF GEORG MONTAG

Joe Christmas might well have resolved his sense of self, but it is an endured settlement that has to a degree been thrust upon him. In essence he submits to

²⁶⁷ Lee Jenkins, *Faulkner and Black-White Relations: A Psychoanalytic Approach*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1981, p. 96. Olga Vickery also speaks of “the gradual identification of the individual, Joe Christmas, with this public myth”. Olga W. Vickery, ‘The Shadow and the Mirror: *Light in August*’, *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Light in August: A Collection of Critical Essays*, edited by David L. Minter, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall (1969), 25-41 (p. 33).

history and to the dictated myth of the white Mississippi population. This is not the case with Georg Montag: in the course of *Die erste Polka* Montag is able to resolve his identity struggle not by succumbing to what is expected of him as Joe Christmas does, but by defiantly embracing it. He has meticulously followed the identity journey of his fellow Upper Silesian Wojciech Korfanty, and deduced that identity is not preordained, but rather a political-existential matter of personal choice. At a time of virulent anti-Semitic persecution, then, he himself makes a conscious decision after a lifetime of Catholic worship to identify as Jewish. “So wollen sie einen Juden haben”, he muses at one stage during his inner struggle, “Er war bereit, sich darin einzurichten” (EP, 132). There is an undoubted sense of agency here; his death is not a submission to his fate. As Anne Fuchs puts it, his acceptance of Judaism is, “eine bewusste Identitätswahl”, which she asserts can be understood, “als privater Akt des Widerstands gegenüber der nationalsozialistischen Barbarei”.²⁶⁸

3.8 GEORG MONTAG AND GOODHUE COLDFIELD (*ABSALOM, ABSALOM!*)

Montag's decision to barricade himself into his home in *Die erste Polka*, and his tragic death by his own hand have an unmistakable precedent in the Faulkner canon. Following his late-night conversation with Josel Piontek (Montag had been severely unnerved by the boy haplessly asking him if he was a Jew), the retired magistrate decides to secure his home by nailing up his door and windows:

Wenn er weg ist, nagel ich die Fenster und die Tür von innen zu, dachte der Alte (EP, 340).

It is an attempt to achieve total physical and spiritual withdrawal from what has become a desperately dangerous environment. Later that night he commits suicide when the military police unpropitiously arrive at Valeska Piontek's home in search of Feldwebel Metzmacher and Irma's new soldier husband Heiko Birkner, both

²⁶⁸ Fuchs, p. 108.

billeted with the Pionteks (it appears Montag erroneously believed the police were coming for him).

The retired magistrate's resolve to barricade his home, and his tragic death by his own hand were, however, not original plot devices from Bienek's imagination. Rather, the incidents derived from Faulkner's arguably most powerful critique of the Civil War-era South, *Absalom, Absalom!* In this work Goodhue Coldfield, a store-keeper and Methodist steward in 1860s Mississippi, acts out a comparable course of action—albeit from different motives—when secession from the Union, and Civil War threaten. The curious and tragic Coldfield story is outlined in the novel by Mr Jason Compson (III), one of several narrators of *Absalom, Absalom!* Coldfield is, unusually, a white Southerner who rejects much of the Southern code of ethics; an individual “who owned neither land nor slaves except two house servants whom he had freed as soon as he got them” (AA, 20), and someone who guards his good name jealously, “a man with a name for absolute and undeviating and even Puritan uprightness in a country and time of lawless opportunity [...]” (AA, 43). Crucially he identifies as a Unionist—not a popular political affiliation for a white Southerner to hold in Jefferson, Mississippi—and argues against secession from the Union; when Mississippi secedes in 1861 he will take no part in the war against the United States, maintaining that for the South the war meant, “paying the price for having erected its economic edifice not on the rock of stern morality but on the shifting sands of opportunism and moral brigandage” (AA, 260). Refusing to sell any goods to the military, he permanently closes his store, and he and his daughter Rosa move to the back of his house, the front door locked, and the front shutters closed and fastened. It is the beginning of a permanent personal withdrawal. When the store is broken into and looted by Confederate troops, Coldfield voluntarily mounts the stairs to his attic, with the intention of never again leaving the room:

That night he mounted to the attic with his hammer and his handful of nails and nailed the door behind him and threw the hammer out of the window (AA, 82).

The act is instantly reminiscent of Georg Montag's tentative decision to withdraw when he has buried his Korfanty manuscripts:

Er beschloß, das Haus nicht mehr zu verlassen.

Er wollte es jedenfalls probieren (EP 265).

Total withdrawal is Coldfield's way of renouncing the Southern code and his times, but it is a perilous action and it puts him in great danger: he is avoiding the Southern draft, and if discovered would have been shot or hung without trial by Confederate provost marshals. After three years nailed up in his attic Coldfield stops accepting the food which his daughter clandestinely delivers to him at night, and in the penultimate year of the war takes his own life by starving himself to death.

In *Absalom, Absalom!* Coldfield is representative of the few who question the principles on which the South was built, and despite his status as a minor figure in the novel his significance was clearly compelling to Bienek. While there is no reference to Coldfield specifically in Bienek's secondary writings, we do know that the author was familiar with *Absalom, Absalom!* In his diary Bienek spoke fulsomely of the novel in broad-brush terms: "[...] jenes Erschrecken, jene Ernsthaftigkeit, jene Mythisierung, jene Überhöhung, jene fantastische und genaue röntgenhafte Psychologie..." (TB, 287),²⁶⁹ and perhaps it was no coincidence that the novel was one of the few books Bienek anticipated he would take with him when, to avoid distraction during the writing of *Die erste Polka*, he decamped from his home in Ottobrunn to an isolated tower in Sommerhausen (BP, 63). In any case, in his portrayal of Georg Montag Bienek appropriates the store-keeper's moral compulsion to voluntarily withdraw from an increasingly radicalised political environment, as well as his decision to take his own life. He creatively reworks

²⁶⁹ These comments referred also to *Light in August* and *The Sound and the Fury*. Diary entry of 15.9.1981. (TB, 287).

Faulkner's Southern context (slavery, political upheaval, the inevitable Civil War) into an Upper Silesian one (the persecution of Jews and ethnic minorities, consolidation of Nazi power, war with Poland). But what are we to make of the appropriation? Firstly, I believe it was a way of honouring Faulkner: it does not subvert or parody the hypotext, rather it commends it. Secondly, though in most other respects Coldfield is not an obvious counterpart for Georg Montag, the parallels that do exist between the two men's situations establish a compelling connection between Upper Silesia and the American South. They are very different worlds, Bienek's and Faulkner's; nevertheless, the underlying racial, political and military situations in the two territories appear recognisably analogous. The intertextual appropriation is a way of saying that Mississippi, as specifically constructed by Faulkner, is an admissible model by which Upper Silesia can better be understood. In this way Montag's predicament can be seen in a new context, in a sense highlighting its transnational (and even universal) value.²⁷⁰

3.9 IRMA PIONTEK AND FAULKNER'S *THE SOUND AND THE FURY*

Georg Montag took the initiative when it came to self-definition: he refused to submit to an identity profile that no longer appeared appropriate to his current situation. His identity decision was an act of volition, an ethical and political choice at a time of great stress—and one which proved that personal identity was not necessarily fixed; rather it was a dynamic process subject to flux and transition. And yet in Bienek's Gleiwitz not many Upper Silesians are typically capable of Montag's approach. Some do make the attempt; however, it is not an undertaking for the faint-hearted. In Bienek's construct the making of identity choices in Upper Silesia is to struggle against the forces of history and politics, the region's deeply ingrained borderland mentality, the precepts of the Church; in short it is to struggle against the symbolic pull of the mythical and "enslaving" Upper Silesian black earth (EP,

²⁷⁰ It must be said, however, that if the reader is unaware of the connection between the hypertext and the Faulkner hypotext—the relationship between Coldfield and Montag is unacknowledged in *Die erste Polka*—a layer of deeper understanding may well be forfeited.

361), which demands submission, pragmatism, suffering and quiescence. Or, put another way, it is a struggle against Upper Silesian fate, as Joe Christmas's was a struggle against Southern fate. Few Silesians, however, are equal to the endeavour. One figure who initially rebels, but who ultimately submits to a kind of preordained Upper Silesian destiny is Irma Piontek, the troubled daughter of Leo Maria and Valeska Piontek whose personal narrative spans all four Gleiwitz novels. Again it is notable that an enhanced understanding of a Bienek protagonist can be achieved by means of comparison with a figure from Faulkner: in the case of Irma the comparison is with Candace (Caddy) Compson from *The Sound and the Fury*. Following my consideration of Bienek's reception of *The Sound and the Fury* and a summary of how the novel impacts in general on the Gleiwitz tetralogy, I will argue that Caddy's influence on Irma is so significant that without her, Irma, as she is depicted in *Die erste Polka* and *Septemberlicht*, is pretty much inconceivable.

3.10 FAULKNER'S *THE SOUND AND THE FURY*

Bienek turned time and time again to Faulkner's second Yoknapatawpha novel, *The Sound and The Fury* (1929) (the first was *Sartoris* which also appeared in 1929). First published in Germany in 1956 as *Schall und Wahn* its modernist credentials were highlighted in a FAZ review by Erich Franzen who described it as, "der erste und künstlerisch gelungenste Versuch Faulkners, nach der Zerstörung des konventionellen Romanschemas durch James Joyce eine neue Form der Epik zu schaffen".²⁷¹ It was certainly an unconventional novel and quickly gained a reputation for being obscure and confusing, with its multiple narrators, timelines, and perspectives. Many readers on both sides of the Atlantic were left a little adrift by the novel. Walter Yust, in an early US review (1929), complained about the work in the following terms:

²⁷¹ William Faulkner: "Schall und Wahn", *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 19.05.1956.

Mr. Faulkner has the privilege of writing his novels as he chooses. It's none of my business. It is my business, however, to decide for myself when I wish to submit to a novelist's willfulness and his laborious attempt to play a game with me—to keep me puzzled by leaving out names of personalities and by scrambling incidents so that I am unable to follow any recognizable sequence.²⁷²

And in Germany Ingeborg Bachmann commented in a similar vein in her fourth Frankfurt lecture, "Der Umgang mit Namen". "Ich glaube fast, es wird kaum jemand gelingen, sich je ganz und gar zurechtzufinden in dem Gewebe des Buchs [...], weil die Behandlung der Zeit durch William Faulkner dies erschwert – in dem Buch wird zwischen drei Zeiten andauernd hin- und hergesprungen [...]", she announced.²⁷³ But it was the perplexing issue of names that exercised her most:

Nicht hier liegt die eigentliche Schwierigkeit, weil wir mit Texten, die die chronologische Zeit nicht mehr zum Muster haben, längst vertraut sind, sondern weil wir völlig im Stich gelassen werden beim Griff nach dem Namen. [...] Da gibt es zweimal den Namen Caddy, einmal mit y geschrieben, einmal mit ie; zweimal den Namen Jason, zweimal den Namen Quentin, einmal als männlichen, einmal als weiblichen Vornamen.²⁷⁴

Bienek, however, was having none of this, and suggested a way of demystifying the narrative, or at least of ameliorating the confusion, by the simple expedient of rearranging the reading order of the four sections of the novel (a measure which might well have derived from his reading of Malcolm Cowley).²⁷⁵ "Lese Faulkners *Schall und Wahl* wieder", Bienek wrote in *Beschreibung einer Provinz*, "und entdecke mit Erstaunen und Bewunderung, wie ›einfach‹ das Ganze geschrieben ist – wenn man das erste Kapitel erst am Schluß liest: das verwirrt nämlich auf eine äußerst raffinierte und kunstvolle Weise" (BP, 31). This procedure certainly helps to

²⁷² Walter Yust, 'Of Making Many Books', in *William Faulkner: A Literary Companion*, edited by Nicholas Fagnoli, New York: Pegasus Books (2008), 32-34 (pp. 33-34).

²⁷³ Ingeborg Bachmann: 'Der Umgang mit Namen', *Frankfurter Vorlesungen: Probleme zeitgenössischer Dichtung*, Munich: R. Piper (1984), 62-78 (p. 75).

²⁷⁴ Ibid, pp. 75-76.

²⁷⁵ Cowley: "[...] we can't be sure that the four sections of the novel are presented in the most effective order; at any rate, we can't fully understand the first section until we have read the three that follow". *A Second Flowering*, p. 148.

clarify some of the obscurity, especially surrounding the events described in the first section narrated by Benjy. Nevertheless, Bienek's suggestion is not foolproof; whatever way it is approached *The Sound and the Fury* is a daunting and challenging novel and requires considerable effort on the part of the reader to become fully intelligible. And yet, however much Bienek admired Faulkner's modernist time-disrupting narrative structure, and his pervasive obscurity in *The Sound and the Fury*, he was not inclined to emulate these aspects of style in his own Gleiwitz novels: the tetralogy is for the most part clearly narrated (Bienek called his style "eine tradierte, [...] eine epische Erzähl-Form"),²⁷⁶ and despite numerous flashbacks and memory sequences in all four novels, Bienek's narrative is linear in its timelines, and his writing is predominantly clear and intelligible. As we shall see, the influence of *The Sound and the Fury* was to be exerted on the tetralogy mainly in the characterisation of Irma Piontek, the 19-year-old daughter of Leo Maria and Valeska Piontek.

3.11 AN OUTLINE OF *THE SOUND AND THE FURY*

The Sound and The Fury has as its subject matter the inexorable collapse of the Compson clan, an erstwhile prosperous and aristocratic (in the looser Southern plantation meaning of the word) Mississippi family, now financially and morally on its uppers. The collapse of family can of course be viewed symptomatically as an integral stage in the on-going collapse of the South following Civil War defeat. The head of the family is Jason Compson III, a lawyer with an alcohol use disorder, whose Calvinist wife Caroline suffers from illness anxiety (her ailments remain indeterminate). The couple have four children, Candace (Caddy)—who in the course of the novel gives birth to a daughter—and three sons, Benjy, Quentin, and Jason IV (the last named after his father); the three sons are the narrators of the first three sections of the novel. The concluding section is recounted by an authorial third-person narrator. Each of the four sections is set on a single day (Bienek was

²⁷⁶ Hinck, p. 31.

surely influenced by this—as we know three of the four Gleiwitz novels similarly take place on a single day);²⁷⁷ Benjy's section is set on 07 April 1928, Quentin's eighteen years earlier on 02 June 1910, Jason's on 06 April 1928,²⁷⁸ and the concluding section two days later on 08 April 1928.

The three brothers could scarcely be more different. Benjy is a man of thirty-three with severe intellectual disability (he has the mental age of a three-year-old). Quentin is a student at Harvard, fixated in a patriarchal "Southern" way with his sister Caddy's sexual honour, who at the same time harbours an incestuous love for her; he commits suicide at the end of the eventful day he narrates. Jason, a racist, is a mean and avaricious businessman, who when his father dies becomes the titular head of the Compson family. He cheats and lies his way through the events of the day he describes. The three are extremely interesting characters in their own right, and are portrayed with exemplary psychological depth, but they are not the main focus of this study; rather in terms of characterisation it is to Caddy Compson and to a lesser extent her transgressive daughter Miss Quentin (confusingly named after her late undergraduate uncle) we must turn in any consideration of *The Sound and the Fury's* influence on Bienek's writing. I am referring here specifically to Irma Piontek, who, without the influence of Caddy Compson, I will argue, would have been an altogether different character in the Gleiwitz tetralogy.

Caddy and Miss Quentin are central to *The Sound and the Fury*. In the Jean Stein interview mentioned above Faulkner had described the novel as "a tragedy of two lost women: Caddy and her daughter",²⁷⁹ and while neither woman is given a narratorial role—we can thus never pin down exactly what they think and believe—we learn a great deal about the two women through the eyes of the four narrators. Nevertheless, the choice of narrators represents a particularly asymmetrical

²⁷⁷ See Ahrens, p. 117: "In den Bänden 1-3 der Tetralogie ist die Handlung ebenfalls auf einen Tag fixiert."

²⁷⁸ 06 April 1928 is Good Friday. As it happens *Zeit ohne Glocken* is also set on Good Friday (1943).

²⁷⁹ *Writers at Work*, p. 130.

gendered narrative arrangement: in the case of Quentin and Jason the two women are viewed through extremely discriminatory eyes. Quentin adheres compulsively and blindly to the social and sexual mores of the disappearing aristocratic South (“I at least revealed a blundering sense of noblesse oblige by getting myself born below Mason and Dixon” (SF, 76), he muses at one stage in his narrative), and his great gripe is that Caddy cares so little for patriarchal Southern codes of female purity and subservience; in particular he judges the loss of her virginity at seventeen, and her promiscuity following the break-up of her relationship with her lover Dalton Ames, as a matter of the utmost shame for the Compson family. But Caddy is a complex and conflicted figure, and while she certainly rebels against the constraints of her Southern Calvinist heritage and etiquette (especially its debilitating concept of honour regarding the role of women in society promulgated by her mother) she is simultaneously depicted as a kind and compassionate person, who cares deeply both for Quentin and for Benjy (one commentator is correct when he claims she is the only Compson, “capable of giving herself to love and to life”).²⁸⁰ However, when she learns she is pregnant (probably by Ames) and realises she will have to marry—it appears as a pragmatic decision, but nonetheless a capitulation—her journey of resistance essentially ends. She ultimately succumbs to the pressure of traditional, stultifying Southern patriarchy, as exemplified in its various aspects by her family.

While making sense of actions, motives and outcomes in *The Sound and the Fury* is notoriously difficult, and often subject to surmise and individual interpretation, I concur here with Eileen Gregory’s assessment that Caddy, at the end of her relationship with Ames, has “in despair accepted Quentin’s suggestion that her femininity is corrupt at the source: she tells Quentin, at the close of her affair with Dalton Ames, “I’m bad anyway you cant help it” [...], fatalistically acknowledging

²⁸⁰ Edmond L. Volpe, *A Reader’s Guide to William Faulkner*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1964, p. 99.

her precious womanhood to be corrupt and damned”.²⁸¹ It is as if the ideology of the patriarchy, and even fate itself, dictate she can have no individual identity, but must conform to a predetermined model of womanhood. She marries a man who is not her baby’s father; before long, her husband divorces her. She is now effectively banished from returning to the family home, where her name, on her mother’s instruction, is no longer permitted to be spoken. Worse than this, Caddy now without agency, appears unable to prevent the removal of her baby to her former home, where the child will be brought up by the Compson family. She appears to have accepted Southern white patriarchal rule.

At this stage one aspect of Faulkner’s depiction of Caddy Compson must be mentioned, as it impacts significantly upon the discussion of Irma Piontek which will follow. It is Caddy’s repeated insistence in *The Sound and the Fury* that she has (metaphorically) “died” or is already “dead”. This motif is deployed by Faulkner in several ways. On occasion it is used as a euphemism for having a full sexual relationship. For Caddy sexual experience with Dalton Ames—whom she loves—certainly appears to be a (welcome) kind of “dying”; this at least is one way of interpreting her outburst to her brother Quentin regarding Ames: “I would die for him I’ve already died for him I die for him over and over again” (SF, 127). The relationship with Ames ends, however, when he leaves Jefferson; when her brother Quentin questions her about her many other lovers, “*did you love them Caddy did you love them*”, he recalls her answer as being, “*When they touched me I died*” (SF, 125)²⁸², where “died” in this instance appears—though nothing is written in stone with Faulkner—to be a synonym for being repulsed by sex. This would indicate her unhappiness with these additional sexual encounters, and her sense of guilt. (At this point her compulsive promiscuity appears to frighten her, for example when

²⁸¹ Eileen Gregory, ‘Caddy Compson’s World’, in: *The Merrill Studies in The Sound and the Fury*, edited by James B. Meriwether, Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill (1970), 89-101 (p. 100). (Subsequently referred to as “Gregory”).

²⁸² Faulkner often uses italicisation for the purposes of emphasis.

she speaks of her wantonness as, “*something terrible in me sometimes at night I could see it grinning at me I could see it through them grinning at me through their faces*”) (SF, 94). In a further use of the motif, Caddy uses the concept of dying and being dead to communicate the true nature of her compelling personal and social situation. Now pregnant, she must seriously consider marriage as a means of restoring the reputation of her family. The erstwhile nonconformist appears preoccupied with avoiding scandal:

What else can I think about what else have I thought about [...] I can't even cry I died last year I told you I had but I didn't know then what I meant I didn't know what I was saying [...] But now I know I'm dead I tell you (SF, 104).

Caddy again views herself as effectively dead, but it is clear that the meaning of the motif has evolved since the days when she claimed she would willingly “die” for Dalton Ames. Dawn Trouard put it this way: “[...] sexual passion, so like dying in its annihilation of self, has been translated into social dying [...]”.²⁸³ In fact, it could also be judged, as Eileen Gregory puts it, as a “spiritual death”.²⁸⁴ In any case, in the light of her pregnancy, Caddy realises that she must now conform, and in effect unceremoniously surrenders to the repressive Southern status quo she had previously flouted. Her attempt to establish for herself a meaningful identity inimical to her community (while she lives within it) has failed.

3.12 THE FIGURE OF IRMA PIONTEK

In terms of influence on the Gleiwitz tetralogy Caddy Compson was for Bienek the most significant protagonist in *The Sound and the Fury*, and she was to provide him with a proximate template for Irma Piontek, the archetypical Gleiwitz protagonist whose ill-fated history straddles all four Gleiwitz novels. Two themes connecting the two fictional women are apparent: one was the early code-breaking aspects of

²⁸³ ‘Faulkner’s Text Which Is Not One’. In: *New Essays on The Sound and the Fury*, edited by Noel Polk, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1993), 23-69 (p. 43).

²⁸⁴ Gregory, p. 101.

their respective young lives, the second their eventual capitulation in the face of family, societal and, it must also be said (as Eileen Gregory states above of Caddy's situation) of fatalistic pressures. That Bienek envisaged a connection between the two women appears most clear in the author's obvious replication in Irma's speech and thoughts (over three of the novels) of Caddy's repeated insistence in Faulkner's novel that she has died or is already dead. Irma Piontek's similar insistent perspective that she too is "dead" was therefore not an original Bienek motif, but rather an intertextual appropriation from Faulkner, intended to illuminate Irma's situation emphatically as an Upper Silesian woman in this turbulent historical period.

The 19-year-old Irma Piontek is a complex figure in the tetralogy, an obsessive woman prone to considerable mental stress, in her own way as "lost" as Caddy Compson. Yet, while the narrative of *Die erste Polka* revolves around her precipitous marriage to Heiko Birkner, an outsider to the province billeted in her family home (she has scarcely known him for more than a few days), our understanding of what motivates her actions and decisions is initially indistinct. What we do know, however, is that Bienek's representation in *Die erste Polka* of this young woman until her submission is like that of Faulkner's Caddy Compson, a narrative of non-conformism. To her cousin Andreas, Irma is a cold fish, "[e]ine seltsame Person" (EP, 157), who shuts herself up in her bedroom, and talks to no one. There is certainly considerable conflict with her mother over the approaching wedding. Valeska is against the marriage (Josel believes the forthcoming wedding to be Irma's way of "punishing" her mother, for what we don't yet know), and she also opposes her daughter's choice of a civil rather than a religious ceremony (Irma is not enamoured of the Catholic Church). However, in *Die erste Polka* there is little indication of the deep mental trauma she displays in later novels; rather, the emphasis is on her recalcitrance and her hostile demeanour, the tools she uses in her attempts to forge an independent and meaningful identity. In *Septemberlicht*

Valeska is shocked that an *Arbeitsdienst* spade hangs on her bedroom wall, “wo andere Leute eine Kruzifix hängen haben” (SL, 286).²⁸⁵ The spade, however, is not necessarily indicative of Irma’s political leanings; rather, she relishes the fact that it disconcerts visitors (which it does when Valeska and the archpriest Pattas visit her room). Further marks of her hostility towards her mother in *Die erste Polka* encompass her dressing for her wedding in her *Arbeitsdienst-Uniform* (this cuts Valeska deeply), and pointedly denying her mother the traditional Upper Silesian valedictory embrace between a bride and her mother for which Valeska yearns.

In *Septemberlicht* Irma’s motivations become clearer, though it is admittedly a protracted process. In an lengthy interior monologue at her father’s funeral (the kind of direct presentation Faulkner refuses Caddy in *The Sound and The Fury*), she obsesses about an incident before her wedding which has caused her distress and guilt (in a commentary on *Septemberlicht* Bienek called it “eine furchtbare, erschreckende Wahrheit”).²⁸⁶ Standing at her father’s graveside the unspecified incident is so distressing that Irma wishes she too were dead. It is a scene clearly reminiscent of a comparable event in *The Sound and the Fury* where Caddy, accompanied by her brother Jason (who is the narrator of this section), similarly stands at her father’s graveside following his funeral; nearby is the grave of her older brother Quentin. Here are the two graveside snippets:

Irma dachte: Es wäre besser, ich würde an seiner Statt dort liegen, verschlossen im Sarg (SL, 100).

‘[...] You’d be better off if you were down there with him and Quentin,’ I [Jason] says. ‘Do you know that?’

‘I know it,’ she [Caddy] says (SF, 173).

²⁸⁵ The *Arbeitsdienst* or *Reichsarbeitsdienst* was a Nazi organisation formed in 1935 to recruit young adults—typically for six months—to provide manual labour for the state. The organisation, whose emblem included an image of a spade and two ears of grain, was also used as a means of promoting National Socialist ideology.

²⁸⁶ Horst Bienek, *Einführung in die Lesung*.

This might well present as an attempt on Bienek's part to establish intertextually an early point of connection between Irma Piontek and Caddy Compson, and their personal situations. In any event what is not in doubt is that the ever-present motif of "being dead" in *Septemberlicht* clearly derives from Faulkner, and that it represents a compelling association between the two figures. At the end of her graveyard monologue in *Septemberlicht*, Irma—just like Caddy in *The Sound and the Fury*—claims to be already dead ("ich stehe hier [...], mitten unter den Lebenden, und dabei weiß ich, daß ich tot bin...") (SL, 102), and Chapter 24 of the novel actually opens with her single line interior monologue, "*Ich weiß, daß ich tot bin*" (SL, 261), italicised for added emphasis. Later in the chapter, again obsessing about her (undisclosed) misdemeanour, Irma reiterates in another italicised interior monologue the same assertion: "*ich bin ja schon tot, ich weiß, daß ich tot bin*" (SL, 275). We must wait, however, until the end of *Septemberlicht* for any revelation of what has happened, though there are clues throughout the narrative that the issue has to do with a mentally handicapped man called Kaprzik, a person incapable of speech, whose presence at her father's *Leichenschmaus* causes her much agitation. Only in the closing pages of *Septemberlicht* does Irma finally divulge to her astonished mother her tortured feelings ("Ich bin tot. So wie der Vater, den wir heute begraben haben") (SL, 344), and the origins of her mental anguish: in the recent past she has given herself sexually to Kaprzik partly out of curiosity ("Ich wollte wissen, wie es ist") (SL 346), and partly as a defiant reaction to her mother's strong disapproval of her developing relationship with Skrobek, a friend from her youth. Irma learns of Valeska's appeal to Skrobek to refrain from courting her daughter, and for the rationale behind her entreaty: "Jedenfalls war ein Taxi-Chauffeur wohl nicht die *richtige Partie* für eine *echte Piontek*" (SL, 263). It is an assault on the integrity of Irma's choices, and ultimately on her search for an individual identity. Her mother's intervention is also the reason for Irma's defiant and impulsive marriage to Heiko Birkner. But her defiance, like that of Caddy Compson, does not bring her the sense of freedom from her mother—and

by extension from Upper Silesia itself—she had expected. Her Kaprzik disclosure in fact marks the effective end of her acts of rebellion. This is not to say, however, that Irma fully reconciles with her mother and her heritage: there is still friction and anger in her relationships, and a sense of the typical equivocation in her demeanour that Bienek portrays in the majority of his Gleiwitz protagonists. Nevertheless, *Septemberlicht* concludes with the symbolic embrace between mother and daughter that Valeska had longed for. “[...] Irma ließ es sich gefallen”, we are told, “ihr Kampf war ausgekämpft” (SL, 347). The gesture marks her ultimate submission, and her failure to sustain an individual identity unfettered by the influence of mother and heritage. In *Zeit ohne Glocken* significant changes in her bearing become evident. She marries Skrobek in a Catholic ceremony (Heiko Birkner having died in the first few days of the war), attends church every Sunday, appears positively disposed to the sacrament of confession, and removes the *Arbeitsdienst* spade, the symbol of her former protest, from her bedroom wall.

It was the equivalence of sex and sexuality with being dead in the mind of Caddy Compson that Bienek intertextually appropriated in *Septemberlicht* in Irma Piontek’s mental anguish surrounding her sexual relationship with the mentally impaired Kaprzik. It was thus Faulkner in the first instance who gave Bienek the means to express Irma’s tormented predicament. And the motif of being dead was so compelling to Bienek that he rehearsed it again in both *Zeit ohne Glocken* and *Erde und Feuer*. In *Zeit ohne Glocken*, however, Irma’s thoughts of being dead or wanting to be dead also derive from her realisation that she lacks personal agency, i.e. that she is incapable of disengaging from either her mother or her Upper Silesian *Heimat*. “*Ich wollte weg, ja ich hab mich gewehrt, wollte herausreißen, was mich hier festhalten könnte,*” she maintains in a remarkably impassioned monologue in *Zeit ohne Glocken*, “*und ich ahnte doch, daß ich niemals davon loskommen würde*” (ZG, 323). The monologue continues with an emotional

explanation for her seduction of Kaprzik, wholly indicative of her neurosis: it was all about her compulsion to break away from Upper Silesia:

[...] und deshalb hab ich's mit dem blöden Kaprzik getan, weil es niemanden gab, der abstoßender, abscheulicher und häßlicher gewesen wäre, der meine Tat verwerflicher machen und noch mehr Haß auf mich ziehen würde. Ich wollte, daß sie mich verstoßen, ausspeien, vertreiben, damit ich nicht mehr zurückkehren kann, tot wollte ich sein, alles in mir sollte absterben (ZG, 323).

This hoped-for escape route by these means underscores Irma's desire for humiliation and degradation and clearly presents as disturbed and obsessive. Nevertheless, far from being uncommon in the tetralogy, this level of neurosis is embedded in the narrative of all four novels as part of Bienek's agenda to portray the province as profoundly unusual, if not unhinged (we shall see further examples regarding Josel Piontek and his equally masochistic craving for abasement in Section 5.7 of this study). But from where does this neurosis ultimately derive. Bienek has a hypothesis for this. In *Zeit ohne Glocken* and *Erde und Feuer* he reveals Irma's inability to escape and her thoughts of being "dead" as deriving from a specifically Upper Silesian source: the mythical propensity of the Silesian soil (correctly described by Eigler as a "synecdoche for Heimat")²⁸⁷ to demand obedience and humiliation. As she commences her enforced trek westwards from the Russians in *Erde und Feuer* Irma acknowledges the authoritative, magnetic pull of the Silesian soil. "*Immer wollte ich weg von diesem Land*", she deliberates, "*aber ich habe bemerkt, das Land will mich haben, es will mich besitzen, das Land gibt mich nicht frei [...]*" (EF 163). Unlike Georg Montag, hers is an act of surrender rather than one of agency. Especially—and poignantly—in Upper Silesia's hour of need, she has succumbed to the soil:

Ja ich gehöre zu dieser Erde, und erst recht, wenn um sie gekämpft wird, erst recht, wenn sie leiden muß, erst recht, wenn sie bluten muß, erst recht, wenn sie gequält wird (EF, 163).

²⁸⁷ Eigler, p. 110.

Her acquiescence is of course enacted against her better judgement. It is as if she simply has no choice but to fatalistically accept an Upper Silesian identity predicated on centuries of border living. *“Nichts kann mich mehr aus diesem wilden und dunklen Land wegbringen”*, she muses, with a sense of resigned helplessness, *“und jetzt hab ich mich entschieden, noch stärker, noch tiefer einzudringen [...]”* (ZG, 324). Such is the mythical power of the black Upper Silesian earth that not only does she accept her fate, she now actively embraces it:

Jetzt will ich wurzeln in diesem Land, mit diesem Skrobek, und ich werde nicht aufhören, Kinder zu gebären [...] ich weiß, daß ich tot bin aber mit jedem neuen Tod werde ich neues Leben gebären für dieses dreimal verfluchte dreimal geheiligte Land (ZG, 324).

Irma's compulsion to conform and align rather than to continue her initial resistance has become the foundation stone on which her identity is now laid. Similarly in *The Sound and the Fury* Caddy Compson, for all her attempts to resist, is incapable of opposing the influence her Southern culture and religious tradition exert on her. But did it have to be this way? Both *The Sound and the Fury* and the Gleiwitz tetralogy illustrate that while most are incapable of showing the agency required to rebel, not every protagonist is amenable to resignation or capitulation. Faulkner, for example, gives us Caddy Compson's daughter Quentin (also known as Miss Quentin) whose story demonstrates that breaking away as a woman from the delimiting boundaries of the Southern patriarchy is actually possible. Raised in the Compson household Miss Quentin exhibits a radical non-conformism in the form of uninhibited promiscuity and wilful disrespect; unlike her mother, however, she refuses to be cowed by local convention: she will not accept fate as something to be endured. Much of her rebellion is a reaction against her persecution by Jason Compson (Caddy's brother) who is systematically defrauding her of her mother's allowances, and whose patriarchal authority—Jason has by now become head of the Compson family—is threatened by her promiscuity and insubordination. At seventeen Miss Quentin finally flees the Compson household, eloping with a man

from a travelling show she has recently met, running off with the money which is rightfully hers, and with her uncle's savings to boot. In this way she has, unlike her mother, broken fully from the constraints of her Southern heritage. In Bienek's Gleiwitz, as it happens, we have no character to match the headstrong, unrepentant and frankly offensive Miss Quentin; however, we do have the 15-year-old Kotik Ossadnik, the principal Upper Silesian dissenter in the four novels, who is a much more sympathetic and thoughtful protagonist than Miss Quentin, and whose rejection of the Silesian earth and all it stands for is delivered articulately and firmly in a powerful credo at the end of *Erde und Feuer*. For Kotik, about whom there will be much to discuss in Section 5.6 of this study, is one of the few characters in the tetralogy capable of the kind of agency required to take on the myth that is the symbolic black soil of the *Heimat*.

3.13 THE SILESIAN EARTH

The relationship between the Upper Silesian and the earth is of course a critically important *Leitmotiv* in the tetralogy. To put the association into some kind of context, it is important to understand Bienek's opinion on the nature of the Silesian *Heimat* as expressed in a 1985 essay. In "Schlesien – Aber wo liegt es? Eine melancholische Erinnerung" the author maintained that Silesians had a much more sentimental relationship to the earth than would be common in the West. The *Verhältnis* was more a Slavic phenomenon: "Das ist östlich und den Polen und Russen näher", he stated.²⁸⁸ He was careful, however, to disavow any suggestion that the relationship had any association with the racist *Blut und Boden* ideology of the Nazis. "Es hat nichts mit ›Blubo‹ zu tun", he definitively declared.²⁸⁹ Nevertheless, while Bienek may have termed the Silesian attachment to the soil as sentimental, as rendered in the tetralogy it was often far from this; in fact, it was highly ambivalent, characterised by a vigorous love-hate symbiosis which often

²⁸⁸ In *Heimat: Neue Erkundungen eines alten Themas*, edited by Horst Bienek, Munich: Hanser (1985), 57-61 (p. 61).

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

expressed itself in seemingly mutually exclusive perspectives. In the tetralogy the province is adjudged variously as both blessed and cursed, and sometimes—as we have seen in the Irma Piontek monologue from *Zeit ohne Glocken* quoted above—simultaneously as both. For Valeska Piontek the soil is clearly blessed: fleeing the Russians in January 1945 she takes a handful of Upper Silesian earth to be buried with her should she die outside the province (EF, 160). Her husband also acknowledges affection for the land (EP, 374); as often as not, however, for Leo Maria Piontek the black soil has overtones of negativity and despair: “Es ist ein verfluchtes Stück Erde... Oh, eine verfluchte Erde...” (EP 373), he proclaims on the night he dies.

The “cursed land” motif has a particularly Faulknerian resonance for readers conversant with *Go Down, Moses* (1942),²⁹⁰ for in this work the same theme of the cursed land is also preeminent. While it was not the only Faulkner novel to include the concept of the cursed South, for the purposes of this study it was certainly the most compelling. At this stage, however, it should be said that while a German translation of the novel is to be found in Bienek’s *Arbeitsbibliothek* at the Horst-Bienek-Archiv,²⁹¹ with the exception of a brief allusion to “The Bear” (a novelle included in the novel) I can find no references to “*Go Down, Moses*” in the author’s secondary writing or interviews. Nevertheless, I do not believe that the inclusion of this theme in the tetralogy to be inadvertent. In the following section I will demonstrate how *Go Down, Moses* was plausibly influential to Bienek in two ways. The first concerns the concept of the tainted land itself. Two stories in particular in the novel allude so forthrightly to the elemental concept of a land living under a curse that it is difficult to imagine that Bienek was not reliant in the working out of his vision of Upper Silesia on Faulkner’s understanding and interpretation of the accursed South, a space morally damned as a result of antebellum slavery, and

²⁹⁰ William Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972. (Subsequently referred to in the text as “GD”.)

²⁹¹ *Go down Moses: Chronik einer Familie*, Zürich: Diogones, 1974.

deplorable postbellum race relations. The second influencing factor concerns Faulkner's perception of the Southern frontier as a territory in flux. It seems likely that Bienek noticed in *Go Down, Moses* how the wilderness regions described in the novel exist in an in-between space, in a way that stimulated his imagination as he sought an understanding of (or vision for) his own disappeared province, and a means to reconstruct it artistically.

3.14 FAULKNER'S *GO DOWN, MOSES*

Go Down, Moses consists of a series of seven closely connected stories published independently, and subsequently reworked to form a novel, or what the author wished to be considered as a novel. Faulkner's subject matter is the history over several generations of the McCaslin-Edmonds family, originally Yoknapatawpha County slave-owning planters, and the curse engendered in the institution of slavery and its legacy that hangs over the family, and by extension over the whole South. The most important story for the purposes of this study is Faulkner's novella *The Bear* (*Der Bär*), the fifth of the seven stories, for Bienek "doch eine der be- und gerühmtesten Erzählungen von Faulkner" (TB, 692). The storyline of the novella develops two interlocking narratives: the first concerns the annual hunt in the wilderness bordering the Tallahatchie River in Mississippi for "Old Ben", a ferocious bear described in the narrative as "solitary, indomitable, and alone; [...]" (GD, 147) who plays havoc with livestock and the domestic dogs of the locality, and the second the initiation as a hunter, and the coming of age of Isaac (Ike) McCaslin, the story's main protagonist. McCaslin is a child in "The Fire and the Hearth" ("Feuer und Herd"), the second story of *Go Down, Moses*—typically for Faulkner the seven stories of *Go Down, Moses* are not narrated in chronological order—and an adolescent who comes of age in the course of "The Bear". He is the sole white grandson of the late Carothers McCaslin ("Old Carothers") and is in line to inherit the family estate of his grandfather when he reaches the age of twenty-one.

The mythical and terrifying bear is eventually hunted down and killed in a bizarre series of events involving several local hunters with striking lineages (though for the frontier region of Faulkner's fictional county they are not necessarily extraordinary ones): Sam Fathers is the son of a black slave and a Chickasaw chief, and Boon Hogganbeck is the descendant of a lesser Chickasaw line, a "quarter Indian, grandson of a Chickasaw squaw" (GD, 173). A central role in the pursuit of the bear is also played by a virtually untameable, crazed mongrel dog, appropriately named Lion in light of its extremely aggressive temperament; this vicious dog pins the old bear down while Boon violently stabs the bear to death. Not only the legendary bear dies, but Sam Fathers also dies as a consequence of his injuries, and in the final lines of the story we learn that, after some time, Boon Hogganbeck appears to live a crazed existence in the slowly disappearing woods.

Admittedly the hunt for Old Ben in the Mississippi wilderness seems a far cry from the wartime events described in the very dissimilar powerhouse of heavy industry that is German Upper Silesia. Yet in both "The Bear" and the Gleiwitz tetralogy each territory in its own disparate way is described as "cursed" in forthright, declamatory, and rhetorical terms by key characters. In the tetralogy it is members of the Piontek family—Leo Maria, Irma, Milka, and Josel—who describe the land as such; in *Go Down, Moses* it is Ike McCaslin. When Ike comes of age he makes a momentous decision to repudiate the estate he has inherited from Old Carothers McCaslin,²⁹² firstly, as he explains to his astonished cousin McCaslin (Cass) Edmunds, because he believes the land is not his to relinquish in the first place, since land can never really be owned by anybody but God (GD, 196), and secondly and more significantly, because the land was "accursed" (GD, 197) both by the indigenous Americans (Chickasaws) who owned it before the white planters arrived, but predominantly by the planters themselves, who brought the evil and inhumanity of slavery to the land. Ike renounces his inheritance on the grounds of

²⁹² The title of the first German translation of the novel was therefore appropriately *Das verworfene Erbe*.

information he gleans from old ledgers preserved in the plantation commissary store as a 16-year-old. He discovers that Eunice, Old Carothers's slave, was actually his mistress, and that a child, Thomasina, was born of the relationship. Eunice takes her own life when Thomasina herself becomes pregnant by old Carothers, the girl's own father. For Ike, the extreme moral turpitude of his grandfather is a shocking revelation and is representative of the abasement of a whole region. In practice the chronicle of degradation described in the old ledgers is a paradigm of "a whole land in miniature, which multiplied and compounded was the entire South" (GD, 224). The blight of slavery is at the root of the South's abasement. It is an edifice, "intricate and complex and founded upon injustice and erected by ruthless rapacity and carried on even yet with at times downright savagery" (GD, 227). As Robert Penn Warren puts it, "From the land itself, from its rich soil yearning to produce, and from history, from an error or sin committed long ago and compounded a thousand times over, the doom comes".²⁹³

There is certainly a sense in the novel that any attempt to resist the curse of the South is futile. As Bienek must have noticed, the cursed Southern land has the power to determine fates and identities. Ike McCaslin—the white descendent of Old Carothers—declares as much to the black Northern husband of a distant relative:

'Don't you see? This whole land, the whole South, is cursed, and all of us who derive from it, whom it ever suckled, white and black both, lie under the curse? Granted that my people brought the curse on to the land: maybe for that reason their descendants alone can – not resist it, not combat it – maybe just endure and outlast it until the curse is lifted [...]' (GD, 212).

In a way Ike himself does make a significant attempt to counter his inherited fate by renouncing his patrimony, and while renunciation brings him a sense of liberation, even expiation, from the sins of the past, in the long term his protest is

²⁹³ Robert Penn Warren, p. 62.

ineffective. A later generation of the family continues to be afflicted by the curse. In the “The Fire and the Hearth” mentioned earlier, Old Carothers’s great, great, great grandson, the white seven-year-old Roth Edmonds succumbs, long after Civil War defeat, to the long-established racial discrimination of the South, to what the narrator calls, “the old curse of the fathers, the old haughty ancestral pride [...], stemmed not from courage and honour but from wrong and shame” (GD, 91). Suddenly aware of his Southern heritage the seven-year-old, although wracked with shame and guilt, refuses to sleep in the same bed (as was usual with the pair) as his black close friend, Henry Beauchamp, who is—as the boys both share a white ancestor (Old Carothers)—a distant relative. As Faulkner puts it, the boy, “[...] entered his heritage. He ate its bitter fruit” (GD, 93). It does not help that his demeaned, though proud, friend acquiesces so readily to the new dynamic. The “old curse of the fathers” means Henry too has a new role to play. A kind of fatalism dictates that he too must succumb to a prescribed identity. No longer equal, he has become at just seven years old the traditional black subordinate. Little appears to have changed in the intervening years since the death of Old Carothers; the sins of the past continue to be replicated in the present.

If the root cause of the South’s cursedness is to be found in the egregious institution of slavery, what then is the cause of Upper Silesia’s damnation, as Horst Bienek understands it? The answer lies in the province’s liminal status as a contested terrain between nations, and in the borderland-inspired tendency of the population to submit (or adapt) to whatever vicissitudes (or opportunities) come their way in order to survive. Identity is fluid, fatalistic thinking rife, succumbing a rule of thumb, independent decision-making uncommon or futile. The curse is abetted by the Church’s demand for the people to accept suffering and pain without protest. All this is the legacy of the metaphorical Silesian soil. To all intents and purposes the curse is outlined in Kotik Ossadnik’s credo in the final pages of *Erde und Feuer* where in a kind of summation of the matter, Bienek, speaking

through the boy, outlines in plain language what has bedevilled the province and ultimately brought about its downfall.

Kotik however does not use the word *verflucht* itself: that is a term used in relation to Upper Silesia only by members of the Piontek family. Josel Piontek is the first to use it to describe the province in *Die erste Polka* as he makes preparations to flee Gleiwitz (“[...] ich verschwinde einfach hier aus dieser Pierunnje-Gegend und komm nie wieder her, nie mehr ... in dieses verfluchte Stück Erde”) (EP, 331). His father too as we know is prone to describing the Upper Silesian earth as labouring under a curse. Following the attack on the Gleiwitz *Sender* which he follows sporadically on the radio, Leo Maria Piontek suddenly becomes a fatalistic interpreter of the contested and mystical Upper Silesian earth. Invoking the devotional phrase, “O du unnje gesegnte Erde!” (EP, 375), remembered as an altar boy during *Kollende*,²⁹⁴ he reassesses the Upper Silesian earth as “Du dreimal verfluchte Erde!” (EP, 375). And not only does he despair at the persistent conflict which blights the province, he also laments the human exploitation and deep inequality at the heart of Silesian society. In one instance the dying Leo Maria Piontek even speaks of the soil’s metaphorical tendency to enslave, “diese schwarze Erde, die ihre Männer zu Sklaven machte” (EP, 361), an arresting judgement given the tetralogy’s “cursed earth” link with *Go Down, Moses*: this would certainly appear to establish another implicit connection between Faulkner’s fictional Yoknapatawpha, and Upper Silesia itself. For Piontek, the Upper Silesian land is also accursed because its agriculture and mining benefit the rich, and not the poor who do the work, and in times of war, the fighting. In the final few pages of *Die erste Polka* Piontek implies that the earth is also foredoomed because of its contested borderland status. This brings tragic consequences:

²⁹⁴ A Silesian house-blessing ceremony.

Es ist ein verfluchtes Stück Erde... Oh, eine verfluchte Erde... Leo Maria stieß das leise, aber heftig hervor. Wird es denn nicht mal aufhören, daß sich die Menschen wegen dieser verfluchten Erde gegenseitig umbringen... (EP, 373).

And it is the rich who divide the spoils of war as borders are redrawn. In a polemic as powerful (and rhetorical) as that of Ike McCaslin, Piontek outlines the issues as he sees them:

Die Armen haben die Saat in die harte trockene oberschlesische Erde gesteckt und sie mit ihrem Schweiß gedüngt, und die Reichen haben die Frucht genommen. Die Armen sind unter die Erde gegangen, haben gegraben in der Erde des Herrn und die Kohle herausgeschaufelt mit Methan in den Lungen, und die Reichen haben sie verkauft. Und die Armen haben sich übern Fluß hinweg oder über die Straße oder von einem Wald zum andern die Köpfe eingeschlagen, und die Reichen haben sich Flüsse und Straßen und Wälder miteinander geteilt und an einem Tisch gesessen. Und jetzt zerpflügen die Armen die Erde des Herrn mit den Kanonen der Reichen..." (EP, 373-374).

And yet, as often in the tetralogy, there is a contrary view that the Upper Silesian soil, while cursed, is somehow simultaneously blessed (just as proclaimed at *Kollende*), the kind of equivocal sentiment absent in Ike McCaslin's denunciation of the South. Bienek here extends the remit of Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses* motif to texturise his vision of the province. In Bienek's "inconclusive" Upper Silesian soil we have a moment of creative intertextual appropriation where Bienek takes Ike McCaslin/Faulkner in a different direction. While for Leo Maria's sister Emilie (Wassermilka) Piontek in *Septemberlicht* the Upper Silesian soil is cursed, in a curiously Upper Silesian borderland way she believes the province can also, concurrently, be worthy of love; in this conundrum another aspect of the divided nature of the province is revealed: "Wir kommen von dieser verfluchten Erde nicht los", she muses at her brother's graveside, "du hast recht gehabt, Leo Maria, hassen muß man diese Erde und lieben muß man sie – und dazwischen werden wir zerrissen" (SL, 105). It is interesting that the unusually recalcitrant Wassermilka, who in *Die erste Polka* lives a highly unconventional life by the Klodnitz in down-at-

heel conditions, is sometimes (surely not coincidentally) associated in the tetralogy with a traditionally “Southern” pursuit, the tobacco industry; she earns some kind of living rolling her own cigars (“Eigenwuchs und Eigenprodukt!” she proudly tells Willi Wondrak) (EP, 140), and it is rumoured that she will start growing tobacco on her newly acquired land on the Klausbach-Wasser (EP, 305). In fact she longs to leave the province, and harbours thoughts of one day visiting the Mississippi River itself (EP, 226), and even toasts the river at her niece’s wedding (of course the reference to the Mississippi is, “wie ein großes schwebendes nachklingendes Rätsel” (EP, 230) to Heiko, the wedding groom from way beyond the Upper Silesian pale, who can hardly be expected to understand Wassermilka’s preoccupation with mythical, even mystical, waterways). Leo Maria’s daughter Irma also concurs with Wassermilka’s love-hate attitude towards the homeland, and compares her second husband’s “Wörter” (Skrobek dabbles in poetry) to the Upper Silesian earth; again, there is a sense here that the province can simultaneously engender both love and hatred in the population:

Und so hab ich mir den Skrobek genommen, der seine Wörter so langsam spricht, daß sie manchmal zu Gedichten werden und der sich schämt, seine eigenen Wörter aufzuschreiben, weil sie schwer sind und verflucht wie diese Erde und zugleich so schön und sanft und eine einzige Melodie wie dieses Land (ZG, 324).

3.15 A TERRITORY IN FLUX

Bienek’s replication of Faulkner’s cursed land motif allowed him to gain some Southern traction for his representation of Upper Silesia—at least for those who recognise the intertext—to provide an enhancing, deeply poetic and even educative connection between the province and the Southern states as they were depicted in the writers he admired. And there was another compelling connection between the two territories. Bienek must have noticed the status of Faulkner’s Mississippi hunting grounds in “The Bear” as a frontier territory in flux; this was precisely the manner in which from the outset he wished to present his own Upper Silesian province. In Faulkner’s story something materially changes with the death

of the bear. What was happening on a minor scale during the years of the hunt—the slow encroachment of the woodland, “that doomed wilderness whose edges were being constantly and punily gnawed at by men with ploughs and axes” (GD, 147)—now appears unstoppable. The wilderness itself, symbolised by Old Ben, comes under attack: timber rights are sold to a lumber company, logging gangs move in, a planing-mill covering several acres is soon under construction. Significantly for Bienek who in the tetralogy was to use adolescence as a signifier of a liminal Upper Silesia, we note this process of deforestation through the eyes of Ike McCaslin, who as we know at the age of 21 will become the rightful inheritor of the Carothers plantation. From the age of 10 Ike begins a “novitiate to the true wilderness” (GD, 148) with Sam Fathers as spiritual mentor. His rite-of-passage from boy- to manhood is mapped out as the hunt for Old Ben progresses from year to year until the bear is finally killed, and the boy’s initiation appears complete. In a way Ike’s loss of childhood can be seen as analogous to the loss of the wilderness, just as Bienek used the loss of childhood trope in the tetralogy to symbolise the transitioning process which would have as its outcome the loss of Upper Silesia as a German province. In a similar fashion the attacks on Upper Silesia by both the National Socialists who wish to obliterate the rich Polish and Jewish traditions inherent in the Upper Silesian character and outlook, and the Russians whose victory will see to it that German legacy is expunged for ever from the Silesian *Heimat*, parallel the assault by the forces of modernisation and commerce on the “doomed wilderness” of what is properly Ike McCaslin’s true *Heimat*.

3.16 FAULKNER’S *AS I LAY DYING*

“The Bear” ultimately incorporated a strong political and societal message; in delineating the evil of slavery and its long-term outcomes, and in its regret for the irrevocable loss of the frontier wilderness, the work was certainly very much more than a gripping Mississippi hunting story. As we have seen, Bienek was able to relate to the political arguments of the story and reconceptualise them in the

tetralogy in a specifically Upper Silesian setting. In this way a riveting connection was established between the province and the Southern states.

In the case of Faulkner's novel *As I Lay Dying* (1930) there was no such political agenda; however, this did not mean the novel did not prove influential to Bienek in other ways. On the contrary: firstly it provided him with a revelatory epigraph for *Septemberlicht* (see below), and secondly, and most noticeably in *Septemberlicht* and *Zeit ohne Glocken*, it almost certainly gave rise to Bienek's episodic foray into interior monologue in the Gleiwitz novels (as opposed to his much more customary "erlebte Rede"). Finally, a specific monologue in *As I Lay Dying* (although Faulkner has not numbered them, it is Section 32) provided Bienek with a narratological template for Chapter 14 of *Septemberlicht* in which he was able to extend Faulkner's remit by the addition of a specifically political narrative absent in the source monologue.

The novel is the story of the eventful and final journey of the late Addie Bundren, a mother of five, from her impoverished husband's Yoknapatawpha hill farm to the county town of Jefferson 40 miles away for burial. Rather than being interred locally Addie has requested burial in her own family burying-ground. The funeral cortège making its way to Jefferson is highly unusual: the bereaved family proceeds fitfully on a mule-drawn wagon, Addie's coffin inappropriately open to the elements, amid severe weather conditions, chaos and adversity. Not all family members welcome the prospect of the journey. Addie's son Darl Bundren, who has severe mental health issues, attempts to sabotage proceedings along the way by burning down the barn in which Addie's coffin is left overnight. As the cortège arrives in Jefferson, he is declared insane, and transported to a mental institution at Jackson. Finally, nine days after her death Addie Bundren is laid to rest in Jefferson.

Throughout the narrative it becomes clear that family members harbour portentous secrets from one another. Jewel Bundren, for example, an important

incident in whose recent past was to influence Bienek so significantly in Chapter 14 of *Septemberlicht*, is not actually the son of Addie's husband Anse. Rather Jewel's biological father is the minister of religion Mr. Whitfield with whom Addie was involved at an early stage of her marriage; apart from Addie and Whitfield, only Darl, whom Faulkner endows with unusual intuitive powers, is aware of this. There is also a second secret: Dewey Dell, the late Addie Bundren's 17-year-old daughter is pregnant, and has concealed this from her family, or rather from everyone but her insightful brother Darl. She, therefore, has an ulterior motive for making the hazardous journey to Jefferson: it is a means to find an opportunity to abort her child (in which she is unsuccessful). So too the inept and feckless Anse Bundren uses the hazardous journey to Jefferson to buy a set of teeth and, as it transpires, to acquire a new wife.

Bienek was fulsome in his admiration for *As I Lay Dying* considering it, "einer der schönsten und größten Romane der Weltliteratur überhaupt, ein Wunder an Roman, und eigentlich nur mit dem Schlußmonolog des »Ulysses« zu vergleichen", (ML, 11), and while *Septemberlicht* is clearly named in honour of Faulkner's *Light in August*, in terms of overall influence *Septemberlicht* is very much more indebted to *As I Lay Dying*. In the first instance Bienek used a quotation from the novel as an epigraph for *Septemberlicht*:

Wenn man sich nur in die Zeit
hineinweben könnte. Es wär schön,
wenn man sich einfach
in die Zeit hineinweben könnte (SL, 5).²⁹⁵

The phrase is used by Darl as the Bundrens face yet another serious impediment on their way to Jefferson—family members recklessly attempt to treat a leg injury Cash Bundren has sustained crossing a flooded ford. Epigraphs were important to

²⁹⁵ "If you could just ravel out into time. That would be nice. It would be nice if you could just ravel out into time" (AD, 196).

Bienek, and he went some way towards explaining the quotation in *Beschreibung einer Provinz*:

Das Motto zum neuen Roman gefunden, bei Faulkner in *Als ich im Sterben lag*: Wenn man sich nur in die Zeit hineinweben könnte. Es wär schön, wenn man sich einfach in die Zeit hineinweben könnte.

Im Grunde ist das auch meine Motivation zum Schreiben dieser Romane (BP, 128).

In the context of *As I Lay Dying*, Darl's phrase actually expresses his desire for an absolute escape from the immediate senselessness of the journey to Jefferson, and from the routine pain of his psychological and emotional problems. He longs to achieve this freedom by what he terms "ravelling out" into time itself.²⁹⁶ Bienek, however, appears simply to appropriate Darl's words to identify *Septemberlicht* as a work of memory, as an indication from the outset of his intention to "ravel out" into his Gleiwitz past, and thereby commemorate his childhood experience; as Elwira Pachura puts it, "Die Worte [...] drücken die Sehnsucht nach dem Vergangenen aus und sind ein Mittel, um das Untergegangene in Erinnerung zu behalten, es der Vergessenheit zu entreißen."²⁹⁷

Both *As I Lay Dying* and *Septemberlicht* revolve around a funeral, or rather in the case of Bienek's novel, two funerals, those of Leo Maria Piontek, and the retired district magistrate Georg Montag who both die in the early hours of 1 September 1939. The fact that each work mixes gothic humour with tragic circumstance marks a further common thread: the funerals in both novels proceed with a handful of bizarre crises which might seem more at home in gothic tragicomedy. In *As I Lay Dying* buzzards overhead shadow the already putrefying remains of Addie Bundren whose final trek to Jefferson is also dogged by severe flooding, a collapsed bridge,

²⁹⁶ See André Bleikasten: "Darl wanders in a world itself corroded by unreality and impermanence, a world forever on the brink of chaos and extinction. Almost everywhere in his monologues we can sense his obsession with disintegration and dissolution, with the irresistible onrush of time [...]" André Bleikasten, *The Ink of Melancholy: Faulkner's Novels from The Sound and the Fury to Light in August*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017, pp. 190-191.

²⁹⁷ Pachura, pp. 36-37.

a disastrous attempt to ford a swollen river, drowned mules, Darl Bundren's arson activities, Cash Bundren's broken leg (with cement as plaster cast), and the treacherous coercion of Addie's daughter Dewey Dell into having sex with a pharmacy clerk. In *Septemberlicht* we also have coffin malfunctions (though admittedly of a much gentler sort) when the four-wheeled cart on which Leo Maria's Piontek's coffin is transported to the cemetery unceremoniously gets stuck in a ditch. There are also a handful of comic scenes in the *Septemberlicht* graveyard such as the grotesque and appalling wailing of three *Klageweiber*, the compulsive sobbing of the gothic Nieradczyk sisters (Gleiwitz funeral habitués), and the almost slapstick comedy occasioned when distant explosions are heard from the front line (the war with Poland is into its third day) and mourners start jumping into ditches on the insistence of the one-legged Paul Hrabinsky, who may or may not be a veteran of Annaberg, but invokes the 1921 battle nonetheless in time-honoured tradition (SL, 160).²⁹⁸ And of course there is the unusual and embarrassing appearance on Valeska Piontek's insistence of a gramophone at the graveside of Leo Maria Piontek, on which her son Josel plays a scratchy excerpt from Chopin's Funeral March (surely the author's nod to the portable graphophone mentioned in the final monologue of *As I Lay Dying*, the signature possession of the duck-shaped woman who lends Anse Bundren the spades with which to dig his late wife's grave, and who subsequently becomes his second wife).

3.17 THE IMPACT OF FAULKNER'S NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE

The similarities outlined above certainly mark common threads between *Septemberlicht* and *As I Lay Dying*. However, a further profound influence of Faulkner's novel on Bienek's Gleiwitz writing is to be found in Bienek's literary style. Faulkner's default mode of representation in *As I Lay Dying* is direct first-person interior monologue. There is no omniscient narrator; rather fifteen narrators across fifty-nine monologues (Ute Müller calls these monologues

²⁹⁸ Older *Gleiwitzer* claim Hrabinsky lost his leg in a mining accident (SL, 282). Ambivalence, as usual, takes centre stage in Bienek's Gleiwitz.

*Erzählabschnitte*²⁹⁹) recount and reflect on the events surrounding Addie Bundren's death and the subsequent journey to Jefferson; as Bienek puts it in *Mein Lesebuch*, "Das alles wird aus der Perspektive der beteiligten Personen erzählt" (ML, 46). Each narrator's subjective response to the unfolding events provides a key to the reader's understanding not only of the individual narrator, but also of the protagonists he or she describes. Often the same event covered by a different narrator elicits a new and telling interpretation. It worth noting at this point, however, that improbably, given that for the most part they are recounted (or at least delivered) by hill farming folk without much formal education, Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* first-person narratives often reveal, in tandem with normal diction appropriate to the protagonist's educational attainment, considerable literary proficiency.

Bienek was clearly impressed with Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* monologues. We know this firstly because Chapter 14 of *Septemberlicht* derives directly in literary format and plotline from an *As I Lay Dying* monologue, and secondly on the grounds that with *Erde und Feuer* Bienek considered (though ultimately did not) breaking with the established narrational style of the three previous novels in favour of individual Faulkner-inspired monologues ("Der 4. Band ähnlich Faulkners »As I lay dying« - alles in Personen erzählen" (TB, 76), he wrote in his diary on 13.02.1978), and finally by the choice of Faulkner excerpts he chose to include in *Mein Lesebuch*. Rather than pick a self-contained short story, of which there are many in the Faulkner canon, and which in the context of an anthology might have seemed a more appropriate choice,³⁰⁰ he chose four consecutive interior monologues from *Als ich im Sterben lag* (ML, 46-64), as if to foreground Faulkner's modernist credentials, and certainly to display the psychological depth that can be achieved with the technique. Three of the selected monologues (they are direct first-person

²⁹⁹ Ute Müller, p. 29.

³⁰⁰ "Faulkner hat wunderbare Erzählungen geschrieben", Bienek wrote in his introduction to *Mein Lesebuch*, "und es hätte sich angeboten, eine abgeschlossene Novelle aufzunehmen" (ML, 11).

accounts) are narrated by Darl Bundren, Vardaman Bundren, and Vernon Tull, and relate to Darl and Jewel Bundren's attempt to transport their mother's coffin across a swollen river. All three describe the same chaotic events from discrete perspectives. The fourth monologue, again narrated by Darl, describes the recovery of Cash Bundren's tools from the raging river. Each monologue presents a compelling profile of the respective narrator. Darl is the complicated, philosophical Bundren brother, his account of fording the river is descriptive, detailed, and highly poetic. Vardaman, the youngest Bundren (we never learn his age), narrates here in the inarticulate and rambling manner of a confused child; while Vernon Tull's voice is matter of fact, and without much pretension (he is a neighbour who prefers to help the Bundren family on his own terms, and is not afraid to criticise, or speak his mind). The four monologues chosen by Bienek offer a representative and exciting introduction to Faulkner's modernist writing, though Bienek's introduction to them in *Mein Lesebuch* scarcely prepares his readers for the startling and gripping events to come: he contextualises them rather unobtrusively in italics as follows: "*Addie Bundren ist gestorben; ihr letzter Wunsch war es, in Jefferson begraben zu werden; so bringt ihre Familie den Sarg mit einem Pferdefuhrwerk dorthin; aber der Fluß hat Hochwasser, und die Brücke ist weggeschwemmt*" (ML, 46).

Given that, apart from Chapter 14 of *Septemberlicht*, Bienek did not imitate Faulkner's 'one interior monologue equates to one chapter' format, how was the author influenced by the American's monologue protocol? In the first instance it is fair to say that Bienek's preferred stylistic device for expressing the thoughts, emotions and impressions of his protagonists was not *As I Lay Dying's* direct, first-person narration, but rather *erlebte Rede*, free indirect third-person discourse (also known as "narrated monologue"). It is a characteristic of Bienek's style, however, that the predominant *erlebte Rede* was often supplemented by sometimes short, sometimes long bursts of *As I Lay Dying* style direct first-person monologue. Often

both styles occur within the same narrative sequence. Take for example Leo Maria Piontek's indirectly narrated memory of his mother's illness in *Die erste Polka*, which via *erlebte Rede* also takes account of his father's perspective. This is followed immediately by Leo Maria's direct rendition of a subsequent event concerning his father:

Und schließlich wurde seine Mutter krank, sie hatte ein Krebsgeschwür, und der Vater wußte, daß sie bald sterben würde. Da ist er eines Tages mit seinem Sohn in den Wald gegangen, wo wir ganz allein waren, und er hat mir das Geld gezeigt, das er heimlich gespart hatte, im Futter seiner Jacke eingenäht, es würde gerade ausreichen für zwei Fahrkarten nach Köln, eine Erwachsenen- und eine Kinderkarte [...] (EP, 357).

Similarly, on another occasion in the same novel, Valeska Piontek destroys her husband's photographic self-portraiture, and the narrative changes suddenly from third-person *erlebte Rede* to first-person monologue:

Sie hatte aus der Küche ein spitzes Messer geholt und in jedes Photo hineingestochen und sie dabei zerfetzt oder zerschnitten, und sie hatte sich über sich selbst gewundert, daß sie am Ende nicht in sich selbst hineingestochen hatte, als Leo Maria nach Haus kam, hab ich mich versteckt. Ich wartete, bis er in seinem Atelier verschwunden war, ich bin ins Nebenzimmer gegangen, habe eine Tasse an die Wand gehalten und gelauscht (EP, 363).

The unexpected switch to interior monologue was a way of removing authorial presence as an "on-behalf" narrator (principally of Leo Maria and Valeska Piontek in the examples above) from the proceedings, in an attempt to create immediacy and psychological disclosure. And in *Septemberlicht*, while it was never to supersede Bienek's prevailing *erlebte Rede*, the Faulknerian interior monologue became more and more prevalent. That it derived from Faulkner is particularly evident in several interior monologues in Chapter 11 (by Josel and Irma Piontek, Andreas Pilgrim, Wassermilka, Ulla and Tonik Ossadnik) at the burial of Leo Maria Piontek. Though these are not individual chapters and are always enclosed within Bienek's more usual third-person narrative and *erlebte Rede*, these sections, just

like the two examples from *Die erste Polka* above, read and feel like the individual interior monologues of *As I Lay Dying*, where essentially the same intensity of feeling and mental turmoil is communicated; we are dealing in both novels with the portrayal of distressed, abnormal states of mind, the kind of psychoses Bienek often postulated were typical both of the South and of his childhood province, and linked the two territories. Take for example Irma Piontek's obsessive first-person thoughts (italicised for emphasis in typical Faulknerian mode) as she considers the possibility that her sexual encounter with Kaprzyk may have resulted in a "cretinous" pregnancy:

[...] ich wünsche mir nur, daß da etwas wächst in mir und zum Kretin wird, genauso idiotisch wie der Idiot, der das gemacht hat, damit die ganze Stadt zum Kretin wird, wenn das herauskommt, sollen sie kommen, und mich erschlagen [...] (SL, 275).

This easily equals the intensity of, say, Addie Bundren's compulsion as a schoolteacher before her marriage to physically punish her pupils, "looking forward to the times when they faulted, so [she] could whip them" (AD, 157). As is the case with Irma, there is also a sense of sadism in Addie's actions, and even masochism: with every strike she herself feels an intense (metaphorical) pain. It is as if her intention is also self-punishment:

When the switch fell I could feel it upon my flesh; when it welted and ridged it was my blood that ran, and I would think with each blow of the switch: Now you are aware of me! Now I am something in your secret and selfish life [...] (AD, 157).

In a sense the interior monologue as practised by Faulkner in *As I Lay Dying* offered Bienek an appropriate literary device with which to capture very unusual states of mind, a way of achieving an otherwise elusive psychological insight. What Bienek did not imitate, however, was the sophisticated diction and syntax noted earlier that Faulkner sometimes employed in his representation of his hill-farming protagonists. Bienek's diction in his interior monologues appears much more appropriate to his protagonists—in this respect Bienek upholds a realist view of the

interior monologue that thought processes and vocabulary should match the character's intellectual status—and the monologue therefore comes across as more credible to the reader than Faulkner's (Bienek was especially conscious that his own child protagonists should speak (or think) in terms commensurate with their ages and abilities).³⁰¹ Contrast the appropriateness of Andreas Pilgrim's thoughts about his mother's death at his uncle's funeral:

Sie haben mich nicht benachrichtigt, als sie starb, sie wollten mich nicht aufregen, sagten sie, stell dir vor, der einzige Sohn durfte nicht bei der Beerdigung dabei sein, sie haben sie begraben in Leobschütz, neben dem Grab ihrer Schwester, und ich durfte es nicht einmal sehen (SL, 103),

with the quite incommensurate Faulkner representation of Vardaman Bundren's mental perception of his brother Jewel's horse in a dark, unlit barn. This can hardly be what a confused child would reasonably speak or think:

It is as though the dark were resolving him out of his integrity, into an unrelated scattering of components—snuffings and stampings; smells of cooling flesh and ammoniac hair; an illusion of a co-ordinated whole of splotched hide and strong bones within which, detached and secret and familiar, an *is* different from my *is* (AD 51).

Cleanth Brooks, however, argues that Faulkner's use in the monologues of vocabulary that his protagonists cannot in actual fact possess (Brooks calls the phenomenon simply a "literary convention")³⁰² is something the reader has to go along with in the interests of gaining superior insight: "We are thus enabled to penetrate much more deeply into the complexities of their minds than we could otherwise", he writes.³⁰³ In any case Faulkner's mixed diction—at times colloquial, at times extremely literary—was not something Bienek himself was to emulate in his own *Septemberlicht* first person monologues (despite the occasional *pierunnje*). Where he did follow an *As I Lay Dying* precedent was in the occasional use of the

³⁰¹ "Ich hasse Romane in denen der Autor in eine Kindfigur sein ganzes Wissen projiziert...", Bienek, perhaps surprisingly (given his admiration for *As I Lay Dying*) wrote to me (private letter of 11 May 1982).

³⁰² Cleanth Brooks, *William Faulkner: First Encounters*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983, p.79.

³⁰³ Ibid.

more radical element of the interior monologue, the stream of consciousness device. In my analysis I am following Gabriela Sander's clarification of the interior monologue/stream of consciousness relationship:

Beim inneren Monolog handelt es sich um eine Art stummes Selbstgespräch einer Figur, durch das scheinbar distanzlos Gedanken, Assoziationen, Gefühlsregungen, Stimmungen, Bilder, Ahnungen usw. in der 1. Person Präsens wiedergegeben werden. – Werden syntaktische Ordnungen aufgebrochen, um die Preisgabe rationaler Steuerungsmechanismen zu signalisieren, liegt eine radikalisierte Form des inneren Monologs vor: Bewusstseinsstrom (*stream of consciousness*).³⁰⁴

In some sections of *As I Lay Dying* Faulkner was prone to break away from a grammatically stable sentence structure into a more chaotic stream of consciousness format, for example in the first of Jewel Bundren's monologues when he complains about his brother Cash's noisy construction of their mother's coffin, under the dying Addie's window:

Because I said If you wouldn't keep on sawing and nailing at it until a man can't sleep even and her hands laying on the quilt like two of them roots dug up and tried to wash and you couldn't get them clean. I can see the fan and Dewey Dell's arm (AD, 11),

or in Dewey Dell's stream of consciousness memory of a nightmare in which her person and identity appear to dissolve, which not only dispenses with punctuation, but is italicised, indicating perhaps a different state of consciousness:

[...] *I had a nightmare once I thought I was awake but I couldn't see and couldn't feel I couldn't feel the bed under me and I couldn't think what I was I couldn't think of my name I couldn't even think I am a girl I couldn't even think I nor even think I nor even think I want to wake up* [...] (AD, 108).

In passages where rational thought has similarly broken down Bienek also resorts to a stream of consciousness technique, most noticeably in those sections in *Zeit ohne Glocken* dealing with Arthur Silbergleit's stay in the Niederwallstraße Jewish

³⁰⁴ Sabina Becker, Christine Hummel, Gabriele Sander, *Grundkurs Literaturwissenschaft*, Stuttgart: Reclam, 2006, pp. 145-146.

centre in Gleiwitz, and on his final journey from the Gestapo prison in Kattowitz to the gas chamber at Auschwitz-Birkenau. Silbergleit's disjointed thoughts as he prepares to leave the overcrowded Kattowitz cell are the product of a kind of half sleep, "sein Geist durchpflügte jene Schichten, in denen sich Schlaf und Bewußtheit und Traum durchdringen" (ZG, 59), a near perfect seedbed for a stream of consciousness presentation. Here Silbergleit's thoughts (among other threads) encompass former Passover ceremonies, absent acquaintances, and memories of Aron Brauer, a boy not yet fourteen who is small enough to access the bricked-up cellar of the Gleiwitz Niederwallstraße hiding place where the ritual objects of the synagogue are concealed.³⁰⁵

Der Mann segnete die Mazze und goß von dem Rotwein ein den der Herr Kochmann besorgt hatte niemand fragte woher Lamm gab es in diesem Jahr nicht sie blickten auf den Stuhl der frei geblieben war der Rabbiner Saretzki war mit dem letzten Transport weggebracht worden [...]

Sie schwiegen und Aron ging in den Keller und brachte aus dem Versteck die Thorarolle die sie schon ein Jahr nicht mehr gesehn der kleine Aron Brauer (ZG, 58).

It should be noted that there are two boys named Aron in *Zeit ohne Glocken*. Aron Brauer is not to be confused with Aron Szalit, a figure from Silbergleit's unpublished novel *Der Leuchter*, a hymnic excerpt from which appears in *Zeit ohne Glocken* (ZG, 59). While Silbergleit does reflect on Aron Szalit in a fragmented monologue as he makes his way to the train yard ("ein kleiner Junge namens Aron Szalit läuft aus dem Ghetto hinaus in die Welt") (ZG, 207), of the two boys it is Aron Brauer who is the more prominent in his thoughts. As Silbergleit walks through Kattowitz he imagines in stream of consciousness format a conversation with the boy concerning the Niederwallstraße hideaway, and even appears to recreate in his

³⁰⁵ We learn in *Zeit ohne Glocken* that shortly before the outbreak of war the far-sighted Judicial Counsellor Kochmann, a Jew living in the Niederwallstraße community, had organised the construction of the *Versteck*. Kochmann had sought Silbergleit's help in the project, though we are never advised in what way, or to what extent. As far as the poet was concerned, besides Kochmann only one other person, Aron Brauer, was aware of the building work.

subconscious mind the boy's replies to him, before returning (in the final line) to his own voice:

eines Tages werde ich in dem Versteck bleiben und nicht mehr herauskommen [...] ich gehe nicht mit wenn sie uns holen nach Lublin in das Ghetto ich weiß nicht was Lublin ist aber ich weiß was Gleiwitz ist und da will ich bleiben in meinem Versteck bis eine andere Zeit kommt. wie der Junge redet nicht einmal vierzehn ist er und wie er redet (ZG, 207).

In a further fragmentary inner monologue as he is manhandled into a railway cattle wagon in Kattowitz, the shocked poet movingly recalls in stream of consciousness format an unannounced visit by his wife Ilse to Gleiwitz, a fragrant bunch of jasmine in her arms. However, whatever Bienek's motivation was for bringing her from Berlin to the Niederwallstraße, he does not ultimately allow the couple a final meeting. Perhaps Silbergleit's reaction to her arrival in Gleiwitz was one way of portraying without sentimentality the sheer pathos of the situation. In any event, it is certainly understandable that the unnerved poet cannot face prolonging the agony such an encounter would entail, given his hunch—at this stage he has no firm answers—that future events can scarcely end well:

komm nicht mehr wieder es ist besser [...]
niemand weiß wohin wir kommen ein Fluch ruht auf uns (ZG, 209)

But it is on the selection platform in Birkenau³⁰⁶ and in the gas chamber itself, as Silbergleit moves (indeed almost sleepwalks) towards his terrible fate, that the poet's stream of consciousness monologues appear particularly poignant. Any resistance that he had shown to the National Socialists since his arrival in Gleiwitz from Berlin (he had assisted Kochmann and Aron Brauer in the concealment of holy objects from the synagogue, and against all odds, had carried his self-penned books

³⁰⁶ The physical background of this scene appears to be based on a photograph published in Gerhard Schoenberger's *Der gelbe Stern: Die Judenverfolgung in Europa 1933-1945*, Hamburg: Rütten & Loening, 1991, p. 142. (Subsequently referred to as "Schoenberger".) Bienek reprinted the image in *Beschreibung einer Provinz* (BP, 143).

from Kattowitz as far as the gas chamber anteroom) evaporates when, arriving at the “shower” facility, he is deprived by a Kapo functionary of his glasses:

Silbergleit ließ es geschehen. Er wehrte sich nicht mehr (ZG, 347).

As he is murdered with hundreds of other European Jews on the afternoon of Good Friday 1943 his final thoughts are primarily for his beloved Ilse Silbergleit, but also for Aron Brauer. It is an especially affecting moment, recounted plainly and without sentimentality:

Aus der Decke ragten sechs Rohre. Wie sie alle darunter duschen sollten? Jemand fragte nach Seife. Aber Seife war keine vorhanden.

Immer wenn der Jasmin duftet hab ich an dich gedacht ich hab dich gesehn das letzte Mal als du unten vor dem Haus standest mit dem Strauß Jasmin im Arm der Geruch des Jasmin drang durch alle Korridore durch alle Türen durch alle Ritzen in das Versteck im Keller in der Niederwallstraße wo wir die Thorarollen versteckt haben

[...] wo ist der kleine Aron geblieben [...] (ZG, 347).

The books he has protected so attentively on his journey—they signify both his literary and his personal identity—are torn to shreds by a Kapo soon after the heavy iron door of the chamber is closed, symbolising the end of Jewish culture both in Upper Silesia and in Germany as a whole.

In some respects, as Hans Otto Horsch points out, these interior monologues bring to mind Molly Bloom’s acclaimed monologue in Joyce’s *Ulysses*.³⁰⁷ However, unlike Bloom’s soliloquy, the stream of consciousness passages in *Zeit ohne Glocken* are merely occasional and are inserted between both narratorial comments and (to use Sander’s terminology above) “non-radical” monologue forms. In this respect Bienek follows Faulkner rather than Joyce. As a whole the Silbergleit monologues represent an endeavour on Bienek’s part to narrativize the inconceivable, to recreate directly the state of the doomed poet’s consciousness in his final hours.

³⁰⁷ Horsch, p. 101: “Die als innere Monolog gestalteten Partien des Romans sind fast interpunktionslos – wie bereits das berühmteste Vorbild dieser literarischen Technik, der Monolog der Molly Bloom in James Joyces *Ulysses*”.

Given the subject matter the task was certainly not for the faint-hearted. According to K. H. Kramberg Bienek's writing appeared instinctive here. "Ungewollt, scheint es, zerfließt hier Bieneks Handschrift in jene interpunktionslos gleitende Prosa", he reflected, "die den dunklen Klage-ton des Psalmodischen sucht und dabei "kläglich" erstickt".³⁰⁸ For Winfrid Halder attempting to depict Silbergleit's final moments in Birkenau bordered on what was poetically possible: Bienek's representation was undoubtedly, "eine der beklemmendsten Passagen des gesamten Romankomplexes", he wrote, "wo zugleich die Literatur an die Grenzen ihrer Aussagefähigkeit kommt".³⁰⁹

3.18 CHAPTER 14 OF HORST BIENEK'S *SEPTEMBERLICHT*

As we know Bienek used Faulkner's first-person-monologue technique relatively sparingly in the tetralogy. Its use seldom exceeded a few paragraphs within chapters dominated by *erlebte Rede*. There was one exception, however. On a single occasion Bienek went so far as to replicate the narrative style (and indeed the subject matter) of an entire monologue in *As I Lay Dying* to shape a complete chapter of *Septemberlicht*. The idea for this chapter, however, did not come out of the blue. We can put its genesis into some kind of context with the knowledge that some early drafts of *Die erste Polka* show Bienek's trial runs with the kind of chapter-length monologues deployed by Faulkner in *As I Lay Dying*. Typescripts of the monologues, contained in *Entwürfe zu "Die erste Polka"*³¹⁰ at the Horst-Bienek-Archiv in Hannover, are mostly chapter length, and are written from the individual perspectives of four characters; moreover, each is named for the narrator in the style of *As I Lay Dying*. The first of the three Valeska monologues opens with impressions of the Klodnitz:

³⁰⁸ K.H. Kramberg, "Gleiwitz, Karfreitag 1943", *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 15/16 September 1979.

³⁰⁹ Winfrid Halder, 'Schlesische Apokalypse 1945: Literarische Darstellungen bei Hugo Hartung und Horst Bienek in zeitgeschichtlicher Perspektive'. In: *Schlesien: Literarische Spiegelungen im Werk der Dichter*, edited by Frank-Lothar Kroll, Berlin: Dunker & Humblot (2000), 149-186 (p. 178). (Subsequently referred to as "Winfrid Halder".)

³¹⁰ *Entwürfe zu "Die erste Polka"*, (Typescript), Horst-Bienek-Archiv (Biw 31,1). (Subsequently referred to as "Entwürfe".)

VALESKA

Unter mir trieb schwarz der fluß.

tiefschwarz träumte er sich durch eine karge landschaft; kohlenverharschte wiesen, kümmerliche pappeln wie vergehende signale an den ufern, vor der stadt eine reihe mächtiger akazien, die ~~schon~~ im frühsommer ihre kerzen abgebrannt hatten und jetzt auf den feurigen glast des herbstes warteten.³¹¹

Valeska's sister-in-law's monologue opens similarly with visions of the same river:

MILKA

Dieser verdammte fluß, diese schmutzige, träge dahinströmende fluß, wie oft hab ich an seinem ufer gesessen damals, und hab einfach reingestarrt ins schwarze fließende Wasser, da gabs immer was neues zu sehen, wellen, blasen, schaum, frösche, holz, wasserspinnen, fische [...]³¹²

Faulkner's guiding hand in this early writing is fairly clear: in terms of style and subject matter Bienek's description of the Klodnitz is instantly reminiscent of Darl Bundren's impressions of the flooded river he and his brother Cash must ford on their treacherous journey to Jefferson to bury their mother (there is also incidentally an undoubted mythologizing tendency at work in them which also surely derives from Faulkner):

DARL

Before us the thick dark current runs [...].

Through the undergrowth it goes with a plaintive sound, a musing sound; in it the unwinded cane and saplings lean as before a little gale, swaying without reflections as though suspended on invisible wires from the branches overhead (AD, 128).

There are also monologues in the *Entwürfe* by Josel (who is sometimes referred to as Hoppek), and his thirteen-year-old friend Ulla (neither protagonist has yet been accorded a surname). Yet none of these Faulknerian chapter-length monologues was used in *Die erste Polka*. Bienek writes teasingly in his own hand (rather than in

³¹¹ *Entwürfe*, p. 230.

³¹² *Entwürfe*, p. 246.

the typescript of the monologues) as if addressing a literary agent or a publisher's reader, of their rejection due to space constraints:

Achtung:

Die Monologe!

Geht weiter, wir haben

Hier keinen Platz für euch. [...] ³¹³

But a lack of space was hardly the reason for the non-inclusion. While they do show some tentative concepts which were to become significant themes in the novels, and contain the ghosts of emerging plotlines, in reality the *Entwürfe* monologues were fairly derivative experiments, hastily typed up, and heavily annotated (some sections of which, to be fair, could also be said to owe various stylistic debts to Marion Bloom's *Ulysses* soliloquy). Nevertheless, Bienek did not entirely abandon the idea of a Faulkner-inspired, chapter-length first-person monologue, though it was not until the second Gleiwitz novel that this came to pass. In Chapter 14 of *Septemberlicht* Bienek intertextually appropriated the literary form, the subject matter and plotline of a complete *As I Lay Dying* monologue (Section 32).³¹⁴ In terms of symmetry, style and storytelling, Bienek's chapter—the substance of which concerns the thwarted attempt of Bruno Ossadnik, a working class youth, to acquire a BMW motorcycle—is an undisguised (though unacknowledged) Gleiwitz-themed replication of Darl Bundren's interior monologue describing his brother Jewel's acquisition of a horse in the Mississippi backwater where the two young men live and work.

The two monologues are essentially moonlighting tales, one fairly innocuous in its nature, the other with potentially dangerous consequences. It was Linda Morita who first pointed out the thematic resemblance between the two pieces of writing:

³¹³ *Entwürfe*, p. 229.

³¹⁴ What appears to be an earlier version of the chapter was published in a 1978 compilation of short stories. 'Brunos Geschichte', *Das Lächeln meines Großvaters und andere Familiengeschichten erzählt von 47 deutschen Autoren*, edited by Wolfgang Weyrauch, Düsseldorf: Classen (1978), 273-281.

[...] Bruno interessiert sich für Motorräder und hat die Absicht, ein solches zuzulegen. Aus der Sicht seines Bruders Kotik wird eine Episode wiedergegeben, die an die Geschichte von Darl aus *As I Lay Dying* erinnert, und somit wiederum einen Bezug zu William Faulkner herstellt [...]. Bei Faulkner besteht dieser Wunsch allerdings in einem Pferd, das schließlich erworben werden kann. Hier bringt Bruno das Geld fast zusammen, aber wegen des Krieges gibt es keine Motorräder mehr zu kaufen.³¹⁵

While it is an enquiry well worth pursuing, Morita has not chosen to elaborate further on the matter (nor to my knowledge have any other commentators). In the following section I shall therefore outline the characteristics of each monologue to establish the rationale behind Bienek's close replication of Faulkner's domestic story. I use the word "domestic" as Darl Bundren's monologue primarily concerns private family matters; there is no engagement with regional or national politics in the monologue, or indeed in Faulkner's novel as a whole. Nor is there a discourse of racism (in comparison with *Absalom, Absalom!* or *Light in August*, Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* is a remarkably apolitical novel). Politics and racial conflict are at the heart of what differentiate the two monologues. Where Darl Bundren's Yoknapatawpha as rendered in *As I Lay Dying* is apolitical, Kotik Ossadnik's Gleiwitz is a highly politicised space with underlying issues of racial persecution, cultural discrimination, and ambiguous identities.

3.19 DARL BUNDREN'S MONOLOGUE

In *As I Lay Dying* Darl's direct first-person monologue is presented as a flashback, one of several in the novel which supplement and enrich our understanding of the Bundren family hierarchy. The quality of the writing lies in Darl's matter-of-fact and yet highly poetic account of an early incident in his younger brother's life, in which, as well as telling a compelling story, he discloses the tense dynamic—stemming predominantly from deceit—within the Bundren family; simultaneously he reveals vital aspects of his own complex personality. Darl is a perceptive narrator, and in

³¹⁵ Morita, p. 215.

particular has an analytical—or clairvoyant³¹⁶—ability to work out certain secret truths about the Bundrens which some members of the family would prefer to remain hidden. The narrative is gripping, yet unhurried, and replete with ironic humour, with the final revelation coming in the last few lines. The plot is relatively straightforward. By day Jewel Bundren is a 15-year-old farm worker; however, to earn money to buy a horse, he has worked surreptitiously at night for several months clearing a neighbour's land by lantern light. Not unexpectedly his performance by day at work on the family farm has deteriorated during this period. There is some concern among his family that he is losing weight, “dropping off to sleep at any moment” (AD, 116), and some conjecture regarding the possible reasons for his fatigue. With no idea of the reasons for Jewel's odd behaviour, his mother Addie sensitively conspires with the help of her children to get his day jobs done, so that her unsympathetic husband Anse, who simply considers Jewel to be lazy, remains as much as possible in the dark. Darl and his brother Cash initially believe Jewel has a girlfriend, or that he is seeing a married woman. The fact that a lantern goes missing when he is absent remains a mystery:

“Rutting,” Cash said.

“Yes,” I said. “But why the lantern? And every night, too. No wonder he's losing flesh [...]” (AD, 117).

Cash follows Jewel one night and discovers the truth. While he keeps the facts from Darl, he is clearly relaxed about what is going on. Eventually Jewel turns up on the family farm on a new horse and defends his purchase defiantly in the face of his father's anger, who fractiously views Jewel's moonlighting as a kind of economic threat to the financial security of the family unit. And what about those other family secrets Darl reveals in the course of the monologue? As it happens, Addie and his sister Dewey Dell also have issues to conceal. Addie's duplicity towards Anse in her support for Jewel during his moonlighting period marks a point of

³¹⁶ See Michael Millgate, *William Faulkner*, Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1961, p. 37.

realisation for Darl that all is not as it seems. He is taken aback when he remembers that in the past his mother was a woman who hated deceit, “who had tried to teach us that deceit was such that, in a world where it was, nothing else could be very bad or very important” (AD, 116). When he sees his mother weeping at Jewel’s bedside he deduces with remarkable intuition that Jewel is not Anse’s biological son. This is as clear to him as the fact that his sister is also perpetrating a deceit: that she is pregnant and is trying to keep this from her family. The monologue ends with Darl’s insightful declaration about Jewel’s paternity and his sister’s pregnancy: “And then I knew that I knew. I knew that as plain on that day as I knew about Dewey Dell on that day” (AD, 123).

3.20 KOTIK OSSADNIK’S MONOLOGUE

In Chapter 14 of *Septemberlicht* (the only chapter-length interior monologue in the tetralogy as a whole) Bienek allows Kotik Ossadnik, who is the narrator, to follow the main elements of Darl Bundren’s narrative; Kotik’s account is also a story of clandestine night work by lantern light, and is similarly rendered in flashback mode, although the object of desire in *Septemberlicht* is, as is appropriate to the times and the industrialised urban German setting, a BMW 250 motorcycle. It appears that the respective objects of desire in the corresponding monologues represent for the two protagonists a bid for some kind of freedom or independence, a potential means of escape from unsatisfactory lives.³¹⁷ Jewel Bundren’s counterpart in Gleiwitz is Bruno Ossadnik, the adolescent son of the working class couple Franz and Anna Ossadnik. Like Jewel, Bruno is exhausted by having two jobs; his day job is as an apprentice at the RAW (*Reichsbahn-Ausbesserungs-Werk*), and his secret moonlighting work consists of bricklaying. It is all too much: at home he too falls asleep at table; and just as Jewel is “losing flesh” (AD, 115), so too Bruno,

³¹⁷ It is possible the motorcycle motif itself derives from Carson McCullers’ *The Member of the Wedding*, in which novel the main protagonist, Frankie Addams, admires a similar machine on a walk through her Southern US town, spitting on the broad leather seat, and shining it with her fist; later in the novel she associates the object with her bid for freedom and self-expression: “Traveling on trains. Letting her rip on motorcycles. Flying around all over the world in aeroplanes. Here today and gone tomorrow” (CN, 565).

we are advised, “fiel fast vom Fleische” (SL, 154), Bienek’s choice of words deliberately echoing Faulkner’s unusual turn of phrase. Bienek also develops the liminal discourse initiated by Faulkner. In Darl’s monologue Jewel Bundren clearly straddles a liminal territory between sleep and waking: “You’re asleep on your feet this minute” his father tells him at one point, and Darl describes an incident where his brother curiously appears at table halfway between wakefulness and sleep:

He ate hearty enough, except for his way of going to sleep in his plate, with a piece of bread half-way to his mouth and his jaws still chewing (AD, 116).

Bienek replicates in Bruno the blurred boundaries inherent in Jewel Bundren’s situation: Bruno is also described in terms of the liminal; he too is caught in an indeterminate no-man’s land between sleep and wakefulness (“Es konnte geschehen, daß er beim Essen, aufrecht im Stuhl sitzend, den Löffel in der Hand, einschlief”) (SL, 148), and of course he is positioned between adolescence and manhood (“eben in der Pubrität”, as his mother puts it) (SL, 149).

The Ossadnik family’s speculations about the reasons for Bruno’s behaviour fall roughly into the same category as Jewel’s (“Er wird eine Freundin haben”) (SL, 151). Perhaps, Anna Ossadnik muses, introducing the first cautionary political note, an aspect not present in the Faulkner source text, Bruno’s girlfriend is Polish: “Die polnischnen *Dschiewki* sind sehr hübsch, das ist wahr Bruno”, Kotik remembers her advising her son, “aber man kriegt heutzutage Schwierigkeiten, wenn man sich mit Ausländern einläßt” (SL, 152). This is, however, an isolated moment of concern on the part of the Ossadnik family, as in the main Kotik depicts a household of lightweights where nobody really has the gumption or inclination to care much about Bruno’s situation, as if nothing is at stake. Only Kotik himself takes an interest. In *Septemberlicht* it is he who follows Bruno to uncover the real reason for his brother’s strange behaviour: in a cellar in Gleiwitz he has been working on the construction of a dividing wall in a building just opposite the burnt-out synagogue. It is of course the Niederwallstraße *Versteck*. On the final night of the

work, cautiously taking a circuitous route, Kotik accompanies Bruno to the site. For Kotik, the dank, cold, foul-smelling cellar makes for a bizarre and mystifying spectacle. The carbide lamp can scarcely illuminate the dark basement space where one man naked to the waist is already silently at work. “Ich dachte, ich sehe nicht recht” is Kotik’s first reaction (ZG, 155). We have here one of Bienek’s typically freakish and baffling “Upper Silesian” spaces, a locale of the order of Kotik Ossadnik’s love nest in the Miethe Allee (*Erde und Feuer*), but without the love and magic: in the Niederwallstraße cellar we have solely threat and anxiety. Kotik has not the courage to ask what is actually going on, and is warned by Bruno to keep his mouth shut for good reason: the secret work is risky and dangerous, and surely illegal: only in *Zeit ohne Glocken* do we discover that the bricked-up cellar is to be used as a hiding place for sacred objects from the synagogue.³¹⁸ Nevertheless, while Bruno is aware of the danger, there is certainly no sense in Kotik’s account that his brother is politically motivated. Bruno comes across as uninquisitive and morally unaware: his moonlighting is simply a means to an end. Ultimately, however, the boy is thwarted in his purchase: all vehicles including his motorcycle have been requisitioned by the Wehrmacht, and he must go home from the dealership empty-handed. Bruno never really comes to terms with the loss of the motorcycle. In a later chapter of *Septemberlicht* he channels his frustration into joyriding. He does not survive the war: in *Zeit ohne Glocken* his brother Andi reports his death in Greece, his place of burial unknown (ZG, 46).

On a stylistic level, taking on Faulkner at his own game is not for the faint hearted. Faulkner’s—the source monologue—is certainly the more impressive. It is taut and concise, for the most part stripped back to essential elements. Darl Bundren’s thoughts remain focused and on-message. The story telling is superb, the dialogue convincing, and where his monologue depicts characters with believable emotional insight and psychological depth, Kotik’s Ossadnik’s protagonists—including

³¹⁸ The fact that we only learn the true meaning of the incident in a later novel is in itself a Faulknerian trait.

Bruno—remain uninteresting and flat. In addition, Kotik’s monologue is much looser and disparate than Darl’s, and ranges too widely over extraneous matters: does the boy really need to outline the plot of the “Indian” novel his mother Anna is currently reading—and in any case how does he know the book’s plot?—has he read it himself, or is this an attempt to imbue Kotik with the clairvoyance of Darl Bundren? Similarly, while it might be likely that Kotik would know the details of his mother’s employment in Gleiwitz before her marriage, would he be aware of the further quite detailed private information about her employer Dr. Bermann, a Jewish medical consultant, and his family? Or perhaps the section beginning, “Sie pickte mit dem angefeuchteten Zeigefinger ein paar Krümel vom Tisch und sinnierte einer Erinnerung nach” (SL, 152), up to and including the first paragraph of the next page, is actually an interpolated section of *erlebte Rede* by Anna Ossadnik herself? The section describes how Anna Ossadnik, formerly an appreciative employee of the Bermanns, can no longer divulge what has now become taboo to speak about, “daß sie früher einmal bei einer jüdischen Arztfamilie im Haushalt gearbeitet und damit ihre Aussteuer zusammenverdient hatte” (SL, 153). If this is *erlebte Rede* it would be inconsistent with Faulkner’s single Darl perspective, where there is no encroachment of any other voice other than Darl’s. This lack of clarity is disconcerting here, but it is typical of Bienek’s practice in the tetralogy, intended, as it was, as a means of avoiding that which Bienek called, “vollends in die alten Raster des herkömmlichen Erzählens zu geraten”.³¹⁹ (“Und was ich auch sehr wichtig finde: Jedem Satz, der gesprochen wird, folgt eine Kommentierung, von der man nicht weiß, ob sie vom Autor stammt oder vom Gesprächspartner im Roman oder ob der Handelnde selber darüber nachdenkt”).³²⁰

³¹⁹ Rudolph, p. 43.

³²⁰ Rudolph, p. 43.

What does Bienek hope to gain with the transposition of Jewel Bundren's impoverished rural Mississippi of the late 1920's to Bruno Ossadnik's industrial, borderland city of Gleiwitz in 1939? The *Septemberlicht* appropriation of Faulkner's monologue could of course simply be a means of honouring a significant writer in Bienek's literary life. But in fact, it is more than this: by introducing the political and racial dimensions referred to above Bienek creatively reconstructs the hypotext. He goes beyond Faulkner's apolitical remit by transforming *As I Lay Dying's* domestic tale of moonlighting into (at this stage) an unresolved political intrigue.³²¹ Where Jewel Bundren has merely to answer to a feckless and irate father, the consequences of Bruno Ossadnik's rather more dangerous freelance work are potentially calamitous. And in the Anna Ossadnik section (irrespective of whether it is Anna in *erlebte Rede* mode, or Kotik in an *As I Lay Dying*-style monologue), Bienek imaginatively reveals how the racial ideology of the National Socialists has perniciously gained traction in Gleiwitz, causing trepidation and fear. Finally, we have seen how Bienek replicates Jewel Bundren's liminal status in Bruno Ossadnik. In Bienek's appropriation of Faulkner's monologue, however, Bienek takes the liminality a little further: Bruno becomes a symbol of a liminal province sleepwalking towards a new order. The symbolism is reinforced by Ulla Ossadnik's (gothic) contention that her brother might well be moonstruck ("mondsüchtig") (SL, 153). Certainly Kotik's understanding of the phenomenon:

Die Mondsüchtigen würden wie in Trance, mit geschlossenen Augen, aus dem Fenster aufs Dach steigen, man dürfe sie nicht rufen und auch keinen Lärm machen, sonst würden sie sofort in die Wirklichkeit zurückkehren und dabei das Gleichgewicht verlieren und abstürzen (SL, 153),

would point to the symbolism of a province close to a tipping point towards rite-of-passage assimilation.

³²¹ We learn further details of the *Versteck* in *Zeit ohne Glocken*, and of its destruction in *Erde und Feuer*.

CHAPTER 4: THOMAS WOLFE

Vor dem Hotel die Tafeln, wer hier alles gewohnt hat. Mein so von mir
geliebter Thomas Wolfe! ³²²

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In 1979 Bienek published “Baracke Deutschland”, a memorial poem about the possibility of personal and national reconciliation in a transitioning Germany (a country he termed as “janusköpfig, nach Ost und nach West blickend”).³²³ The poem is set mainly against the backdrop of his own and his family’s experiences stretching back to the Upper Silesian uprising of 1921, through the World War, to his period as a prisoner in Vorkuta and his eventual release into a changed (and yet curiously unchanged) Germany. In the work Bienek defines his country as profoundly flawed—it could offer much more to its divided people. And yet the poem ends on an optimistic note. All is not lost; redemption is possible, but it is a matter for the individual and the collective will: “Ich werde einiges tun müssen dafür, bleiche Mutter”, Bienek writes, “Wir werden es tun müssen”.³²⁴ The poem is consciously modelled on Bertolt Brecht’s “Deutschland” (1933) not only in its use of Brecht’s metaphor *bleiche Mutter* as a moniker for a tainted Germany, but also in its tone of resentment and bitter disappointment at what has come to pass. In the fourth section of the poem Bienek speaks of the authors he read as a young man in East Berlin, having voluntarily left Gleiwitz after the war. In it there are references to Brecht’s epic theatre and to his *Offener Brief an die deutschen Künstler und Schriftsteller* (1951); more importantly perhaps for the purposes of this study, there are also references to other—in their time and place—less politically orthodox texts and writers:

³²² Bienek’s hotel accommodation on a visit to New York awakens emotional thoughts of Thomas Wolfe. Diary entry of 4.10.1984 (TB, 763).

³²³ Horst Bienek, *Wer antwortet wem: Gedichte*, Munich: Hanser, 1991, p. 14.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

In Berlin lernte ich dann das Organon
des epischen Theaters, las Kafka und Faulkner
heimlich und schmuggelte Texte zu meinen Freunden
über den *Gott, der keiner war*, schrieb übers
Haben und Nicht-Haben und weinte als Knabe
Mit Perrudja, ein Engel, der heimwärts schaut.
Und hatte genug von den Kriegen,
Von großen Karthago...
O Deutschland, bleiche Mutter.³²⁵

We have already encountered Bienek's GDR reading list in this study, notably in his 1986 address to Martin Gregor-Dellin outlined in my Introduction. However the reference to Brecht's epic theatre is new, as is what I assume to be an allusion to *To Have and Have Not* (1937) by Ernest Hemingway, whose writing enjoyed an on-off relationship with East German censors in the early 1950s (the novel was actually not published in the DDR until 1970).³²⁶ We also have the by now familiar references to Kafka and Faulkner, and allusions to Arthur Koestler (*Ein Gott der keiner war*), and Hans Henny Jahn ("Ein Knabe weint" from *Perrudja*). Finally, we have the allusion to *Look Homeward, Angel* where Bienek, in the role of exile, appears to take on the mantle of Thomas Wolfe's symbolic angel, looking back at what has been irretrievably lost (which we can assume to be his Silesian childhood and homeland).

That Bienek, 25 years after his GDR experiences, should continue—this time in verse—to analyse his early literary influences was testament to the remarkable power and hold these writers exerted on his consciousness. All the authors mentioned were important in their different ways, nevertheless Bienek understood the impact of Thomas Wolfe, the writer whose first novel *Look*

³²⁵ Ibid., p. 17.

³²⁶ See Anna-Christina Giovanopoulos, "'Humanistischer Aufschrei' or 'Anarchistische Protest': The East German Reception of Ernest Hemingway, J.D. Salinger, and Jack Kerouac", *Amerikanische Populärkultur in Deutschland: Case Studies in Cultural Transfer Past and Present*, edited by Heike Paul and Katja Kanzler, Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag (2002), 87-110 (pp. 90-98).

Homeward, Angel was an exploration of a personal past, as particularly significant in its ongoing value. For what must have appeared immediately striking to Bienek was that *Look Homeward, Angel* (1929) was essentially the narrative of a lost world, the memory work of an author attempting to reconstruct and preserve in literary format a lost childhood, and an irretrievably disappeared past (in Wolfe's own words in a letter to his sister Mabel Wolfe Wheaton, "a world that is gone, a life and a time that is gone").³²⁷

Bienek did not actually review *Look Homeward, Angel* formally, or indeed any other Wolfe novel. The reason may have been that with the exception of *Es führt kein Weg zurück* (1950) the re-publication in German translation of Wolfe's major novels after the war occurred during his period of imprisonment in East Berlin and the Soviet Gulag. In February 1962, however, Bienek reviewed for the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* a volume of letters by Thomas Wolfe, edited by Elizabeth Nowell.³²⁸ It had been over a decade since he had read *Schau heimwärts, Engel*. He was clearly enthralled to be engaging with Wolfe once again: "Man gerät in einen Rausch, in dem sich der Dichter ständig selbst befunden hat", he wrote in his diary in February 1962. "Das teilt sich mit [...]. Wolfe hat nichts von seiner Faszination auf mich eingebüßt" (TB, 62).

The article itself, entitled "Beichte eines rastloses Lebens", was subsequently reprinted in *Der Blinde in der Bibliothek*.³²⁹ Bienek's analysis is, as its title might imply, more about Wolfe's life history and character than about the novels themselves, and it is clearly written for the general reader rather than for a specialised literary readership (as he points out in the epilogue to *Der Blinde in der Bibliothek* his goal for the most part when writing about literature was to awaken interest in the reading public for authors he valued) (BB, 149). Nevertheless, the

³²⁷ *The Letters of Thomas Wolfe*, edited by Elizabeth Nowell, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956, p. 178. (Subsequently referred to as "The Letters of Thomas Wolfe".)

³²⁸ Thomas Wolfe, *Briefe*, edited by Elizabeth Nowell, Reinbeck bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1961.

³²⁹ Horst Bienek, *Der Blinde in der Bibliothek. Literarische Portraits*, Munich: Hanser, 1986. (Subsequently referred to in the text as "BB".)

“Beichte eines rastloses Lebens” review is important as it reveals much about Bienek’s reception of Wolfe’s oeuvre. Bienek was struck by the fact that Wolfe’s letters had the same power to affect the reader (“zu erschüttern, zu faszinieren und zu begeistern”) (BB, 49) as the novels had done, and was arrested by the openness and honesty of the correspondence (“durch keine Attitüde oder literarische Verbrämung verfälscht”) (BB, 49) which afforded the reader an undisguised impression of Wolfe’s private life. Not that, according to Bienek, there was ever a great difference between the subject matter of Wolfe’s correspondence and that of his novels; both derived from the same source—Wolfe’s own life. Bienek surmised that the close affinity of Wolfe’s fiction to his life experiences (“diese Identität von Erleben und künstlerischer Umsetzung”) (BB, 49) was one factor which drew readers to his work, despite the frequent and inauspicious stylistic excesses. For other readers—and here Bienek singles out the Beat Generation on both sides of the Atlantic—it was precisely the emotional and stylistic excesses that were compelling. “Liegt das an seiner ungezügelter, oft kritiklosen Begeisterung, an seinem ekstatischen Tadel, an seinem melancholischen Wortgesängen, der unendlichen Prosodie...” (BB, 50) he writes of Wolfe’s appeal, suggesting a possible additional attraction for the Beatniks was Wolfe’s attempt, “mit den Romanen so etwas wie einen amerikanischen Mythos zu schaffen?” (BB, 50). One gets the impression here that Bienek is speaking for himself as well: it is clear his own response to Wolfe was highly emotional; in particular he was intensely moved by the passionate, melancholic, and distinctly poetic quality of *Look Homeward, Angel*,³³⁰ if not for what he saw as certain unfavourable aspects of Wolfe’s style, which he defined as “Maßlosigkeiten, Wucherungen, und Rhetorik” (BB, 49).

³³⁰ Malcolm Cowley, an astute reader of Wolfe, ascribed Wolfe’s popularity in Germany to the fact that his novels had “*Angst and Sehnsucht* and other qualities dear to German readers” (*A Second Flowering*, p. 183).

What is missing from “Beichte eines rastlosen Lebens”, however, is any discussion of Wolfe’s literary style—*poetischer Realismus*—which Bienek claimed repeatedly from 1969 onwards as defining *Look Homeward, Angel*. If this was an omission, then it was understandable—Bienek’s review was after all an appraisal of Wolfe’s letters. Nor, however, was the term mentioned by Bienek’s contemporary, Heinrich Böll, who was also extraordinarily sympathetic to Thomas Wolfe. Böll’s short pieces on Wolfe’s two novels *Von Zeit und Strom* (1936) (*Of Time and The River*) (1935) and *Geweb und Fels* (1941) (*The Web and the Rock*) (1939), each published with remarkably similar titles: “Das fremde und bittere Geheimnis des Lebens”, and “Thomas Wolfe und das bittere Geheimnis des Lebens” respectively (both 1953), are not only characteristically stylish, but also outstanding for their insight (much too is revealed about Böll himself, his politics, his aesthetics, and most of all his generosity of spirit). Böll too, like Bienek, also comments on the stylistic excesses of Wolfe’s prose, drawing a distinction between his often unconstrained style, and the astringency of Hemingway (whom I believe Böll is referring to here): “Gewiß, er [Wolfe] wühlte in Adjektiven, während andere seiner Generation sie sorgfältig zu vermeiden suchten”, though he was big-hearted enough to learn a writer’s lesson from Wolfe. “Es scheint, als habe er sämtliche Adjektive noch einmal verschlissen und verschlungen”, Böll wrote, “damit es uns leichter fällt, sie zu meiden, wo wir glauben, sie meiden zu müssen”.³³¹ Where the politics of the late 1920’s in Germany are concerned, however, Böll is steelier than Bienek. While Bienek seemed almost grateful that Wolfe should choose to write about the 1928 Munich Beer Festival in the posthumously published *The Web and the Rock* (“unser braves Münchner Oktoberfest” as Bienek sentimentally calls the festival) (BB, 51), Böll worried that Wolfe, who had travelled extensively in Germany in the 1920s and 30s and had allowed his narrator in the novel to declare

³³¹ ‘Thomas Wolfe und das bittere Geheimnis des Lebens’, *Heinrich Böll, Erzählungen, Hörspiele, Aufsätze*, Cologne: Kiepenhauer & Witsch (1967), 349-351 (p. 350).

Munich “das »deutsche Himmelreich« mit seinen Bierhäusern”,³³² had descended to the level of a mediocre travel guide. His emotional attachment to Wolfe, however, was enough to ensure he ultimately forgave him his romantic visions of Germany, writing them off unhappily as “Blubo”.³³³ Thomas Wolfe, “verzeiht man eben, was bei anderen nie durchgehen würde”,³³⁴ Böll wrote, an expression of remarkable sympathy and indeed affection for an author who had so much to give, but whose time ran out too soon: “er hatte unendlich viel zu erledigen, bevor er so plötzlich starb”³³⁵ (Wolfe died in 1938 aged 37).

4.2 THOMAS WOLFE’S *LOOK HOMEWARD, ANGEL*

The subject of Thomas Wolfe’s *Look Homeward, Angel*, essentially a *Bildungsroman*, is the progression to adulthood of Eugene Gant within the confines of an extraordinarily divided middle class Southern family. The novel is set in the Blue Ridge Mountain resort of Altamont—the author’s fictional name for Asheville, North Carolina— predominantly between the years 1900 and 1919. The adolescent making the transition to adulthood is the youngest of the seven surviving children of W.O. and Eliza Gant, a couple living and working in the expanding town. The novel chronicles in astonishingly realistic detail Eugene’s childhood, education, and coming of age, and concludes on the eve of his departure for Harvard at the age of nineteen. It is primarily Eugene’s story, and to a lesser extent that of his mother and his beloved older brother Ben Gant. This trio is of significant interest in the story of Horst Bienek’s reception of *Look Homeward, Angel*, and the impact the novel had on the Gleiwitz tetralogy. Wolfe’s novel also depicts the fraught relationships within the Gant family itself, and the family’s relationship with the boarders who share their homes. Eugene’s father, W.O. Gant, a stonemason, is an irascible alcoholic prone to depressive moods and rhetorical outbursts, especially

³³² Ibid., p. 351.

³³³ Ibid.

³³⁴ Ibid.

³³⁵ Ibid., p.350.

regarding his deteriorating health; his mother Eliza Gant is an ambitious, practical and shrewd businesswoman, who in addition to running a large boarding-house (Dixieland), steadily amasses, much against her husband's will, an extensive property and land portfolio. Her property business is in many ways symptomatic of the changing profile of Altamont: the town is caught in Wolfe's narrative between post-Reconstruction small-town inertia and an emerging dynamic process of Americanisation which promises eventually to dilute the town's southernness. Much of the remodelling is fuelled by land and property speculation in which the said novel's matriarch Eliza Gant is heavily involved. In this respect she is of significant interest in this appraisal of the novel's influence on Bienek's Gleiwitz novels. In some ways, indeed, Valeska Piontek is Eliza Gant's counterpart in the tetralogy (by way of contrast, however, Valeska's estranged husband Leo Maria Piontek shares little of W.O. Gant's colossal personality and temperament other than his occasional partiality for rhetorical declamation).

The Altamont couple's deteriorating marriage—Wolfe describes their relationship extravagantly at one point as an “ancient, submerged struggle between their natures” (LH, 53)—has adverse repercussions for the upbringing of the children. Loneliness and separation characterise the relationships between family members, and family life is a fraught and often chaotic experience; for part of the novel W.O. and Eliza live in separate homes, and the family is split up accordingly. Only Eugene is given the opportunity to advance his education. He is sent to a private school in Altamont, where he excels, and from there progresses at the age of sixteen to Pulpit Hill, the State University. As Eugene grows in maturity, his intellectual pursuits (he has a tremendous appetite for reading) isolate him from other family members and induce in him a strong desire to leave his Southern homeland.

Eugene's formative years however are marked with tragedy. His brother Grover Gant (“the gentlest and saddest of the boys”) (LH, 45) dies before reaching his teens, and years later Grover's twin brother Ben dies of pneumonia at the age of

twenty-six. A sense of heartfelt longing for what might have been, along with a searing sense of regret for the “strange, flitting, loneliness” (LH, 462) which characterised Ben’s short life cuts through Wolfe’s narrative. Loneliness along with an eternal search for solace and transcendence is at the heart of Ben’s condition. “He was a stranger” we are told, “and as he sought through the house, he was always a prowler to find some entrance into life, some secret undiscovered door—a stone, a leaf, that might admit him into light and fellowship” (LH, 93). The illness and death of Ben, described with tremendous compassion and empathy in *Look Homeward, Angel*, is widely acknowledged to be one of the most moving and powerful scenes in Wolfe’s writing³³⁶ (it is that section of the novel referred to above in Bienek’s Gregor-Dellin address, over which Bienek was moved to tears).³³⁷ The trope of loneliness, so central to *Look Homeward, Angel*, was consciously replicated in the tetralogy in many of Bienek’s protagonists, and most especially in the figure of Josel Piontek in *Die erste Polka* and *Septemberlicht*, who in some ways can be seen as Bienek’s “Eugene Gant” figure. He is for example connected to Eugene by the familiar “end of childhood” motif that appears in many of the Southern novels Bienek admired, and by his wayward behaviour as an adolescent. Eugene’s emotional and physical bewilderment at growing up, described by Wolfe in typically overwrought terms—“the wild confusion of adolescence, the sexual nightmares of puberty, the grief, the fear, the shame in which a boy broods over the dark world of his desire” (LH, 254)—could equally be Josel Piontek’s. The two boys are also linked by the fact that they both find love or what they believe is love—the emotionally immature Josel with Ulla Ossadnik, and the by now 16-year-old Eugene with the older Laura James—only to be let down by their respective loved ones. In *Zeit ohne Glocken* the talented Ulla, who has matured much faster

³³⁶ John Lane Idol, Jr. went so far as to call it “one of the greatest scenes in American fiction”. In: *A Thomas Wolfe Companion*, New York: Greenwood Press, 1987, p. 47. (Subsequently referred to as “Idol”.)

³³⁷ Months before he died, Bienek spoke again of his reaction to Ben Gant’s death. He was reading Klaus Mann’s diaries: “Er [Mann] rühmt Ben’s Tod”, Bienek wrote in his *Tagebücher* in March 1990, repeating his own reaction, “Ja, da habe ich tagelang geweint!” (TB, 1536).

than Josel, rejects the (by this time) 18-year-old to pursue a musical career, and Laura, despite her protestations of love, leaves Eugene to marry a man her own age. Neither boy really gets over his rejection.

Following graduation from Pulpit Hill Eugene returns to Altamont where his father's health continues to deteriorate (he has cancer, and dies in Wolfe's follow-up novel *Of Time and The River* in a powerful account), and from where his mother continues her land and property speculation, ruthlessly selling her husband's home and business premises, "over his indifferent mutter of protest" (LH, 504). Eugene sees the sale of Gant's old house as "the final disintegration of his family" (LH, 505). Finally, Eugene prepares to leave Altamont for Harvard. In the final chapter of the novel Eugene's late brother Ben appears to him as a ghost on the porch of W.O. Gant's former memorials workshop in the town square in a scene of strange moonlit reverie.³³⁸ Their conversation, surreal though it is—as they converse marble angels walk to and fro, "like huge wound dolls of stone" (LH, 517)—appears to galvanise Eugene's thoughts, and helps bring him to some kind of resolution about his future. There is nothing for him in Altamont, or perhaps in any city: using the symbols of the novel, the leaf, the stone, and the door (of which more later), Eugene proclaims that he must look to his inner self for solace, for transcendence, for fulfilment:

And no leaf hangs for me in the forest; I shall lift no stone upon the hills; I shall find no door in any city. But in the city of myself, upon the continent of my soul, I shall find the forgotten language, the lost world, a door where I may enter" (LH, 521).

The implication is that Altamont and childhood are now lost to Eugene forever. The final lines of the novel bear this out: "[...] as he stood for the last time by the angels of his father's porch, it seemed as if the Square already were far and lost; [...] he was like a man who stands upon a hill above the town he has left, yet does not say

³³⁸ This chapter is the second of two excerpts from *Schau Heimwärts, Engel* which Bienek reproduces in *Mein Lesebuch* (the first is the epigraph to *Look Homeward, Angel*).

“The town is near”, but turns his eyes upon the distant soaring ranges” (LH, 522). His situation was surely the inspiration for Josel Piontek’s palpable sense of loss as he prepares to flee Gleiwitz in *Die erste Polka*, the town similarly slipping away as he leaves Georg Montag’s *Gartenhaus*: “Wenn die Tür hinter mir zuschlägt, dachte er, ist etwas verschwunden, auf immer weg. Irgend etwas, das spürte er, hörte auf, wenn er den Raum hier verließ, das Haus, den Garten” (EP, 340).

4.3 BIENEK’S RECEPTION OF *LOOK HOMEWARD, ANGEL*

In an undated interview with the *Bayerischer Rundfunk* Horst Bienek spoke of his response as a young man during his short period in the SBZ/GDR to *Look Homeward, Angel* in terms of a life-transforming experience, and specifically acknowledged the debt he owed to the work with regard to *Die erste Polka*:

Und da möchte ich ein Buch nennen, das mich wie kaum ein anderes erschüttert, beeinflusst, verwandelt hat, ein Buch, das ich gelesen und mit dem ich gelebt habe, über lange Zeit, von dem man gewiß auch Spuren in der ‘Ersten Polka’ wird entdecken können. Es ist dies ‘Schau heimwärts, Engel’ von Thomas Wolfe.³³⁹

In a remarkable show of empathy, Bienek went on to identify personally with the main protagonist of Wolfe’s novel, finishing up with an exclamation (a rough version anyway) of the novel’s signature phrase:

‘Look homewards, Angel’ [sic], eine Geschichte vom begrabenen Leben, wie der Untertitel lautete, die Geschichte des Eugen Gant, der so alt wie ich damals war, und der vom Hunger nach Leben und nach Liebe, und den ewigen unerfüllbaren Sehnsüchten getrieben war. In ihm erkannte ich mich wieder, die Trauer und die Melancholie, die Lebensgier und die Lebenswut, und die rastlose Suche nach... ja, wonach? Nach dem gesteigerten Leben, nach dem ekstatischen Augenblick, nach, wie es bei Wolfe heißt, ‘der großen vergeßenen Sprache, dem verlorenen Ende eines Weges in den Himmel, ein Stein, ein Blatt, eine nichtgefundene Tür’.³⁴⁰

³³⁹ Horst Bienek, *Bayerischer Rundfunk*. Text: Horst Bienek. *Bücher der Kindheit*. Redaktion: Leonard Reinisch. Annotated typescript. Horst-Bienek-Archiv, BIW 12, p. 8. (Subsequently referred to as “*Bücher der Kindheit*”.)

³⁴⁰ *Bücher der Kindheit*, pp. 8-9.

It was not entirely unprecedented for readers to react in this remarkable way to Wolfe's first novel. Louis D. Rubin, Jr., a Southern novelist who ultimately became better known as a literary critic also enjoyed a long-term relationship with Wolfe's writing. Rubin described his initial reaction to *Look Homeward, Angel* in equally ecstatic terms: "My own encounter with the Wolfe novels has been a lifelong affair [...]", he wrote. "To say that I was enthralled with Thomas Wolfe scarcely describes what happened. I read *Look Homeward, Angel* and straightaway was transported into a realm of literary experience that I had not known could exist."³⁴¹ The difference between Bienek and Rubin, however, was that the 19-year old American lived in a democracy, and could choose to read and write about just about anything he wished; this was not a luxury available to Bienek. In 1946, tragically as it transpired, he had chosen the German Democratic Republic in which to live, a political, social and literary environment very different to Rubin's South Carolina. While for Rubin *Look Homeward, Angel* represented an intense artistic experience which served to promote and uphold the legitimacy of his thoughts and feelings,³⁴² for the 20-year old Bienek the novel was no less than an aesthetic manifesto, a means of vindicating his literary identity and of defending himself against the stultifying strictures of the socialist realism demanded by his East German superiors. Perhaps foolishly he ignored his better judgment by flaunting the novel on what was a decidedly dangerous kind of literary hustings. Referring to the 1950 Bad Saarow *Lehrgang*, he described in *Mein Lesebuch* the particulars of his artistic protest (and it does not appear to have been metaphorical): "Dort habe ich (und es war ziemlich kühn, damals) leidenschaftlich gegen den verordneten sozialistischen Realismus polemisiert, in der Hand die deutsche Übersetzung von Thomas Wolfes >Schau heimwärts, Engel< schwenkend, und mit diesem Buch habe ich einen ganz anderen Realismus verteidigt, den poetischen" (ML, 10). At this

³⁴¹ Louis D. Rubin, Jr., 'Thomas Wolfe Once Again', *North Carolina Historical Review*, 50.2 (1973) 169-189 (p. 170).

³⁴² "Here was a writer who had put into words so much that I felt and thought". Louis D. Rubin, Jr., 'Thomas Wolfe: Homage Renewed', *Sewanee Review*, 97.2 (1989), 261-276 (p. 264).

point, however, it should be said that according to Daniel Pietrek, Bienek did have a short dalliance with socialist realism which remained unmentioned in public utterances.³⁴³ John R. Frey even notes in his short treatise “Socialist Realism in East Germany” that according to Stephan Hermlin socialist realism was “conscientiously followed” by several younger writers, the most promising of whom included, among others, Dieter Noll, Günter Kunert, Christa Reinig, and Horst Bienek [sic].³⁴⁴ Perhaps any brief involvement was a means to be published and gain advancement.³⁴⁵ It cannot be doubted, however, that at the time of the Bad Saarow *Lehrgang* Bienek’s sympathies were firmly on the side of *poetic* rather than *socialist* realism, and it was certainly a measure of the long-term hold of *Look Homeward, Angel* on the author that some 20 years later Bienek should praise the novel so intently, and speak of its aesthetic importance to him: *Look Homeward, Angel* was “ein ekstatischer Gesang, eine lyrische Rhapsodie, ein Hymnus auf das Leben, [...] so eine Art Poetik für mich”.³⁴⁶ Clearly the choice represented a decisive and definitive rejection of the socialist realism of his GDR past in favour of Wolfe’s poetic realism: *Look Homeward, Angel*, after all, was quintessentially antithetical to the tenets of the (by now for Bienek) despised doctrine: the novel promoted no real political or ideological cause, was thoroughly pessimistic in tone, experimental in form, and modernist in spirit (for example in the use of symbolism, stream of consciousness, interior monologue), and in the final chapter (a favourite of Bienek’s) decidedly surreal. Above all it championed the integrity of the individual, and the validity of human emotion and feeling. Not exactly a novel committed to class struggle and the unassailability of the proletariat. Bienek was clearly

³⁴³ Pietrek, p. 480.

³⁴⁴ John R. Frey, ‘Socialist Realism in East Germany’, *German Quarterly*, 26.4 (1953), 272-278 (p. 273). It is worth noting that when Frey’s article was published Bienek had already begun his Vorkuta imprisonment.

³⁴⁵ Bienek put it this way in *Das allmähliche Ersticken von Schreien*: “Inzwischen aber verlangte der Staat, in dem ich lebte, von den jungen Dichtern Friedensgedichte. Und zwar in *sozialistischer* Manier. Verlangte - das bedeutete nichts anderes: wenn man gedruckt werden wollte, wenn man Förderung erhoffte, dann mußte man das tun” (AE, 33).

³⁴⁶ *Bücher der Kindheit*, p. 10.

mesmerised. “Thomas Wolfe war unser Gott damals”, he told Jo Wünsche, adding somewhat knowingly, “[...] Sie sehen, kein sozialistischer Realismus”.³⁴⁷

4.4 POETIC REALISM: THOMAS WOLFE AND HORST BIENEK

What then did Bienek learn from Thomas Wolfe and *Look Homeward, Angel* about the style, and what did he adapt? There was of course the obvious lesson that a literary work could legitimately include a realist mode of representation and simultaneously a poetic and symbolic agenda. E.K. Brown commented on Wolfe’s accomplishment in this respect, asserting in his aptly named essay “Thomas Wolfe: Realist and Symbolist” that Wolfe’s main characters, “were at once richly complicated human individuals who attracted the realist in him and also typical figures, often indeed gigantic symbols, of American life,” and proceeded to make an exemplary case for W.O. Gant who appears not only in *Look Homeward, Angel* but also in Wolfe’s second novel *Of Time and The River*:

His central character in the first two novels, Mr Gant, as well as having a variety of strongly marked simple aspects—those of the sordid drunkard, the master of invective, the wild foiled seeker after the meaning of his life—has the symbolic significance of nothing less than America itself.³⁴⁸

This appears to be exactly what Bienek is attempting in *Die erste Polka* with the figure of Leo Maria Piontek, the man who dies before the momentous events which irrevocably transform Upper Silesia. He is the quintessential Upper Silesian, a man who like W.O. Gant symbolises “nothing less” than his homeland. In the final chapters of the novel Bienek realistically recounts in flashback format key episodes of Piontek’s personal history, while simultaneously presenting him in symbolic terms, and as a spokesman for the mythical aspects of the life of the province. Piontek’s biography observes a typical Upper Silesian dynamic; political affiliation in the household he grew up in was unpredictable (he was the son of a miner who

³⁴⁷ *alternative*, p. 76.

³⁴⁸ E.K. Brown ‘Thomas Wolfe: Realist & Symbolist’, *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 10.2, (1941), 153-166 (p. 155).

voted against Korfanty in the Reichstag election (presumably of 1903), and a mother who rejoiced in Korfanty's victory). As an adult Piontek himself identifies as German but has no truck with National Socialism, and is indeed, unbeknownst to Valeska Piontek, a secret publisher of anti-Nazi handbills. Piontek is dominated by his wife, as his own father had been by his mother (Upper Silesia is very much a matriarchal society),³⁴⁹ and the break-up of the Piontek marriage is very much about Leo Maria's search for an artistic identity, and Valeska's inability to provide the intellectual space he needs to fulfil his creative needs (he is a family photographer with an extra-curricular enthusiasm for photographing the ruins, castles and towers of Upper Silesia, in the interest, tellingly, of preserving them for posterity). That he has a clear understanding of the province's dual nature, and is well aware of the political and strategic reality of living in a borderland industrial powerhouse—he is a man incidentally with a pronounced social conscience—is evident in the final chapter of *Die erste Polka* where Bienek temporarily abandons clear monologue in favour of impassioned, almost demented Upper Silesia-themed rhetoric, declaimed bizarrely in a sickroom of dense green smoke: "Und jetzt zerflügen die Armen die Erde des Herrn mit den Kanonen der Reichen . . ." (EP, 374).

Beyond poetic and symbolic concerns, there was also Wolfe's lesson regarding the relationship between fact (or actuality, as Wolfe sometimes called it) and fiction in artistic writing. Bienek had certainly read in "To The Reader"—Wolfe's preface to *Look Homeward, Angel*—that, "*Fiction is not fact, but fiction is fact selected and understood, fiction is fact arranged and charged with purpose*" (LH, xv), a dictum certainly consistent with poetic realism, and one with which Otto Ludwig himself would not have disagreed. In "The Story of A Novel" (1936) Wolfe's formal explanatory account of his writing practises and literary aesthetic,³⁵⁰ the author,

³⁴⁹ Schneiß, p. 264: "Frauen sind die eigentlich handelnden Personen, sie kämpfen ums Überleben, kämpfen erfolglos um ihre Männer und stehen doch im ewigen Konflikt mit ihnen".

³⁵⁰ Bienek was familiar with this work (BB, 52).

attempting to distance himself from charges of simply recording autobiography in *Look Homeward, Angel* claimed it was, “impossible, for a man who has the stuff of creation in him to make a literal transcription of his own experience” for, he added, “[e]verything in a work of art is changed and transfigured by the personality of the artist”.³⁵¹ According to Wolfe, *Look Homeward, Angel* offered a “general” (in the sense of universal) truth: the novel, was actually, “not true to fact, it was true to the general experience of the town I came from and I hope, of course, to the general experience of all men living”.³⁵² Nevertheless, in *The Story of A Novel*, the author, again referring to *Look Homeward, Angel*, appeared to admit that as a consequence of inexperience he had not always succeeded in his task. Pitfalls could have been avoided:

The thing a young writer is likely to do is to confuse the limits between actuality and reality. He tends unconsciously to describe an event in such a way because it actually happened that way, and from an artistic point of view, I can now see that this is wrong.³⁵³

And indeed, to Herbert J. Muller *Look Homeward, Angel*, as well as Wolfe’s second novel *Of Time and the River*, was “literally autobiography”. While some details were altered, Muller asserted that any changes appeared immaterial:

Naturally [Wolfe] omitted, altered, or fused many details; inevitably he colored or transfigured; but the liberties he took are so obvious or unimportant that it is hardly profitable to study the differences between the story of Eugene Gant and the life of Thomas Wolfe. For an adequate biographical sketch we need only change the names and add some dates.³⁵⁴

Whatever the actual outcome of the endeavour, however, the concept of creative accommodation (“to charge with purpose”) was certainly Wolfe’s literary intention for *Look Homeward, Angel*. He spoke frequently of this aesthetic; his “essential

³⁵¹ Thomas Wolfe, ‘The Story of A Novel’, *The Thomas Wolfe Reader*, edited by C. Hugh Holman, New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons (1962), 13-51 (p. 21).

³⁵² Ibid.

³⁵³ Ibid.

³⁵⁴ Herbert J Muller, *Thomas Wolfe*, Norfolk, Connecticut: New Directions Books, 1947, p. 25.

job”,³⁵⁵ he advised his literary agent Elizabeth Nowell in a letter in 1938, for example, was to transform his material, “into the terms of poetic and imaginative fact—into the truth of fiction”.³⁵⁶ Undoubtedly Horst Bienek would have concurred with the integrity of this essentially poetic realist statement: that artistic interpretation of source material from wherever it came actually heightened meaning and significance.

4.5 BIENEK’S USE OF HISTORY

In *Look Homeward, Angel*, Wolfe relied almost entirely on his considerable powers of memory: the novel was essentially an exercise (however successful) in transforming personal memories into art; historical and political issues were secondary concerns.³⁵⁷ In *Look Homeward, Angel*, the only Wolfe novel with which Bienek materially engaged, history and politics seldom impinged on the Eugene Gant narrative. The Civil War is of course remembered but, in comparison to other Southern novels such as Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!*, infrequently mentioned, and remembrance of the United States’ participation in the Great War is restricted mostly to commentaries on the war industry in those Virginia ports engaged in the transport of troops and the supply of war materials to France: these merely form a backdrop for Eugene Gant’s pathetic attempts to put his relationship with Laura James behind him. A lack of history and politics, however, was scarcely the case with Horst Bienek whose intentions for the tetralogy in historiographical terms were very much broader than Wolfe’s; history, often precisely rendered, was to play an essential role in Bienek’s literary reconstruction of his childhood province. For one thing, Bienek felt he owed this to future readers of the Gleiwitz novels. “[...] Handlung und Personen waren frei erfunden” he proclaimed:

³⁵⁵ *The Letters of Thomas Wolfe*, p. 751.

³⁵⁶ *The Letters of Thomas Wolfe*, p. 751.

³⁵⁷ Even in his Civil War short story “Chickamauga” (1938) Wolfe relied on the war memories of his great uncle John Westall, a Confederate veteran, rather than on any historical research of his own.

aber der historische Hintergrund sollte nachweisbar genau sein, sollte auch künftigen Lesern diese Zeit deutlich, gegenwärtig, nacherlebbar machen (AE, 103-104).

And in any case, as he admitted, his memory of his Gleiwitz upbringing was intense but imprecise.³⁵⁸ “[I]ch mußte noch vieles recherchieren”, he told *europäische ideen*, “weil ich nicht nur einen Roman schreiben, sondern auch die Geschichte dieses Landes erzählen wollte. Also Geschichte und Geschichten”,³⁵⁹ and later (speaking in the third person), “[...] so wollte er in den Geschichten dieser Kindheitswelt auch von *Geschichte* erzählen” (AE, 103). The decision to conflate the invented with historical fact (and historical interpretation) was to bring significant value to Bienek’s narrative: imaginative story-telling and the personal memories which from time to time gave rise to it, would be informed and authenticated by the integrity of factual history. History, however, had to be treated circumspectly. “Dabei darf sie nicht nach einer platten Ideologie zu ihrer Widerspiegelung verkommen” (BP, 11) he told an audience in Bremen in 1969 (as I have stated in my Introduction, Bienek had reservations about the use of historical documents in literary works).

Bienek relied to no inconsiderable extent on painstaking historical research to shore up and in a sense validate his memories and imaginative input (Winfried Halder, a historian himself, was particularly impressed by the thoroughness of the research. “Die Dichte seiner Faktensicherung hätte jedenfalls jedem „professionellen“ Historiker Ehre gemacht”, he wrote).³⁶⁰ It might well appear paradoxical on the one hand that Bienek should reserve the right to interpret and even adjust historical events as part of his poetic-realist agenda, and on the other work rigorously to maintain historical accuracy. Yet to Bienek the two positions were not irreconcilable. On those occasions when he had cause to alter historical

³⁵⁸ See ‘Gespräch mit Horst Bienek’, *europäische ideen*, 37 (1977), 9-13 (p. 12). (Subsequently referred to as “*europäische ideen*”.)

³⁵⁹ *europäische ideen*, p. 12.

³⁶⁰ Winfried Halder, p. 173.

events he did so as a poetic realist, i.e. in the ultimate interest of attaining a more meaningful symbolic truth. Wolfgang Frühwald called this process, “Die Adaption der historischen an die poetische und damit auch sinnbildliche Realität [...]”.³⁶¹ Bienek was extremely conscious that any envisaged changes had to be, by and large, credible. In his diary in 1981, for example (he was preparing for the writing of *Erde und Feuer* at the time), he mentioned several telephone conversations he had had with Gleiwitz doctors who remembered the arrival in the town of the Russians in 1945. He learnt nothing new from the conversations; nevertheless, he was not downhearted: “Ich merke, ich denke mir da immer »bessere«, aufregendere, interessantere Situationen aus...”, he wrote, adding (as a true poetic realist should), “natürlich aufgrund der Fakten” (TB, 275-276).

Of course some altered historical events were actually not all that significant, for example the relocation of local clergyman Pfarrer Pattas from Christ-König in the Gleiwitz outskirts to Peter-Pauls-Kirche in the town centre. Other changes, however, were carefully considered for their symbolic overtones. One case in point is the presence in *Septemberlicht* of the Gleiwitz Rabbi Dr. S. Ochs in the Niederwallstraße for Arthur Silbergleit’s poetry reading event in September 1939. When reminded in a letter from Ochs’ successor, E. I. Loewenstein (who had read a pre-publication *Septemberlicht* chapter in the *Neuer Rundschau*), that Dr. Ochs had actually emigrated from Gleiwitz in the spring of 1939, Bienek was unperturbed, and allowed the rabbi’s presence to stand. To Bienek, the oversight at the end of the day was less important than the “symbolische Rolle” (BP, 152) the rabbi played in the novel (he symbolises the spiritual and accomplished Silesian Jew, the type of man most communities would be proud to have living amongst them). Furthermore, the contribution of Dr. Ochs to the intellectual life of the Jewish community in Gleiwitz was particularly special to Bienek, and as part of his

³⁶¹ Wolfgang Frühwald, ‘Grenzgänger der Erinnerung: Zum poetischen Verfahren in Horst Bieneks Gleiwitzer Roman-Tetralogie’, *Horst Bienek: Aufsätze. Materialien. Bibliographie*, edited by Tilman Urbach, Munich: Hanser (1990), 13-40 (p. 25).

commitment to memorialise the Jewish tradition in Upper Silesia he wanted the rabbi to be remembered.³⁶² In a general sense, Bienek's undoubted respect for the Jewish protagonists in the tetralogy does suggest a certain sentimentality in attitude towards this community. Bienek's portrayal of Arthur Silbergleit himself in the tetralogy is interesting in this respect. Silbergleit was an authentic figure, and Bienek welcomed the opportunity to creatively transform what he knew about Silbergleit's life into the poetic. However, historical information about him was thin on the ground, and much had to be invented. Therefore, a great deal of Bienek's depiction of the poet in *Septemberlicht* and *Zeit ohne Glocken* amounted to imaginative fiction; that portrayal was to be defined in somewhat sentimental terms. In *Septemberlicht* and *Zeit ohne Glocken* Bienek chose to present Silbergleit in extremely respectful terms: Silbergleit is loyal, considerate, courteous and gracious. And while he was personally sceptical about Silbergleit's literary achievement,³⁶³ Bienek's reservations about the quality of Silbergleit's writing do not manifest themselves in the tetralogy.

Although he had met Silbergleit's wife in Berlin (she survived the war and had remarried), some of the information Bienek learnt from her about the poet appeared unreliable, and uninteresting from a narrative point of view (he mentions specifically her memory of Silbergleit's arrest in the couple's Berlin apartment). "Daher sind die Umstände der Verhaftung, seine Bücher, die er bis in die Gaskammer mitnimmt, alles Erfindung", Bienek advised his audience at the literary seminar in Melchingen. He then referred to Silbergleit's wife's testimony: "Hier war mir die Authentizität nicht genug [...]", he decided.³⁶⁴ For Bienek, to amend or invent was (paradoxically) a way to access the "authentic" by symbolic means. This was also the grounds for Bienek's decision in *Septemberlicht* to allow Silbergleit to

³⁶² "Wichtig scheint mir, daß er [Dr. Ochs], der so lange in Gleiwitz gelebt, gelehrt und der jüdischen Gemeinde vorgestanden hat, in Erinnerung bleibt" (BP, 152).

³⁶³ "Sein Werk ist, bis auf wenige Ausnahmen, ziemlich konventionell und dem Zeitgeschmack verhaftet, ja darin erstickend" (BB, 84).

³⁶⁴ Melchingen, p. 13.

travel from Berlin to his childhood town of Gleiwitz in September 1939. This relocation was historically undocumented,³⁶⁵ and quite frankly a highly unlikely move given war with Poland had just commenced. Silbergleit's relocation, however, allowed Bienek in the first instance to rehearse once again the complex issues relating to the Upper Silesian Jewish/Catholic/German symbiosis concerning Georg Montag first outlined in *Die erste Polka*, and in the second opened a narrative door for the restrained and moving chapters in *Zeit ohne Glocken* where the poet and other Silesian Jews join Dutch Jews in Kattowitz on their enforced journey from Drente-Westerbork in the Netherlands to Birkenau.

On occasion what appears to be fictional in Bienek's Gleiwitz turns out to be derived from historical events outside Upper Silesia. I am referring here to an incident in the life of the Gleiwitz Jew Herr Karpe, again, like Silbergleit, a sympathetic and caring figure who accompanies the poet on the enforced Good Friday journey to Auschwitz. Karpe is an interesting figure from the point of view of Bienek's poetic-realist agenda. He is the owner of a laundry business on the Ringstraße in Gleiwitz whose apartment was confiscated on the day of his wife's funeral; he subsequently complained to the police with humiliating consequences:

[...] und die Polizei haben [sic] nur gelacht, er mußte Schuhe und Strümpfe ausziehen, dann hängten sie ihm ein Schild um den Hals ICH WERDE MICH NIE MEHR BEI DER POLIZEI BESCHWEREN und so jagten sie ihn über den Gleiwitzer Ring (ZG, 137).

The story is seamlessly integrated into *Zeit ohne Glocken*. However, Bienek did not invent it; actually it derives from Gerhard Schoenberger's *Der gelbe Stern*,³⁶⁶ a documentary account in text and photograph of Jewish persecution in Europe between 1933 and the war's end. Bienek reported the work had engaged him for weeks (BP, 135). One image from the book, photographed in Munich in 1933, is the

³⁶⁵ Silbergleit actually remained in Berlin until his arrest in March 1943, as Bienek explained in *Der Blinde in der Bibliothek*: "Er kam in das Gestapo-Gefängnis am Alexanderplatz, von dort mit einem Transport nach Polen, wahrscheinlich nach Auschwitz" (BB, 90).

³⁶⁶ Schoenberger, p. 15.

source—unacknowledged by Bienek—for the Karpe incident: it is of a Jewish lawyer, named as “Dr. Spiegel”,³⁶⁷ walking the streets similarly without shoes, a placard around his neck emblazoned with the same words, “Ich werde mich nie mehr bei der Polizei beschweren”. Schoenberner’s shocking caption explains what is going on:

[...] ein Mensch sucht auf der Polizei Schutz vor dem SA-Terror. Aber die SA ist selbst zur »Hilfspolizei« ernannt worden.³⁶⁸

Bienek gives the lawyer’s story to Herr Karpe as part of his poetic-realist initiative: here a documented incident in the life of a Munich lawyer is incorporated into the back story of a fictional Gleiwitz businessman, lending Bienek’s portrayal of Upper Silesia an incontestable sense of authenticity. Another photograph from *Der gelbe Stern* is also significant in this respect. In *Beschreibung einer Provinz* Bienek reported he had been impressed with the photograph of an unnamed Dutch woman in the book,³⁶⁹ and spoke of a fictional opportunity:

Diese Frau, auffallend gut gekleidet, mit dem gelben Stern an der Brust JOOD – sie möchte ich beschreiben. Ich erfinde mir dazu eine Geschichte (BP, 135).

Unlike the Munich lawyer, however, the woman in Schoenberner’s book is without provenance: her only backstory in *Der gelbe Stern* is her Jewish identity. But the source was factual, and one which Bienek could weave into his poetic-realist narrative. In *Zeit ohne Glocken* she subsequently became Bienek’s fictional Rebekka Morgenthaler, a refined Hilversum hotel proprietor, dispossessed of her property by the Nazis, and cruelly deported to Auschwitz on the same train which Silbergleit and Herr Karpe join in Kattowitz. In the conflation of the real and the invented typical of Bienek’s narrative methodology Rebekka becomes an archetypal poetic-realist creation: an authentic historical figure, photographed (we now know)³⁷⁰ in

³⁶⁷ Schoenberner, p. 15. His real name was Michael Siegel (1882-1979).

³⁶⁸ Schoenberner, p. 15

³⁶⁹ He reprinted the image in *Beschreibung einer Provinz* (BP, 135).

³⁷⁰ For further information see: www.niodimagelab.nl/behind-the-star (accessed: June 2025).

June 1943 on the Olympiaplein in Amsterdam, and now fictionally reimagined for the purposes of enhanced signification and authenticity. And yet, Bienek's aim to invent (*erfinden*) a story for the narrative surrounding Rebekka Morgenthaler was not entirely new or original. I do not necessarily believe she was, as Friederike Eigler deduces in *Heimat, Space, Narrative*,³⁷¹ modelled on the historical figure of Edith Stein, the Lower Silesian German Jewish philosopher who converted to Catholicism in 1922, and was murdered at Auschwitz.³⁷² In fact, in an intertextual appropriation Bienek borrowed the plot line in respect of Rebekka from the Australian novel *Riders in the Chariot* (1961) by Patrick White. By turning to White, Bienek found a tried and tested model to depict that which, in its heinousness, was often considered to be practically "unrepresentable". Bienek was admittedly an enthusiastic admirer and occasional reviewer of White's work, once referring to him as "der australische Faulkner"³⁷³ (a description which amounted at least to Bienek's acknowledgement of White's preeminence as an author).³⁷⁴ Certainly there was some synergy between *Zeit ohne Glocken* and White's novel, as both works embrace as subject matter the German persecution of Jews during the war years, up to and including the delivery of victims to Nazi death camps. Indeed, as John Docker put it, *Riders in the Chariot* was "an early example of evocation of the Holocaust,"³⁷⁵ and noted that to date (his article was published in 2007) White's novel seemed, "to have escaped the attention of the critical literature concerning Holocaust novels".³⁷⁶ *Riders in the Chariot* had not, however, escaped Bienek's attention. It is certainly worth mentioning that Arthur Silbergleit's and Rebekka

³⁷¹ Eigler, p. 92, Footnote 43. Eigler based her assumption on an inconclusive entry in *Beschreibung einer Provinz* (BP, 134).

³⁷² The connection appears to be that Edith Stein was imprisoned in the Nazi transit camp at Drente-Westerbork in the Netherlands and transported to Auschwitz from there; in *Zeit ohne Glocken* Bienek's fictional Rebekka is also transported from the same camp to her death in Auschwitz.

³⁷³ Horst Bienek, 'Versuch der fünften Erdteil zu beschreiben', *Merkur: Deutsche Zeitschrift für europäisches Denken*, 16.2 (1972), 151-166 (p. 161).

³⁷⁴ Bienek's copy of the German translation of *Riders in the Chariot* (*Die im feurigen Wagen*, Cologne: Kiepenheuer und Witsch, 1969) is available at the Horst-Bienek-Archiv (Bia 23/368).

³⁷⁵ John Docker, 'An Early Holocaust Novel: White's *Riders in the Chariot*, a Critique', *Holocaust Studies: A Journal of Culture and History*, 13.2-3 (2007), 87-108 (p. 87).

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

Morgenthaler's harrowing train journey to Auschwitz-Birkenau in *Zeit ohne Glocken* is remarkably similar to the enforced journey made to the fictional (and ironically named) Nazi death camp at Friedensdorf by Mordecai Himmelfarb and the so-called "Lady from Czernowitz" in White's novel. It is true, however, that both figures present very differently to Silbergleit and Rebekka in *Zeit ohne Glocken*: White's Himmelfarb is a Jewish professor of English in a northern German town who, when his hiding place is discovered, gives himself up to the authorities, while the Lady from Czernowitz, also Jewish, presents as an affluent, well-travelled, and in some respects arrogant woman. Nevertheless, a short, tragic fellowship develops on the train between the two people, as it does between Silbergleit and Rebekka. Like many on their way to Auschwitz in *Zeit ohne Glocken* the Lady from Czernowitz is initially optimistic about her prospects for the future, until she eventually arrives at the door of the gas chamber where her life, like that of Rebekka Morgenthaler, cruelly ends. Unlike Bienek's Silbergleit, however, who also dies, Himmelfarb himself is spared at the door of the "bath-house" by being singled out by a guard for camp duties. He later escapes the camp during an armed uprising and survives the war.

4.6 GLEIWITZ AND ALTAMONT

As part of his quest for verifiable accuracy Bienek was also eager to present the streetscape of his childhood town as faithfully as possible. During the preparation period for *Die erste Polka* he waited patiently for a 1932 Gleiwitz city map to arrive from Bottrop (the West German city twinned with Gleiwitz) and planned his fictional protagonists' routes through the town ("Male mit verschiedenen Farbstiften die Orte der Handlung hinein. Der Weg vom Sender in der Tarnowitzer Landstraße bis zum Hotel *Haus Oberschlesien*, in die Strachwitz-Straße, zur Peter-Pauls-Kirche...") (BP, 29). It is likely that Bienek's attention to detail in this respect is something he learned from Thomas Wolfe: it is noteworthy that Bienek's Gleiwitz is as closely mapped in the tetralogy as Wolfe's Altamont is in *Look Homeward, Angel*. Indeed, Bienek's description of Josel Piontek's and Andreas Pilgrim's sight-

seeing excursion through Gleiwitz in Chapter 7 of *Die erste Polka*, in which the streets of the town and the oddities of its population are introduced to the reader, is highly reminiscent of Eugene Gant's celebrated walk through Altamont with his friend George Graves in Chapter 24 of *Look Homeward, Angel*. (In Wolfe's famous scene, well known for its literary reliance on the "Wandering Rocks" section of Joyce's *Ulysses*,³⁷⁷ the two Altamont schoolboys range through a realistic streetscape of avenues and churchyards, past businesses, stores, banks and schools, mingling as they walk with a liberal cross-section of the town's citizens). While Bienek was proud of the fact that his attention to detail ensured his readers could navigate their way through the streets of Gleiwitz, "wie mit einem Stadtplan" (BP, 149) it was, however, typically as much the imaginative/mythical, rather than the factual/material agenda that was to shape Bienek's townscape. In the set piece description of the Haus Oberschlesien in Chapter 7 of *Die erste Polka*, for example, we have in the same paragraph both a realist description of the hotel, albeit with lyrical accents: "ein mächtiger grauschwarzer stumpfer Kasten, rechts geflankt von der hier in Beton gezähmten und im Sommer auch trügerisch still dahinströmenden Klodnitz", and a surreal description of three lascivious life-size fauns on the fountain rehearsing mythical tales to those café guests with time to listen (Vor dem gewaltigen Steinkasten erzählten sie an warmen Sommerabenden zu dem steigenden und wieder fallenden Wasser von alten polnischchen Wassergeisten) (EP, 80), a scene certainly in the spirit of Wolfe's walking statues in the final chapter of *Look Homeward, Angel*. At one point in *Beschreibung einer Provinz* (during the writing of *Zeit ohne Glocken*) Bienek spoke in a speculative manner of the evolving relationship between fact and fiction in his depiction of the town. Was the town he was describing losing its recognisability?

³⁷⁷ See Nathan L. Rothman, 'Thomas Wolfe and James Joyce: A Study in Literary Influence', *The Enigma of Thomas Wolfe: Biographical and Critical Selections*, edited by Richard Walser, Cambridge: Harvard University Press (1953), 263-289 (pp. 281 – 282).

Gleiwitz, ist es noch mein Gleiwitz, die Stadt meiner Kindheit, so wie ich sie jetzt beschreibe? Ich bin ursprünglich von ihr ausgegangen, ganz akribisch, und bin nicht wenig stolz darauf, daß man mit diesen Büchern die Straßen und Plätze und Parks dieser Stadt durchstreifen kann wie mit einem Stadtplan. Und doch hat sie sich in meinem Kopf inzwischen selbstständig gemacht, mit anderem Leben, anderem Geist erfüllt, ist jetzt ganz aus der Phantasie gespeist (BP, 149).

The answer is that it was not; it was still the town of his childhood, but one enhanced by imagination and poetical insight, which for Bienek made the town more real than real: it helped reveal the core of the Gleiwitz experience as he saw it. Despite his insistence on historical accuracy Bienek was not interested in a mimetic representation of Gleiwitz, and in the end imagination was to prevail. The “Geschichten” were in the final analysis more important than the “Geschichte”, or to put it another way, the historical and factual only worked, or were most effective, within the parameters of his concept of poetic realism. Bienek does appear to be aware of his paradoxical endeavour: that there was a certain tension involved in the novels between the accurate recording of history and historical figures, and the subjective input “ganz aus der Phantasie gespeist”. Take for example the figure of Wassermilka, Leo Maria Piontek’s sister in *Die erste Polka*. In *Beschreibung einer Provinz* Bienek recounts the story of how an elderly woman, formerly from Gleiwitz, advised him at a book reading that she had known the woman. In fact, Bienek tells the reader, Wassermilka was actually “ein Produkt meiner Phantasie” (BP, 99). The reader therefore cannot always be sure what is actually real and what is invented. Perhaps this suited Bienek’s overall symbolic design: in Upper Silesia ambivalence and uncertainty were the keywords.

4.7 POLITICS IN GLEIWITZ AND ALTAMONT

As we know Bienek frequently compared Upper Silesia with the Southern US states, yet how closely does Wolfe’s North Carolina at the turn of the century resemble Gleiwitz on the eve of war in 1939? The answer is not very closely at all: whatever Bienek’s feelings were about the similarities between the two regions—some of

these are outlined in Section 1.6 of this study and refer mostly to the work of William Faulkner—the Upper Silesia of the tetralogy appears in political, social and racial terms a world away from Thomas Wolfe’s early 1900s North Carolina. In terms of race, for example, *Look Homeward, Angel*’s frame of reference is essentially that of the white immigrant European; Altamont’s African Americans live in racially segregated areas, and play only a minor role in the novel, indeed there are no significant black characters in the novel at all, and despite evidence of some racial prejudice against blacks (and indeed the Jewish community), we learn of little or no racial tension on the streets. Altamont therefore appears more or less a racially content town, which hardly represents the actual truth about South Carolina at the start of the century. However, *Look Homeward, Angel* does highlight a South of changing opinions regarding the past. The novel intimates that as the North makes its presence felt economically and culturally, attitudes in the South to past conflict (meaning the war which ended in 1865) are changing. In marked contrast to Faulkner’s *Light in August* and *Absalom, Absalom!*, *Look Homeward, Angel* shows a Southern citizenry not overly preoccupied by its past; remembrance of the Civil War is rare, and if it is mentioned at all, it is for the most part in ironic irreverence. A mistrust of the North, however, still endures, though this no longer appears to derive from the shame of ignominious defeat in the “old war”. Northerners in *Look Homeward, Angel*, just like Reich Germans to the Upper Silesian in Bienek’s tetralogy, were simply from a different planet: Eliza Gant’s reservations about the Northern outsider were those, “of fear, distrust, alienation—the “Yankee” to whom she humorously referred was foreign and remote” (LH, 127). Nor does Eugene Gant as a schoolboy harbour many illusions about the Southern past. Although he realises his emotional feelings for the South (extravagantly termed as “the desire of dark romanticism”) have been influenced by classroom reading, privately he has no appetite for the nostalgic and fanciful legends of the Confederacy or the antebellum past, which spuriously claimed that, “slavery was a benevolent institution, conducted to a constant banjo-strumming

[...], where all women were pure, gentle, and beautiful, all men chivalrous and brave" (LH, 127). In a way, then, *Look Homeward, Angel* is the story of a town to some extent disengaging from its Confederate past (or at least that is the evidence of the novel).

This aspect alone differentiates Wolfe's South from Bienek's Gleiwitz. Where a sense of the significance of the past for the present appears to be diminishing in Altamont, in Gleiwitz it is growing. Bienek's Upper Silesia between 1939 and 1945 is political to its core, a place where the past is shown increasingly to have undoubted and on-going relevance for the present. We need only point to the various snippets of conversation outlined in the two social gatherings of *Die erste Polka* and *Septemberlicht* (the Piontek wedding reception and the Piontek funeral meal respectively) for evidence of the discord and the heightened emotion generated by discussions about the recent past, and Upper Silesia's contested status as a border region. For Bienek the dissension appears to derive not from within the province itself, but rather from an unambiguous outside source. If in Bienek's conceptualisation of Upper Silesia memories of Versailles, the Polish Uprisings, the 1922 division of the province appear in practice in the period between 1918 and 1939 not to have affected the capacity of the mixed Polish and German population to remain living in a kind of pragmatic stability, the influence of National Socialism progressively encroaching from the Reich has changed this utterly.³⁷⁸ Nazism has reawakened and exploited historical grievances, and politicised Upper Silesian culture and social tradition to such a point that binational living in expedient equilibrium now appears increasingly problematic, if not impossible. That the Reich in Bienek's analysis is the source of this imported discord

³⁷⁸ See Sebastian Mrozek who asserts that Bienek's construct in the tetralogy was that Upper Silesia was relatively stable in the period after the division of the province in 1922, and that outside forces ("in erster Linie das Eingreifen der externen Faktoren in die relative friedliche – nach der Teilung Oberschlesiens optimal stabilisierte – deutsch-polnische Symbiose") ultimately led to the demise of the province. Sebastian Mrozek, "'...naturalnie sprechen wir deutsch hier ...': Oberschlesien als literarisch (re)konstruierte, deutsch-polnischer Gedächtnisraum in Horst Bieneks *Gleiwitzer Tetralogie*", *Silesia Nova, Vierteljahresschrift für Kultur und Geschichte*, 11.2, (2014), 119-134 (p. 126).

and evil in Upper Silesia is certainly intimated by Georg Montag's impressions of Gleiwitz as he makes his way to the Haus Oberschlesien for the Piontek wedding reception: the city ironically appears to him as "eine okkupierte Stadt" (EP, 248). The Reich seen from the perspective of Montag, an assimilated Catholic/Jewish Upper Silesian, is in a real sense a kind of foreign power, an occupying force.

4.8 WOLFE'S THEME OF LONELINESS AND ITS IMPACT

The theme of loneliness was central to Wolfe's artistic vision; he described it in an autobiographical sketch as "the central and inevitable fact of human existence".³⁷⁹ In *Look Homeward, Angel* the theme was carefully prefigured in the epigraph (sometimes called a prose poem, or "proem") to the novel. Bienek reproduced the epigraph in full in *Mein Lesebuch* (ML, 65), an inclusion which certainly suggests its importance to him. Wolfe's epigraph was significant for several reasons. Firstly, it articulated the author's perspective on the essential isolation of the individual and the impossibility of knowing others which was to inform *Look Homeward, Angel* so pervasively ("Which of us has known his brother? Which of us has looked into his father's heart? [...] Which of us is not forever a stranger and alone?") (LH, 1), and secondly it contained the first instances of the stone, leaf and the unfound door motifs which are threaded through *Look Homeward, Angel* in various formats, and which eventually found their way into *Die erste Polka*.

The prose poem set the tone for *Look Homeward Angel*. As we have seen the melancholic figure of Ben Gant was an obvious example of Wolfe's preoccupation with the depiction of human loneliness. The whole Gant household, indeed, is gripped by a sense of isolation and separation. But in a novel replete with the friendless and the lonely, the trope is also poignantly apparent in the figure of Eugene Gant himself, around whom Wolfe's narrative is centred. From the outset the name of Eugene becomes a byword for loneliness and isolation; even at his birth Wolfe allows Eliza Gant, rather too floridly perhaps, to recognise

³⁷⁹ Thomas Wolfe, 'God's Lonely Man', *The Lost Boy*, New York: Harper & Row (1965), 193-205 (p. 193).

“unfathomable wells of remote and intangible loneliness” in her child’s dark eyes (LH, 66), and Wolfe’s recurrent motto “O Lost!” turns up repeatedly in association with Eugene throughout the novel like a bad penny.

Bienek was to replicate Wolfe’s theme extensively in his Silesian tetralogy, in a sense transposing Altamont’s loneliness to Gleiwitz. The isolation of the Gant family is plainly re-enacted in the lives of Bienek’s Piontek protagonists, whether it be in the lifelong loneliness of Valeska Piontek (“eine Einsamkeit, die von ihr bis zum Himmel reichte”) (ZG, 410), or that of her husband and daughter who both struggle for spiritual connection to others, or perhaps most poignantly in the isolation of her son Josel Piontek, who even as a child has learned to come to terms with loneliness (EP, 320). The boy’s growing feelings of alienation and abandonment, most evident on the night he flees Gleiwitz, and at his dead father’s bedside in *Septemberlicht* (“Und dabei hätte ich so gern von dir gewußt, wie das damals war, als du so alt warst wie ich, und ob du auch so pjerunnisch einsam gewesen bist wie ich”) (SL, 17) mirror Eugene Gant’s plaintive isolation and loneliness in *Look Homeward, Angel*; Josel’s occasional Upper Silesian *pjerunnisch* in the quotation above scarcely takes us off the scent of Eugene Gant (and maybe is not meant to). Loneliness is clearly one of the motifs that connects Josel Piontek with Eugene Gant; that Bienek intended an analogy between the two boys is made quite clear as Josel takes his leave of Georg Montag in Chapter 29 of *Die erste Polka* and flees Gleiwitz in the erroneous belief that he has killed a drunken army sergeant. Quite unexpectedly for the reader (there is no indication in *Die erste Polka* that the retired magistrate has an interest in contemporary American fiction),³⁸⁰ Montag is moved to quote part of the opening line of *Look Homeward, Angel*’s epigraph, “ein Stein, ein Blatt, eine nicht gefundene Tür” (EP, 335) in response to Josel’s description of the sergeant’s attack on Ulla Ossadnik following

³⁸⁰ It is, however, possible that Montag was familiar with *Schau heimwärts, Engel*. The novel in a translation by Hans Schiebelhuth was published in Germany by Rowohlt in 1932.

the Piontek wedding reception. The phrase recurs in two further configurations, firstly as part of a curious prayer when Josel takes his leave of Montag (“Komm, laß uns für dich beten! Er legte dem Jungen die Hand auf das Haar und sagte: ein Stein, ein Blatt, eine nicht gefundene Tür” (EP, 341), and secondly as Montag locks his front door for the last time, and the extended phrase from Wolfe’s prose poem closes the chapter: “Ein Stein, ein Blatt, eine nicht gefundene Tür; von einem Stein, einem Blatt, einer Tür” (EP, 341-342).

To the uninitiated reader this intertextual quotation from *Look Homeward, Angel* can be baffling; despite Bienek’s explanation in a note at the end of *Die erste Polka* that the phrase is simply a “hommagehafte[s] Zitat [...] von Thomas Wolfe” (EP, 380), it certainly seems in context to be more than just a tribute to a pivotal writer from Bienek’s GDR past. Regarding the significance of Wolfe’s phrase in *Look Homeward, Angel* itself, Wolfe’s critics are divided. Malcolm Cowley judged several of Wolfe’s recurrent phrases in the novel including “A stone, a leaf, a door” to be, “almost meaningless in themselves, but used as musical themes that are stated and restated with variations sometimes through a whole novel”.³⁸¹ For John Lane Idol Jr. the motifs represented some of the novel’s major symbols: “A stone (permanence amidst change), a leaf (the decay and changing aspects of life), a door (the opening to both a new life for earthbound men and a return to a life before an earthly sojourn).”³⁸² For the purposes of Bienek’s reception of the phrase, however, it is interesting that Marcus Cunliffe sees the motifs in terms of the search for a home that has somehow been lost. “Wolfe, the South, mankind”, Cunliffe wrote, “seeks a ‘stone, a leaf, an unfound door’. Americans are lost; home is a place they have grown away from [...], and not replaced with any other permanent or

³⁸¹ *A Second Flowering*, p. 178.

³⁸² Idol, p. 87. The mention of a “life before an earthly sojourn” is a reference to preexistence, a doctrine described by David Herbert Donald, Wolfe’s biographer, as “the belief that the soul left the blissful, unchanging sphere of immortality to enter a human body at the time of birth”. See David Herbert Donald, *Look Homeward: A Life of Thomas Wolfe*, London: Bloomsbury, 1987, p. 149.

satisfying allegiance.”³⁸³ An interpretation of Wolfe’s phrase along these lines might well have resonated with Horst Bienek as he set out to reconstruct his own lost *Heimat* (or *Kindheit*, as he preferred to call it) as a literary memorial of his and Upper Silesia’s past. One senses here Bienek’s identification with Wolfe as the chronicler of a lost childhood that was also evident in “Baracke Deutschland”, quoted above. The implication is that Josel, now that his childhood is over, is also lost (Bienek describes the loss forthrightly: “sie [die Kindheit] hatte sich in tausend kleine Teile der Trauer, der Melancholie, des Schmerzes und der Finsternis aufgelöst”) (EP, 341). Like Eugene Gant, Josel has become a stranger in his own land; he too must learn to search for Wolfe’s “nicht gefundene Tür” (EP, 342), for that elusive gateway—if it can ever be found—that will deliver meaning and enlightenment (in the context of the tetralogy overall this could perhaps be *Heimat* itself). It appears a daring equivalence, and one critic, Thomas Zenke, questioned the appropriateness of the implied association between Josel Piontek and Eugene Gant (it is one of few references I have come across in Bienek criticism to Wolfe’s “stone, leaf, unfound door” motif). It is worth quoting Zenke in full (he is referring to Josel taking his leave of Montag, following the boy’s defence of Ulla Ossadnik from the drunken Feldwebel Metzmacher):

Die Episode endet mit einem Zitat aus Thomas Wolfes “Schau heimwärts, Engel”: “Ein Stein, ein Blatt, eine nicht gefundene Tür; von einem Stein, einem Blatt, einer Tür.” Will Bienek hier mit entliehenen Symbolen, die bei Wolfe eine höchst vielschichtige Bedeutung haben und den ganzen Roman tragen, andeuten, daß Josel ein zweiter Eugene werden könnte oder gar schon ist, einer, der den Weg zu den letzten Geheimnissen des Lebens sucht?

Das wäre eine groteske Überschätzung der dürftigen Geschichte Josels, die solche hochfliegenden Deutungen nicht zuläßt.³⁸⁴

³⁸³ Marcus Cunliffe, *The Literature of the United States*, New York: Penguin, 1986, p. 366.

³⁸⁴ Thomas Zenke: ‘Eine Polka – aber nicht auf dem Vulkan: Horst Bieneks oberschlesische Familienchronik’, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 21 October 1975, p. 22. (Subsequently referred to as “Zenke”.)

It is true that in *Die erste Polka* Josel is hardly a protagonist of Eugene Gant's unique stature. However, we should bear in mind that Eugene is much older when *Look Homeward, Angel* ends than Josel Piontek is in *Die erste Polka*. He is also educated to a much higher degree and is certainly much more experienced and sexually aware than the Gleiwitz boy. It seems clear that at fourteen years old Josel can hardly have the insight that Eugene has at seventeen. Nevertheless, the establishment of an association between Josel Piontek and Eugene Gant through Montag's Wolfe quotation does define how Bienek wishes his fictional character to be understood.³⁸⁵ Unquestionably, however, this deliberate insinuation of affiliation by the narrator makes more sense in the light of the tetralogy taken as a whole (Zenke's review predated the publication of *Septemberlicht*, *Zeit ohne Glocken*, and *Erde und Feuer*). What Zenke could not have known was that in the three subsequent Gleiwitz novels Josel's character was to be fleshed out much more fully, raising his profile to a much higher level, and making the comparison with Eugene Gant more credible.

This, however, was not Zenke's last word about the relationship between *Look Homeward, Angel* and *Die erste Polka*. "Und nebenbei [...]", he wrote, "Gleiwitz ist wahrlich nicht Wolfes Altamont, die Chronik der Familie der Gants nicht die der Pionteks",³⁸⁶ indicating presumably that in terms of literary status the two towns, and the two families in the respective novels shared no equivalence. These points can of course be countered by the same argument as above: the Gleiwitz tetralogy deserves to be judged in its entirety. Over the four novels Bienek's Gleiwitz is a uniquely full depiction of Upper Silesia, encompassing, sometimes controversially, but ultimately conciliatorily, the history and tragedy of the province, the unique mentality of its borderland population, and an exposition as the author saw it of its downfall. In many ways it is as authentic a depiction of Upper Silesia as Wolfe's

³⁸⁵ See also McIvor 1986, pp. 60-61.

³⁸⁶ Zenke.

equally constructed depiction of Asheville NC in *Look Homeward, Angel*. The same can also be said about the Piontek family itself. Bienek's portrait of the extended family over the four novels is wide ranging and extremely detailed, covering the family dynamic from the start of the war until February 1945. And, given Zenke's belittling comments on Bienek's "chronicle" of the Piontek family in *Die erste Polka*, it was perhaps ironic that the matriarch of the Piontek family, Josel Piontek's mother, is now widely recognised by critics to be one of Bienek's most convincing figures in the tetralogy as a whole.

4.9 WOLFE'S ELIZA GANT AND BIENEK'S PORTRAYAL OF VALESKA PIONTEK

Though Bienek named Valeska Piontek after his own mother (whose maiden name was Valerie Piontek) and gave her the role of provincial piano teacher (his own mother's profession) she was not, despite what is commonly assumed, the sole inspiration for the fictional Valeska Piontek. Valeska was also influenced by *Look Homeward, Angel's* persistent but self-deluded Southern mother and entrepreneur Eliza Gant. Eliza is a shrewd businesswoman—a small-town American capitalist—acquiring without the support of her husband a substantial property portfolio in the expanding Altamont of the 1910s and early 20s as the Southern town followed a fraught trajectory towards some degree of national (meaning US) homogenisation. It is certainly striking that many aspects of Eliza's character and her fraught relationships with her family in *Look Homeward, Angel* appear largely replicated in Bienek's novels by the rather unappealing Valeska Piontek (hardly, as described by Heinz Winfried Sabais, "[...] eine der schönsten Müttergestalten der zeitgenössischen deutschen Literatur", as we shall see).³⁸⁷ In particular, Valeska displays many of Eliza's most unsympathetic characteristics. Both women tend to deceive themselves about the true motivations for their actions, and while both are capable and efficient, their controlling single-mindedness has ensured that neither enjoys a happy marriage—each wife ultimately undermines her husband's

³⁸⁷ Hans Winfried Sabias, 'Bieneks epischer Schauplatz', *Bienek lesen: Materialien zu seinem Werk*, edited by Michael Krüger, Munich: Hanser (1980), 50-63 (p. 61).

professional career—or satisfactory relationships with their children. As mothers, both women experience confrontational love-hate relationships with their respective daughters, Helen Gant Barton and Irma Piontek. But most importantly, as if to establish a direct link between *Look Homeward, Angel* and the Gleiwitz tetralogy, Bienek assigns Valeska Piontek a similar interest in property and land speculation. In this she is ably assisted in her various schemes by her brother, the lawyer Willy Wondrak, in a supporting role that Eliza Gant's husband refuses to play. It is interesting to note that in *Reise in die Kindheit* Bienek mentions that his own mother, Valerie Bienek, may herself have had an interest in property, "[...] sie soll sogar mit Immobilien spekuliert haben", ³⁸⁸ he writes, but it is all very unclear whether a property in Peiskretscham she lost in the economic crisis of 1929 was actually inherited, or acquired through speculation.³⁸⁹ In spite of this, it is reasonable to deduce that Valeska Piontek's fascination with the purchase of real estate and the central part it plays in her life bears the unmistakable stamp of Eliza Gant's defining preoccupation. Not that Valeska ever acquires the considerable wealth in Gleiwitz that Eliza Gant accumulates in Altamont (at one point in *Look Homeward, Angel* Wolfe devotes several paragraphs to her land and property purchases, and their current values) (LH, 161-163). Nevertheless, Valeska's speculation is not insignificant, and not without risk.

Bienek uses Valeska's land speculation as a way of revealing the progressive moral degeneration taking hold in the Gleiwitz community as the fragile peace degenerates into war. The critical discrepancy between Eliza Gant's and Valeska Piontek's property dealings is in their very different business practices. Eliza eschews exploitation: her philosophy appears to be based on the importance of

³⁸⁸ *Reise in die Kindheit*, p. 89.

³⁸⁹ In *Septemberlicht* Bienek gives this Peiskretscham backstory to Schachtner, the Gleiwitz delicatessen owner: "hab damals was geerbt von meinem Vater, nicht sehr viel [...] also hab ich die Kneipe in Peiskretscham gekauft, die ging nicht gut, und ich hab sie in in der Krise einem Juden verkaufen müssen zu einem Spottpreis, aber was sollte ich machen" (SL, 248). Schachtner may (or may not) become Valeska's business partner when war breaks out.

benefits for all parties concerned, “[...] all I want is a fair return on my investment. I believe in every one making his profit and giving the other fellow a chance” (LH, 366), she teasingly proclaims to a business associate (and there is no evidence in the novel that her deals are in any way manipulative or exploitative). Valeska Piontek, however, plays by different rules. In the first two novels of the tetralogy her business model becomes progressively more and more suspect. Unlike Eliza’s, Valeska’s speculation is not always about profits or selling at the right time for the right price. Bienek gives her capitalism a unique Upper Silesian fingerprint: in *Die erste Polka* Valeska is prepared to offer the Gleiwitz archpriest Pattas a price reduction on the sale of fields next to the cemetery if he will attend her daughter’s wedding reception, a significant ask for the clergyman given that the civil ceremony has not yet been blessed by the Church. Only in *Septemberlicht* are we given to understand that the sale of the fields has been completed, “und zwar zu einem Spottpreis” (SL, 75). She even appears to have won a further concession for her discounted sale, that of the archpriest’s consent to bury her late friend and tenant Georg Montag according to the rituals of the Catholic Church. Valeska’s intention is of course to honour Montag, but her discounting does feel a little like bribery (in an Upper Silesian kind of way Valeska’s attitude to the Church is sometimes ambivalent: two books dominate her bedtime reading—the Bible and Otto von Corvin’s *Pfaffenspiegel*, the latter a polemical nineteenth century anticlerical work, which wrapped in newspaper she hides in her linen cupboard). Her purchase of several acres of land in the vicinity of the airport, where she has been acquiring land speculatively, does however, seem decidedly underhand. The land is owned by a widow with undeniable mental health issues. Yet her lawyer brother Willi—who is clearly no Atticus Finch—has prevented the compulsory examination of the old woman at a local asylum, and the widow eventually endorses the contract under apparent duress, Valeska guiding her hand as she signs (EP, 70). Are Valeska and her brother guilty of professional malpractice? Neither Bienek (nor narrator) express an opinion. However, it certainly appears that Bienek was often somewhat

in a quandary about how to treat Valeska Piontek's property acquisitions. We know from an entry in Bienek's *Tagebücher* that at one stage during the writing of *Zeit ohne Glocken* he considered having the Piontek family acquire the fashionable Miethe-Alle residence of Justizrat Arthur Kochmann, a retired Jew of unimpeachable reputation still living quietly (and cautiously) in Gleiwitz.³⁹⁰ Bienek however had some reservations about including such a development in the novel, evidently relating to issues surrounding Valeska's reputation:

Ich lasse die Pionteks (der Rechtsanwalt Wondrak managt das) in die Villa Kochmann einziehen, da habe ich auch gleich Gemeinsamkeiten ... natürlich müßte das Haus Wondrak nicht direkt von Kochmann kaufen (der 1940 enteignet wurde), das sähe nicht nur allzu sehr nach Raffgier aus, es würde wohl auch psychologisch und moralisch Valeska P. belasten (TB, 75).

In the proposed scenario, the purchase of the villa by Willi Wondrak could have been sanitised as a "forced sale", leaving Valeska's reputation intact—and to some extent Wondrak's as well:

... aber warum nicht ... ich habe kein Recht zu moralisieren. Jeder macht seinen Reibach, zu allen Zeiten – und schuldig wird die V. dadurch nicht. Ja, je länger ich darüber nachdenke, sollte Wondrak das Grundstück doch bei Kochmann kaufen ... K. könnte Valeska ja zuraten. Er muß ja »zwangsverkaufen« (TB, 75).

Bienek felt it was not his place to pronounce on innocence or guilt.³⁹¹ Nevertheless, there is a striking reticence here about implicating Valeska Piontek in the deal. Given Kochmann's exemplary standing in Gleiwitz, it appeared to have been a step too far for Bienek to associate one of the most important protagonists in the tetralogy—and the one most symbolically affiliated with his childhood province—with such a discrediting proceeding, and in the end the plotline was not used. And

³⁹⁰ Kochmann, an "Ehrenbürger der Stadt" (BP, 61), was an historical Gleiwitz figure. His fate is not reported in the Gleiwitz tetralogy. However, it is believed he died in Auschwitz, probably in January 1944.

³⁹¹ See for example Bienek's emphatic comments: "[...] die Literatur des Nachkriegs war Literatur für den entmündigten Leser, der Autor hat ununterbrochen gewertet und gesagt, du musst Auschwitz furchtbar finden. Ich wollte mit meinen Bücher nicht werten" (Melchingen, p. 10).

where Bienek did use a similar plotline, for example in *Septemberlicht* where there is an actual instance when her professional integrity appears dangerously compromised, he continues to skirt around the issue of innocence or guilt. In that episode Valeska is approached by a local delicatessen owner Schachtner (formerly Schachtnyczek) with an offer to join him in the opening of two new stores in Kattowitz and Königsberg, two eastern Upper Silesian cities ceded to Poland in the wake of the 1921 plebiscite, and now since the outbreak of war again under German administration. Schachtner, a shameless opportunist, has asked his brother-in-law to look out for a retail site, and has no qualms about exploiting the situation of the Kattowitz Jewish business community, “am besten in der Hauptstraße” is his request, “in der *Trzeciego Maja*, da wo ein Jude rausgeht, kriegt man’s billiger” (SL, 248). In *Zeit ohne Glocken* we learn that Schachtner has indeed established speciality food stores in Eastern Upper Silesia (ZG, 167). Nowhere in the tetralogy, however, is it made clear whether Valeska and her brother have joined Schachtner in this business venture, but reading between the lines Valeska certainly appears to have benefited from the new situation brought about by German victory in Poland. This anyway is the opinion of Paul Hrabinsky, a somewhat enigmatic Gleiwitz invalid, who believes that Valeska and her brother’s business has flourished, “bis in die Gegend von Kattowitz hinein” (ZG, 196). Indeed, in the final Gleiwitz novel *Erde und Feuer* Valeska herself acknowledges that the war has done her business no harm (EF, 12). Yet whether she has gone so far as to exploit the situation of the Jews in the manner Schachtner speaks of remains unclear. The answer may be found in the words of Justizrat Kochmann himself, in conversation with Arthur Silbergleit, an old Jewish acquaintance, who has recently arrived in the town seeking sanctuary. Kochmann speaks ominously of Valeska as being perhaps “etwas zu tüchtig” (SL, 334) and certainly does not appear to be overly impressed by what he has heard about her property purchases, some of which were acquired from Jewish vendors: “Seit einiger Zeit kauft sie zusammen mit ihrem Bruder, dem Rechtsanwalt Wondraschek, Grundstücke auf, auch von

unsern Leuten” (SL, 334). There is still some ambiguity here concerning her ethics: is she or is she not an enabler of National Socialism, the type of person whose activities keep the regime ticking over (and, if so, whether her Jewish vendors are getting Eliza Gant’s “fair return” on their sales). But all we have is hearsay, the unclear but nevertheless unsettling testimony of others. Here was an opportunity for Bienek to take a definitive stand on Upper Silesian complicity in the crimes of National Socialism, yet he foregoes his chance to clear the issue up. Would a more authoritative narrative perspective have threatened Bienek’s myth of an Upper Silesia more sinned against than sinning? Perhaps, but it would certainly have resolved the matter. Or perhaps ambivalence is the point: Valeska and her brother have spent their lives in a borderland of shifting frontiers and impermanent political and social structures; was their opportunism not simply par for the course? Therefore no “prescription” on the vexed issue of Valeska Piontek’s questionable entrepreneurship was forthcoming, as if Bienek was hedging his bets regarding the culpability of the Upper Silesian in the catastrophe that befalls the province in 1945. By way of contrast, if there is a value judgement at play in the tetralogy as a whole—and in the final novel in particular—then it is weighted towards Valeska Piontek as a victim of National Socialism rather than an enabler. On the enforced, freezing January 1945 trek westwards described in *Erde und Feuer*, Bienek, without the kind of ambivalence evident when he describes her business arrangements, portrays Valeska as a tragic casualty of war. In that scene, as Soviet warplanes bomb the trek, she and her fellow *Gleiwitzer* are horrifyingly portrayed hanging on for dear life:

Sie [Valeska] hielt sich mit beiden Händen an der Sprosse fest, um nicht weggedrückt zu werden, und sie sah, wie die Flugzeuge im Tiefflug auf sie zukamen, wie die Menschen in die Luft geschleudert wurden als seien sie Puppen [...] (EF, 166).

Yet there is no sense in the episode that she or her compatriots have a case to answer concerning the dreadful situation in which they find themselves. Along with

thousands of other fleeing Upper Silesians, she appears cast as a victim not only of the Nazis, but also of the Russians, and ultimately, later in the novel, of the Allies too, whose grossly destructive aerial bombardment of Dresden we must assume is the cause of her death, and that of her extended family.

CHAPTER 5: CARSON MCCULLERS AND TRUMAN CAPOTE

Aber immerhin: ich war ja einer der Entdecker in Deutschland.³⁹²

Truman Capote tot. 59 Jahre alt. Etwas Schmerz, weil ich so sehr in
sein Frühwerk verliebt war!³⁹³

5.1 INTRODUCTION: CARSON MCCULLERS

Horst Bienek was certainly an early McCullers aficionado, and somewhat of an authority on the writer. In the early 1960's he wrote several enthusiastic articles on her life and work which must certainly have boosted her reputation in Germany, including in 1962 two reviews for the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, one on *The Ballad of the Sad Café*,³⁹⁴ the second on *Clock without Hands*.³⁹⁵ In 1964 (as mentioned above) again in the *FAZ*, he published an assessment of McCullers' first novel *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*.³⁹⁶ He also reviewed for *Die Zeit* a volume of essays by Carson McCullers and critical writing about her, edited by Gerd Haffmans.³⁹⁷ The short review, written in 1974, just a year before *Die erste Polka* was published,³⁹⁸ confirms Bienek's extensive knowledge of, and significant respect for McCullers' work, and for her standing in 20th century literature (she died in 1967).

"Mit einem Rucksack voll Dämonen" was, however, Bienek's most extensive appraisal of McCullers' work. It appeared in the November 1962 edition of *Das Schönste*, the now defunct Munich cultural journal.³⁹⁹ The article was revised and

³⁹² Bienek's claim for Carson McCullers. Diary entry of 24.5.1985 (TB, 893).

³⁹³ At his home in Ottobrunn Bienek mourns the loss of Truman Capote. Diary entry of 5.9.1984 (TB, 755).

³⁹⁴ 'Carson McCullers: *Die Ballade vom Traurigen Café, Erzählungen*' (24 March 1962).

³⁹⁵ 'Tod auf Termin. Carson McCullers: *Uhr ohne Zeiger*' (28 November 1962). (Subsequently referred to as "Horst Bienek 'Tod auf Termin'".)

³⁹⁶ Geweb aus südlicher Erde.

³⁹⁷ *Über Carson McCullers*, edited by Gerd Haffmans, Zürich: Diogenes, 1974.

³⁹⁸ Horst Bienek, 'Über Carson McCullers, herausgegeben von Gerd Haffmans' (21 June 1974).

³⁹⁹ The article took its name from Truman Capote's description of McCullers as a "Wanderer mit einem Rucksack voll selbsternannter Dämonen" (MR, 108).

re-published with a new title “Zwei Fotografien. Carson McCullers” in Bienek’s collection of literary portraits, *Der Blinde in der Bibliothek* (1986). In essence, “Mit einem Rucksack voll Dämonen” covers much of the critical content contained in the three subsequent *FAZ* articles mentioned above (Bienek effectively recycled the material from article to article). It also provides some biographical notes about McCullers’ life, some of which derive from the short McCullers entry in the American publication *Twentieth Century Authors* (1942) to which McCullers herself contributed.⁴⁰⁰ In the article Bienek highlights McCullers’ use of the poetic-realist style, her psychological understanding of her characters—some of whose irrational motivations for acting as they do are often barely fathomable—and her preoccupation with the psychology of adolescence. What particularly struck him was that the (female) figure of Mick Kelly in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* was to some extent based on McCullers’ own childhood and adolescence in Columbus, Georgia. He described the novel along with *The Member of the Wedding* as a “Rendezvous; im Haus der Kindheit, des Traumes und der Phantasie” (MR, 110), an arresting observation given that much of his Gleiwitz tetralogy was itself to be given over to a discourse of his own partly remembered, partly invented childhood and adolescence.

5.2 BIENEK’S UNDERSTANDING OF THE SOUTHERN AESTHETIC

While “Mit einem Rucksack voll Dämonen” is not incisive criticism—it is more an introduction to her work—it is important for what it teaches us about Bienek’s attitude to the South and the Southern aesthetic not only in relation to McCullers herself, but also to other Southern authors (including Faulkner, Wolfe and Capote). Bienek’s explanation of why writers from the Southern states should be drawn to poetic realism is illuminating in relation to his own stylistic choices for the Gleiwitz tetralogy. In his view poetic realism appeared a credible narrative style for the

⁴⁰⁰ ‘McCullers, Mrs. Carson (Smith)’, *Twentieth Century Authors: A Biographical Dictionary of Modern Literature*, edited by Stanley J. Kunitz and Howard Haycraft, New York: H.W. Wilson (1942), 868–869. Bienek considered this publication as “eine der zuverlässigsten Quellen der amerikanischen Literatur” (MR, 108).

Southern writer. This was a consequence of the Southerner's particular cultural heritage. Bienek based his judgment on an (admittedly broad-brush) comparison between what he believed were the defining differences between the US Northerner and the US *Südstaatler*. The choice of poetic realism for the Southerner, he hypothesized,

mag mit ihrer Herkunft zusammenhängen. Die Südstaatler haben nicht das klare, gradlinige, in gewissem Sinne auch statische Bewußtsein der Nordamerikaner – ihre Geschichte und ihre Gegenwart, ihr Verhältnis zur Welt und zur Ewigkeit ist verwickelter, umständlicher; sie sind auch weniger pragmatisch, sind leidenschaftlich, gefühlvoll, auch ungerecht: und sie sind alle etwas versponnen (MR, 106).

And concerning the specific qualities of the Southern writers themselves he had more to say:

Ihre Beziehung zur Wirklichkeit (nennen wir es einmal so) ist leicht gebrochen: Phantasie und Träume, Versprechen und gute Vorsätze nehmen sie allzuleicht für Wahrheit. Und solche Eigenschaften drücken in einem besonderen Maße die Schriftsteller dieses Landes aus (MR, 106).

If this all appears a little generalised, even clichéd, it does nevertheless indicate Bienek's direction of thought regarding the Southern states: in comparison to the Northern states theirs was a very different space, with a correspondingly distinctive character, and a discrete literary tradition. This North/South divide also appeared to provide Bienek with the answer to a question which had exercised him and others in the post-war period—among them Böll⁴⁰¹ in 1958, Enzensberger⁴⁰² in 1963, and Bienek's fellow Upper Silesian, Heinz Piontek⁴⁰³ in 1970—namely why, despite abundant critical praise from literary critics, McCullers had not achieved

⁴⁰¹ See Heinrich Böll, 'Auch dies ist Amerika: Über Truman Capote, *Baum der Nacht und andere Erzählungen*'. Heinrich Böll, *Werke. Essayistische Schriften und Reden I, 1952-1963*, edited by Bernd Balzer, Köln: Kiepenheuer und Witsch (1977), 258-260 (p. 260).

⁴⁰² See Hans Magnus Enzensberger, 'Uhr ohne Zeiger', *Über Carson McCullers*, edited by Gerd Haffnams, Zürich: Diogenes (1974), 166-169 (pp. 168-169).

⁴⁰³ See Heinz Piontek, 'Über Carson McCullers', *Das Handwerk des Lesens. Erfahrungen mit Büchern und Autoren*, Munich: Schneekluth (1979), 165-168 (pp. 165-166).

the popularity in post-war Germany of some other contemporary American writers. The debate is of interest as it again provides us with an insight into Bienek's understanding of the separateness of Southern literature in the first half of the century, and its consequences for the reception of Carson McCullers by the German reading public in the post-war period. Bienek hypothesized that popularity in post-war Germany was "easier" for the likes of Hemingway, Miller, Steinbeck and Mailer: coming from a different US literary tradition than McCullers, they could offer something new to German readers:

Gewiß [...] haben es die rauen, kraftvollen, barbarischen Stimmen der amerikanischen Literatur bei uns immer leichter gehabt als die sensiblen, melancholischen, versponnenen Geister. Poesie, so meint man bei uns, haben wir selbst im alten Europa, Amerika möge uns das verlorene Paradies der Stärke, Wildheit und Vitalität weisen: also Hemingway, Henry Miller, John Steinbeck, Normann [sic] Mailer (MR, 107).

By way of contrast, as Bienek explained, the coexistent (though apparently less well-known) American tradition which included Capote and McCullers, dealt with a very different set of characteristics, values, and emotional responses:

War man nicht geradezu verwundert, daß es daneben die optimistische Tragik eines Saroyan gab, die magisch-versponnenen Verrücktheiten eines Truman Capote und die poetische Melancholie der Carson McCullers? (MR, 107).

It was the particular (in the final analysis melancholic, even existential) nature of her subject matter that accounted for McCullers' initially unremarkable reception by the reading public in post-war West Germany. Bienek explained this further in "Zwei Fotografien", the updated 1986 version of »Mit einem Rucksack voll Dämonen«:

Im Grunde hat McCullers immer europäische Themen: Tod, Einsamkeit, Isolation, Entfremdung, Verfall, die Suche nach Gott, die Suche nach dem Mythos, die Suche nach einem Sinn... Es ist schon merkwürdig, warum sie es gerade bei uns so schwer hat (BB, 48).

This is of course not an entirely satisfactory explanation of why McCullers had not engaged the post-war German reader—the themes Bienek mentions above were hardly exclusive to European or indeed Southern writing; they were universal themes common in literature (including Northern US writing). Perhaps she did not get the recognition she deserved because she was a woman writer (though we must leave that as a matter of speculation). Bienek's hypothesis, however, does appear to be corroborated by Daniel Haas, who put the issue in much plainer terms: "Als ihr Werk zu Beginn der fünfziger Jahre erstmals in deutscher Übersetzung erschien, war man hierzulande auf Hemingway und Steinbeck fixiert; es musste ein bisschen markiger sein, handlungsorientierter. McCullers empfand man als zu leise, zu lyrisch."⁴⁰⁴ What the debate highlights, however, is that Bienek saw what he considered two US styles in dichotomous terms: Hemingway and Steinbeck in one corner representing the Northern (or at least the non-Southern) US literary tradition (power, rawness, strength, vitality); McCullers and Capote in the other representing the Southern tradition (madness, magic, melancholy, nuance, poetry). And given his view that Upper Silesia and the South were in so many ways congruent (it is useful to repeat here Bienek's statement quoted earlier: "Nehmen wir den Osten für eine bestimmte Landschaft, für ein bestimmtes Temperament, eine spezifische Erfahrung, für eine geschichtsträchtige Provinz, wie es etwa der Süden für die Vereinigten Staaten war und noch ist"), then it was perhaps not surprising that he himself would chose the poetic realism as practised by the Southern writers he revered as a means to reveal and illuminate his own "distinctive" Upper Silesian *Heimat*. For in many ways Upper Silesia had become in his imagination a veritable sister territory to the South; ultimately with his choice of poetic realism he was making a very clear statement about how he viewed his

⁴⁰⁴ Daniel Haas, 'An den Rissen der Welt, Carson McCullers: Die Romane', FAZ, 23.11.2011.

childhood province, as well as presaging the probable aesthetic form his Upper Silesian work of remembrance would ultimately take.

5.3 THE LITERARY STYLE OF CARSON MCCULLERS

How did McCullers' poetic realism actually manifest itself in the pages of her novels? Bienek had something to say about this in "Mit einem Rucksack voll Dämonen". By way of introduction, he noted the high degree of praise expressed by British and American writers for her work: "[...] eine Reihe von Zeugen, große Namen sind darunter, die in ihr auch die begabteste Erzählerin der Südstaaten sehen", he wrote. "Tennessee Williams, in gewissem Sinne mit ihr am stärksten verwandt, setzt sie sogar an die Spitze der amerikanischen Literatur [...]" (MR, 106). And without conceding that her achievement ranks above Faulkner's ("Und wenn Graham Greene sie sogar über Faulkner stellt, so mag das eine persönliche Eigenwilligkeit sein; es beweist aber, welchen Rang die McCullers in Amerika einnimmt") (MR, 106) he quoted from Greene's highly positive assessment:

»Die letzten zwanzig Jahre haben viele neue Romanciers mit großem erzählerischem Talent gesehen, aber seit dem Tod von D. H. Lawrence sind Carson McCullers und William Faulkner die einzigen Schriftsteller mit origineller poetischer Ausdruckskraft. Persönlich ziehe ich McCullers vor, denn sie schreibt klarer als Faulkner [...]" (MR, 106).

Greene's acknowledgement of McCullers' "original poetic sensibility" certainly struck a chord with Bienek: in his article he went on to comment on an aesthetic of both realism and symbolism in her early works: "Alle Dinge haben doppelte Bedeutung", he wrote, referring to McCullers' poetic intent, "sie sind real und symbolisch" (MR, 110), and he made much of the mindful poeticality of her prose: her novels constituted a "liebenswert-poetische Werk" (MR, 111). He particularly noted McCullers' ability to reveal the exceptional in the routine and average, "das Ungewöhnliche aus dem Typischen zu destillieren" as he put it (MR, 110), his way of saying that in her prose she elevates hidden depths and underlying truths (a

quality of writing which, indeed, appears consistent with the spirit of poetic realism as outlined by Tony Hilfer above).⁴⁰⁵

What is remarkable is that the stylistic devices, themes and subject matter Bienek foregrounded in “Mit einem Rucksack voll Dämonen” as being characteristic of Carson McCullers should emerge as the literary foundation stones on which *Die erste Polka* in particular was to be built, well over a decade after his article appeared in print. In addition to Bienek’s discourse on Southern poetic realism, the article highlighted themes and preoccupations which had a conspicuous tendency to crop up time and time again in the pages of his Gleiwitz fiction. Bienek noted for example the predominant theme of melancholy which pervades McCullers’s *oeuvre*. “Das Buch durchweht eine poetische Melancholie” (MR, 109) he said of *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, and certainly a sense of personal loneliness, alienation, and despair cuts across the McCullers’ canon, from Mick Kelly, John Singer and Dr. Copeland in the aptly named *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, to Miss Amelia in *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, and Frankie Addams in *The Member of the Wedding*. These characteristics were to be replicated in some of Bienek’s most significant protagonists in the tetralogy, including Arthur Silbergleit, Valeska Piontek, Valeska’s friend and tenant Georg Montag, and her son Josel (indeed it is difficult to properly comprehend a figure like Josel Piontek in *Die erste Polka* without understanding, among others, Mick Kelly and Frankie Addams). Furthermore, in “Mit einem Rucksack voll Dämonen” Bienek often alluded to McCullers’ preoccupation with the eccentric and the grotesque in her writing: her characters represented a “seltsam verschrobenes Personal” (MR, 109). Furthermore, he noted her fixation with a wide range of mentally challenged

⁴⁰⁵ This contrasted markedly with Lenz’s interpretation of Hemingway’s very different concept of realism, as expressed in his essay “Mein Vorbild Hemingway: Model oder Provokation” (a statement with which I believe Bienek would not have disagreed): “Er [Hemingway] hatte geglaubt, daß man dieser Welt nur gewachsen sein kann, wenn man sie nachahmt: dieser Glaube bestimmte seine Erzählweise”. Siegfried Lenz, ‘Mein Vorbild Hemingway: Modell oder Provokation’. In: Siegfried Lenz, *Beziehungen: Ansichten und Bekenntnisse zur Literatur*, Munich: dtv (1976), 37-47 (p. 47).

figures, and on marginalised protagonists who struggle continuously in their lives: McCullers' South was populated with what Bienek labelled as, "Spintisierer und Träumer, Halbverrückte und Trottel, Suchende und Verzückte, Enttäuschte und Verbitterte" (MR, 110). There were also the physically handicapped, "[d]as Unvollkommene, das Hinfällige" (MR, 109). McCullers loved these figures, Bienek surmised, "vielleicht gerade deshalb, weil sie taub sind oder bucklig, schwindsüchtig oder jähzornig, Trunkenbolde oder Süchtige, Verdammte oder Ausgestoßene" (MR, 109), and he himself was to include many such afflicted characters in his Gleiwitz fiction as signifiers of the deep-rooted liminal dynamic characteristic of Upper Silesia, just as McCullers had done in relation to the American South. Finally, it was also revealing that in "Mit einem Rucksack voll Dämonen" Bienek spoke of McCullers' emotionally sensitive treatment of adolescence; he particularly mentions in this respect, "das halbwüchsige Mädchen Mick Kelly" (MR, 108) in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, and Frankie Addams in *The Member of the Wedding*. Bienek was aware that the transition these children make from childhood to young adulthood (or at least from naivete to awareness) in the course of the two novels was also an engagement with the liminal.⁴⁰⁶ Indeed these two works, along with *Clock without Hands*, are particularly interesting in that a developing analogy appears evident between the liminality of adolescence described in the novels, and the febrile, changing Southern locality in which they are set; this I believe did not escape Bienek's notice, and was something which ultimately impacted on his metaphorical presentation of his own childhood region in the Gleiwitz tetralogy.

In the following sections I will analyse the influence of several of Carson McCullers' novels on Horst Bienek's Gleiwitz fiction. Each of the McCullers novels will be

⁴⁰⁶ See Bienek's description of Frankie Addams' personal development in *The Member of the Wedding*: "Beunruhigt von den verworrenen Bildern einer frühreifen Sehnsucht und Phantasie, erlebt Frankie in drei Tagen, wie sich die Welt für sie jäh verändert, als sie, halbbewußt nur, aus der Enge des gewohnten Lebensbereiches strebt" (MR, 110).

discussed individually in the chronological order in which they were written. Incorporated in the discourse is the account of Bienek's intertextual relationship with the novels. This concerns the selective appropriation and creative development of those themes, plots and incidents from McCullers' work which Bienek felt would effectively inform his constructed representation of Upper Silesia. The sheer extent of the intertextual debt to McCullers is remarkable—throughout the writing of the tetralogy the McCullers canon was for Bienek a gift that was to keep on giving. At this point it is worth mentioning that the tetralogy's intertextual relationship with Carson McCullers has to date not yet been catalogued or reviewed in the ever-expanding body of work which now comprises Bienek criticism. The following section will redress this deficit. I start with McCullers' first and perhaps best-known work, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*.

5.4 THE HEART IS A LONELY HUNTER (1940)

Although the adolescent rite of passage constituted a pivotal theme in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, it was by no means the only leitmotif in this wide-ranging novel of Southern life in the late 1930's. In fact, the narrative revolves primarily around the deaf-mute John Singer to whom four Southerners, among them the adolescent girl Mick Kelly, are drawn in search of companionship and human connection. When Singer dies by his own hand the four protagonists go their own way, "einsam wie bisher", Bienek wrote, "und doch durch ihn verwandelt" (MR, 109). The novel covers social, political, and racial issues, many bound up with two figures, also members of the John Singer circle, namely Benedict Mady Copeland, a black doctor who devotes much of his life to the education and betterment of his African American community, and Jake Blount, an itinerant labourer who vainly dreams of socialist revolution. As the economy is stagnant and the mills slack, much of the population in the unnamed Southern town in which the novel is set lives on a knife-edge of uncertainty. On the face of it the likelihood of change in the region seems remote; discrimination against the black population appears ubiquitous, and the violence perpetrated with seeming impunity on the black community, relentless.

Nonetheless, the prospect of change is very much in the air. The atmosphere in the town is restless and fervid, and there is some agitation against racial oppression. There is also the distinct possibility of the United States becoming involved in the Second World War. The question seems not to be if change will ever come about, but when, in what manner, and to what extent.

5.5 THE END OF CHILDHOOD ANALOGY

The prospect of change not only fills the hearts of Dr Copeland and Jake Blount, but also the heart of Mick Kelly. For Mick, however, it is for personal rather than political reasons; she is growing up and recognises but scarcely understands that her person and her life are changing. “This summer was different from any other time Mick could remember”, we are told. “Nothing much happened that she could describe to herself in thoughts or words—but there was a feeling of change.”⁴⁰⁷ In her outline of the novel (“Author’s Outline of ‘The Mute’”) published in *The Mortgaged Heart*, McCullers, indeed, describes Mick as, “a crude child on the threshold of a period of quick awakening and development”.⁴⁰⁸ Of all the characters in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, Bienek was particularly taken with this isolated and lonely 13-year-old,⁴⁰⁹ and the theme of adolescence in the novel is predominantly focused on her. Her rite of passage progresses against the background of a region if not on the threshold of change, then surely preparing for it; and given McCullers’ reputation as a poetic symbolist, it certainly seems reasonable to assume some intentional authorial correspondence between the two (this equivalence becomes even more apparent in two subsequent McCullers’ novels, *The Member of the Wedding* and *Clock without Hands*, as we shall see).

⁴⁰⁷ Carson McCullers, *Complete Novels*, edited by Carlos L. Dews, New York: The Library of America, 2001, p. 83. This volume contains *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, *Reflections in a Golden Eye*, *The Member of the Wedding*, and *Clock Without Hands*. (Subsequently referred to in the text as “CN”.)

⁴⁰⁸ *The Mortgaged Heart*, p. 127.

⁴⁰⁹ Geweb aus südlicher Erde: “Und wir erinnern uns vor allem an das halbwüchsige Mädchen Mick Kelly, dem die Autorin so manche autobiographischen Züge geliehen hat”.

Bienek was undoubtedly influenced by McCullers' characterisation of this imaginative, straight-talking and creative, yet somehow vulnerable tomboy, whose dreams of achievement in the end come to nothing due to the straitened circumstances of her family, and a marked lack of opportunity in the Georgia mill town where she lives. Because she shares a love of music with Ulla Ossadnik, Valeska Piontek's gifted and bilingual piano pupil in *Die erste Polka* (as it happens Bienek's only female adolescent in the four Gleiwitz novels), the expectation is, perhaps, that the influence of Mick Kelly will be mostly apparent in the characterisation of Ulla. And indeed, both are adolescents whose narratives do converge intertextually in the loss of childhood agendas in both novels. Yet the reader will mostly search in vain for Mick Kelly in the figure of Ulla Ossadnik. Despite the obsession with music that both girls share (Ulla with Chopin, Mick with Mozart), Ulla is actually quite different from Mick Kelly; for one thing she is already the musical prodigy Mick dreams of becoming and can never be, and for another she has little of Mick's introspection, sense of powerlessness, and uncertainty; the Ulla of *Die erste Polka* and *Septemberlicht* is exuberant, exuding both confidence and determination, and comfortable conversationally in both German and Polish ("die sehr oberschlesische Ulla Ossanik [sic] [...], die so wunderbar Chopin spielen kann" as Heinrich Böll describes her in his review of *Die erste Polka*.)⁴¹⁰. In fact, Mick Kelly's distinguishing sense of spiritual isolation and loneliness, her desire for meaningful connection (which she attempts to find in the company of the deaf-mute John Singer) and her need for reassurance are actually replicated in *Die erste Polka* in the male figure of Josel Piontek, not in the female figure of Ulla Ossadnik.⁴¹¹

⁴¹⁰ Heinrich Böll, 'Das Schmerzliche an Oberschlesien', *Bienek lesen: Materialien zu seinem Werk*, edited by Michael Krüger, Munich: Hanser (1980), 195-199 (p. 198). (Subsequently referred to as "Das Schmerzliche an Oberschlesien".)

⁴¹¹ Nor was Capote's Idabel Thomkins, Joel Knox's tomboy girlfriend in *Other Voices, Other Rooms* a model for Ulla Ossadnik.

The intertextual relationship connecting Mick and Ulla mentioned above concerns the bicycle excursions the two protagonists take in the respective novels. In *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* Mick Kelly and her friend Harry Minnowitz cycle to a creek in the Georgia woods; their day together ends in a first sexual experience, and for both a hard-hitting realisation of the loss of childhood. The incident was clearly the source of a similar bicycle journey Ulla Ossadnik and Andreas Pilgrim undertake in Chapter 15 of *Die erste Polka*: the pair are tasked with cycling to the home of a young Gleiwitz widow, Tina Zoppas, with an invitation to the Piontek wedding celebration. Bienek's debt to McCullers is obvious: the two adolescents' bicycle excursion also culminates in an unplanned sexual event, and an associated loss-of-childhood awareness. However, in Bienek's appropriation history emphatically intervenes. In *Die erste Polka* Bienek takes the McCullers' incident and recasts it as a frame for his very unusual reconstruction of the infamous "Polish" attack of 31 August 1939 on the Gleiwitz radio station. Ulla and Andreas' errand on that fateful evening, essentially a private matter, is boldly narrated against the historical backdrop of the false flag attack on the Gleiwitz radio station, Hitler's pretext for launching war on Poland the following morning, a raid which has not only immense personal import for the two adolescents, but also momentous public and historical significance. Having delivered the wedding invitation to Frau Zoppas, Ulla and Andreas, hiding in a concrete pipe, observe the proceedings—with no knowledge of their portentous significance—with a mixture of fear and erotically charged tension. Their sexual initiation (denoting rite of passage) takes place when the attackers flee the scene. Their childhood now ends conclusively, "in einem langen stummen erschöpften Schrei" (EP, 162). In that "long silent exhausted scream" we can safely assume an analogy: it is the metaphorical scream signifying the end of the liminal adolescent state which in a symbolic sense parallels the approaching (and irrevocable) transformation of German Upper Silesia itself.

The reaction of the two couples to the loss of childhood also emphatically links the two narratives. Each couple is conscious that a threshold has been crossed. Nevertheless, Bienek's characterisation of Ulla and Andreas never really achieves the psychological depth McCullers brings to that of Harry Minnowitz, and the isolated, profoundly lonely Mick Kelly in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*. Particularly discreet is the description of the two Southern adolescents' reactions to what has taken place. Harry Minnowitz cries as he attempts to understand what has happened and worries about the possibility of Mick becoming pregnant; ultimately the loss of childhood inherent in the sexual act becomes the catalyst for his decision to leave home. Mick for her part reflects regretfully on the change she feels has taken place in her: "She felt very old, and it was like something was heavy inside her. She was a grown person now, whether she wanted to be or not" (HLH, 237), and memories of the incident prey on her mind as the novel progresses. In *Die Erste Polka* Andreas Pilgrim and Ulla Ossadnik, however, appear to take the initiation in their stride, despite the violent events they have witnessed as part of the initiation process. As the couple leave the concrete pipe Andreas simply speaks, "mit einer Stimme, die ihm früher einmal gehört haben mußte" (EP, 162-163), and in the case of Ulla the loss of childhood does not appear to be the overwhelming experience it had been for the Southern couple. If Ulla is affected by the coming-of-age incident she does not brood over it; the fear of the evening's experiences dissipates as she cycles home, "von der Luft, vom Wind, vom Licht abgestreift und zerfetzt [...]" (EP, 163). We must turn to Josel Piontek's loss-of-childhood experience in *Die erste Polka* for a more compelling and decisive reaction to this loss (see section on *The Member of the Wedding* below).

5.6 DOCTOR BENEDICT MADY COPELAND IN *THE HEART IS A LONELY HUNTER*

What is interesting about the Southern towns of *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* and *The Member of the Wedding* is the people's consciousness of the war overseas. This must have been compelling to Bienek who had grown up in Nazi Germany more or less during the period in which the two novels are set. In *The Heart is a*

Lonely Hunter, for example, the talk is of the rise of Hitler and the persecution of Jews (Harry Minnowitz is himself Jewish and understandably has a strong antipathy towards Hitler and fascism). *The Member of the Wedding* is set during the war: “It was the summer when Patton was chasing the Germans across France. And they were fighting, too, in Russia and Saipan” (CN, 479), and rumours are circulating that Paris has been liberated (CN, 523). Berenice Sadie Brown, the down-to-earth African American housekeeper in *The Member of the Wedding* is well aware of what is going on and is quite specific when she expounds on one way the world could be improved: “No war, said Bernice. No stiff corpses hanging from the Europe trees and no Jews murdered anywhere” (CN, 546).

It was surely significant for Bienek that one of the principal characters in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, Benedict Mady Copeland, a single-minded African American physician who strongly opposes the systematic racial discrimination prevalent in the South, should compare the politics of the Southern states to German fascism. For Bienek, who as a boy had witnessed the reality of fascism on his own doorstep, Copeland’s comparison between the South and Nazi Germany, quoted below, must have appeared striking and meaningful:

‘[...] So far as I and my people are concerned the South is Fascist now and always has been’ [...]. ‘The Nazis rob the Jews of their legal, economic, and cultural life. Here the Negro has always been deprived of these. And if wholesale and dramatic robbery of money and goods has not taken place here as in Germany, it is simply because the Negro has never been allowed to accrue wealth in the first place’ (CN, 256-257).

Copeland was of course referring to Germany as a whole, not to any particular region or province. Nevertheless, in Copeland’s analysis of the dire situation the black population in the segregated Southern states finds itself in, Bienek must well have noticed an important analogy with Upper Silesia (again this would have corroborated his conviction that a specific affinity existed between his childhood province and the American South). Copeland’s analysis concerned the predilection

of the black population to accept their lot, to submit to their fate in the expectation or hope of change. In an animated conversation with Jake Blount in Chapter 13 of *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* Doctor Copeland now rejects this approach:

‘In the face of brutality I was prudent. Before injustice I held my peace. [...] I believed in the tongue instead of the fist. As an armor against oppression I taught patience and faith in the human soul. I know now how wrong I was’ (CN, 258-259).

The problem for Doctor Copeland is that he protests to no avail; his inflexibility as a father, his Marxist beliefs, and his obsessional politics have caused his wife and family to abandon him. In addition, he is a lone voice within his own black community; his peers, in the vain hope of gradual change, advocate a course of least resistance towards white discrimination, and do not share his political vision. When Copeland attempts to take a local judge to task about the inhuman treatment of Willie Copeland in prison (his son loses two legs in brutal fashion), and ends up being assaulted and imprisoned himself, his daughter Portia criticises him for his efforts. “Best thing us can do is keep our mouths shut and wait” (CN, 226), she tells him, advocating no admonitory response, but instead anticipating divine retribution for the perpetrators: “Us can just rest back and know they going to be chopped up with pitchforks and fried everlasting by Satan” (CN, 221). She and others like her, “make no effort to go against circumstance”, as McCullers put it in her “Author’s Outline of ‘The Mute’”.⁴¹² This submissive, complacent attitude is replicated in the black community as a whole. Senior members are quite reticent about public protest. Marshall Nicolls, a black pharmacist, does not wish to upset the “amiable relationship” he believes exists between the black and white communities, in the expectation that “by gradual means a better *condition* will come about” (CN, 251). It is not, however, that Doctor Copeland prescribes violent action of any kind to fight injustice; his idea of protest is simply a march to Washington of one thousand black Americans from the county. “All of us together

⁴¹² *The Mortgaged Heart*, p. 138.

in one solid body” (CN, 260), a vain hope (as he realises) given that unity within the black community in McCullers’ Southern mill town is actually non-existent.

Why is it that the black population of *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* remains submissive and meek in the face of segregation and discrimination? Certainly, there is a real fear of the consequences of protest. Notwithstanding this, McCullers allows Doctor Copeland to articulate another reason (and this was to be significant for Horst Bienek), namely the connection between the religiosity of the black community and the acquiescence it habitually rehearses when faced with racial discrimination and blind hatred. Copeland has a phrase for this: he calls this kind of passivity “the yolk of submission and slothfulness” which, when talking to his own children, he advocates they “must thrust from their own shoulders” (CN, 70). He is dismayed that even his wife is undermining his endeavours to educate his children:

He knew, too, that Daisy was teaching the children the cult of meekness. She told them about hell and heaven. Also she convinced them of ghosts and of haunted places. Daisy went to church every Sunday [...]. And with her stubbornness she always took the children to the church, too, and they listened (CN, 70).

We have here Copeland’s conviction that religion is exerting an adverse influence upon his children. It is again evident when in his annual Christmas address to family and friends in the black community, he enunciates a starkly secular message, as he outlines a potential way out of the status quo:

‘We will save ourselves. But not by prayers of mourning. Not by indolence or strong drink. Not by the pleasures of the body or by ignorance. Not by submission and humbleness. But by pride. By dignity. By becoming hard and strong. We must build strength for our real true purpose’ (CN, 166).

Similarly in Horst Bienek’s tetralogy the stance of a community who predominantly “make no effort to go against circumstance” is a major theme. Bienek’s portrayal of the historical submission of the local Upper Silesian population in the face of

oppression (from any source) was surely informed by McCullers' handling of the resistance/acquiescence dynamic in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*. Several aspects of Doctor Copeland's Christmas address to the black community, for example, clearly prefigure Kotik Ossadnik's set-piece speech to his mother in the final pages of *Erde und Feuer*. In this key passage for the tetralogy as a whole Kotik identifies the Upper Silesian propensity for resignation, not just in the National Socialist era, but throughout the chequered history of the border province, as the ultimate reason for the province's downfall. That Kotik's words should echo Doctor Copeland's address to the black community shows a certain reliance on Bienek's part on McCullers' understanding of the Southern situation. The two speeches are quite similar in tone and content, and although Kotik is more specific about the need for indignation and revolt ("die Empörung, die Auflehnung") (EF, 326) to save the Upper Silesian people, he shares Dr Copeland's rejection of submission and humility. In addition, neither sees dependence upon conventional religious practice as helpful (as an atheist Dr Copeland eschews religion completely; Kotik simply rejects the Upper Silesian Church's demand for acquiescence and passivity). What is different in Kotik's discourse (and this is where Bienek goes beyond a reliance on McCullers' vision of the Southern situation) is that Kotik specifically identifies the reasons for the Silesian predisposition to resignation and forbearance as deriving not only from the influence of the Church, but also from a second source, the Silesian soil itself:

Ich weiß nicht, was es ist, aber ich kann das nicht, immer den Kopf gesenkt halten, immer auf dem Boden knien, immer auf die Brust schlagen, immer das Leid auf sich nehmen, ich kann das nicht. Es ist die Kirche, die einen dazu erzieht, ja, aber ich glaube, es ist auch die Erde hier, diese schlesische Erde, die einen dazu zwingt: knie hin, duck dich, laß dich schlagen, bete, leide, Gott will es so! (EF, 326).

The (metaphorical) complicity—if we can call it that—of the Silesian soil must be seen in terms of Upper Silesia's location as a vulnerable border region, the subtext being that border living promotes submission as a means of survival during times

of political upheaval and shifting national frontiers. As Bienek himself put it, “Grenzvölker müssen sich anpassen, sonst können sie nicht überleben”.⁴¹³

5.7 BIENEK’S APPROPRIATION OF TWO EXTRAORDINARY INCIDENTS IN *THE HEART IS A LONELY HUNTER*

The submission motif manifests itself in the Gleiwitz tetralogy often in quite diverse ways, and in Bienek’s construct always derives from two interconnected sources: the church and the Silesian border soil. It can, however, result in bizarre Upper Silesian border-specific outcomes in some of the novels’ characters (all markers for the extraordinary and febrile province). In the case of Andi Ossadnik and Josel Piontek in *Zeit ohne Glocken* the Upper Silesian impulse to submit presents strongly as (or develops into) a degrading and masochistic desire for humiliation and punishment. It is a measure of Bienek’s reliance in *Zeit ohne Glocken* on *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* that the author uses two incidents from the novel as a gateway for his analyses of the theme. In the first, a psychotic event in the life of the itinerant Southern labourer, Jake Blount, is picked up and developed by Bienek to portray the unpredictability and desire for humiliation and punishment of the 16-year-old Andi Ossadnik (known in *Septemberlicht* as Schielok). Jake Blount is a McCullers outsider, grotesque in appearance, and compulsive in behaviour. Having left home as a ten-year-old, “a knock-kneed little runt” (CN, 128) the first signs of his obsessive nature become evident when he befriends a preacher in the tobacco shed where they are employed:

‘[...] My first belief was Jesus. There was this fellow working in the same shed with me. He had a tabernacle and preached every night. I went and listened and I got this faith. My mind was on Jesus all day long. In my spare time I studied the Bible and prayed. Then one night I took a hammer and laid my hand on the table. I was angry and I drove the nail all the way through. My hand was nailed to the table and I looked at it and the fingers fluttered and turned blue’ (CN, 128-129).

⁴¹³ Private letter of 11 May 1982 to Joseph Gerard McIvor.

However, Blount's religious zeal, and his desire to become an evangelist is not a long-term career choice, and he ultimately exchanges religion for radical politics. Ten years later he begins to read and educate himself and formulates a Marxist philosophy by which he means to live, and to pass on to others. However, as a political radical he is ineffective. Unable to relate socially to other people—he is by now a habitual and irascible drunkard—Blount has no value as a propagandist or role model for his Southern community, and in McCullers' novel he is for the most part ridiculed and despised by the local population. The physical consequence of his childhood neurosis—the ragged, white scar in the centre of his palm—remains a reminder to him of his past association with religious fanaticism. On one occasion, cynically implying that stigmata is the cause of his scarred hand, the mark becomes a means of scoffing at a sidewalk Southern preacher, who attempts to convert him.

A close version of Blount's abstruse behaviour appears in *Zeit ohne Glocken* (Chapter 41) where on the evening of Good Friday the adolescent Andi Ossadnik grotesquely (outdoing even McCullers) drives a nail through the palm of his hand in imitation of Christ's suffering on the cross. It is Franz Ossadnik who discovers his son late on that Good Friday evening,

im Nachthemd auf dem Boden knien, die linke Hand auf dem Holzschemel, die Finger krümmten sich halb nach oben und in der Handfläche sammelte sich das Blut, sickerte an den Seiten herunter, aus der Mitte ragte ein langer Nagel (ZG, 384).

The replication establishes a specific analogy between the religious fervency of the South and that of Catholic Upper Silesia in the interests of deeper awareness. Each literary depiction singularly illuminates the other, revealing intertextually the irrational influence of troubled place on respective states of mind. And the McCullers intertext was not to be the only reference to Christ's crucifixion in *Zeit ohne Glocken*. Bienek was also able to recontextualise McCullers' use of the crucifixion motif in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* as a means of promoting a second message, specifically focussed on Upper Silesia. Andi's "nailing" incident had been

carefully prefigured in the opening paragraphs of the novel where the boy is seen to exhibit a far from average interest in the physical issues relating to the nailing of Christ to the cross. “Ich kann nicht verstehen”, he muses early on that Good Friday morning, “wie man einem lebendigen Menschen Nägel durch die Hände schlagen kann” (ZG, 7). A little later he morbidly envisages the nailing of Christ’s feet:

In Gedanken stellte er sich vor, wie der eine Soldat die Füße übereinanderlegt und der andere den Nagel ansetzt und mit einem großen Hammer draufschlägt, bis der Nagel durch das Fleisch und die Knochen treibt und tief im Holz sitzt (ZG, 7).

At this early stage of the novel the particulars of Christ’s crucifixion are transformed into an allegory of (Upper Silesian) submission, absent in McCullers’ intertext. The key phrase in the agenda—“Der Mann am Kreuz kann sich aber nicht gewehrt haben” (ZG, 8)—is spoken by Andi as he ponders the nailing of the feet of the acceding Christ. And later in the day the theme of Christ and acquiescence crops up again following Andi’s Good Friday stoning of the KLV (Kinderlandverschickung) Camp in Richtersdorf, where he believes Protestant families live (ZG, Chapter 10). Ultimately pursued by several boys from the camp Andi allows himself to be caught and punished, taking his cue from what he has learned is Christ’s acceptance of pain and suffering during the Passion:

Er dachte daran, wie sie IHN gezeißelt und mit Dornen gekrönt hatte. Wie SEINE Hände und Füße von Nägeln durchbohrt wurden. [...] Als ER gezeißelt wurde, hat ER sich nicht gewehrt” (ZG, 114).

In Andi’s outlandish, if willing, acceptance of his beating (“Er würde sich nicht wehren” (ZG, 115) he decides in imitation of Christ) we are again meant to see not only the strong influence of the Catholic Church in the region, but also an analogue of collective Upper Silesian submission, that crucial trait which in Bienek’s estimation proved to be a significant factor in the ultimate downfall of the province. By drawing on the McCullers source text, and creatively adding a further level of understanding, Bienek was able to make the intertext his own.

Bienek develops the same argument in a similar manner when he draws on an additional incident from *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* and creatively transforms it—via a fascinating engagement with Dostoyevsky’s Underground Man—to reinforce his Upper Silesian submission hypothesis. The episode concerns a boy at school called Buck whom Mick Kelly has idolised in the past, yet does not appear to have had meaningful, or indeed any, contact with. Mick remembers the boy for a number of reasons, including an attack on his school principal:

He was big and had pimples on his face. When she stood by him in line to march in at eight-thirty he smelled bad—like his britches needed airing. Buck did a nose dive at the principal once and was suspended. When he laughed he lifted his upper lip and shook all over (CN, 207).

That is as much as we hear of Buck in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*; he has a walk-on role as an unsightly, recalcitrant schoolboy, and we learn nothing from the narrator about the motivation for his actions. Yet, a further example of Upper Silesian “Erniedrigung” neurosis in *Zeit ohne Glocken* appears to have been inspired by the incident. Buck’s altercation with his school principal appears likely to have formed the basis for Bienek’s intertextual appropriation in *Zeit ohne Glocken* of Josel Piontek’s attack on his school principal during the distribution of school certificates. Bienek, however, reworks the short incident, transforming the Buck vignette into a complex study of Josel Piontek’s “Erniedrigung” neurosis, the boy’s (typically Upper Silesian) desire for humiliation—a trait which, as we know, he shares in the novel with Andi Ossadnik and Irma Piontek—and which, the tetralogy ultimately posits, proves so catastrophic in a collective sense for the future of the province. On receiving his certificate Josel lunges at the principal and bites him, allegedly on the nose. For Josel’s relatives a particularly distressing aspect of the incident is the fact that the principal is a Nazi Party member, though it is not clear that Josel himself is aware of this. It simply appears that he judges the principal to be a representative of the society that is sending him to war (the 18-year-old has recently received conscription papers), where his greatest fear is that he will be

injured in the head, and left mentally incapacitated (*blöde*) for the rest of his days. The issue is complicated, however, by his perplexing reference to Dostoyevsky as he attacks the school principal, and a new dimension is added to his motivation:

[...] wenn ich den Namen Dostojewskij dabei nannte, dann müßte der andere doch gleich begreifen, warum ich es tat und daß ich dazu verpflichtet war, und so schrie ich ihn an, und als er sich bewegte, sprang ich vor und biß ihn (ZG, 188).

We have here an instance of a neurotic mind: it is a delusional assumption that quoting Dostoyevsky's name will be understood by his victim, or indeed by anyone else. But to Josel quoting the Russian novelist's name is very meaningful. He has been reading *Notes from Underground*, and the persona of the unnamed narrator (the underground man) has become deeply embedded in his consciousness; indeed, he has been rehearsing the underground man's bizarre thought processes for some time. Like the underground man Josel wishes to humiliate others, but also to be humiliated himself: he calls this, quoting Dostoyevsky, "den *Genuß* der Erniedrigung" (ZG, 187). His compulsion takes the form of planning to jostle others on the street, for example his uncle, "wenn er vom Gericht oder aus seiner Kanzlei nach Hause käme, einfach anzurempleln, so heftig daß er hinstürzt, um dann von ihm beschimpft zu werden" (ZG, 187).⁴¹⁴ It is a masochistic will for chastisement; that it is representative of a general Upper Silesian trait across the tetralogy appears to be borne out by an incident on the tram when Josel does successfully carry out his bizarre intention (he deliberately runs into a complete stranger on the tram) and is surprised that his victim apologises to him (ZG, 187).

5.8 REFLECTIONS IN A GOLDEN EYE (1941)

Carson McCullers' second novel *Reflections in a Golden Eye* ("Spiegelbild im goldenen Auge") (1966) is a short work, set in peacetime on an army post in the American South. In its sustained use of Southern gothic convention it is an

⁴¹⁴ This unusual behaviour is also a characteristic of Antonapolous, the mentally deranged deaf mute in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*: "At times he would meet people on the sidewalk whose faces did not please him, and he would bump into these persons and push at them with his elbows and stomach" (CN, 7).

inherently bleak novel, populated by characters we must describe as freakish, disturbed, and psychologically challenged. The barracks is in its way a microcosm of McCullers' enigmatic vision of the Southern homeland as a whole. Much of what goes on there is strange or perplexing: "One old Corporal wrote a letter every night to Shirley Temple making it a sort of diary of all that he had done during the day [...]. Another man, who had ten years' service behind him, jumped out of a three-story window because a friend would not lend him fifty cents for beer. A cook in the same battery was haunted by the fixed idea that he had cancer of the tongue, an illusion that no medical denials could dispel" (CN, 390). We are in the realm of the irrational and the unknown and given Bienek's vision of Upper Silesia ("verrückt", "fiebrig", "seltsam", "unbekannt")⁴¹⁵ McCullers' work surely corroborated his vision of the American South as a valid sister territory to Upper Silesia, and one worth drawing on to make his point. The novel ends with the murder of Ellgee Williams, a private soldier with voyeuristic tendencies, by a (married) homosexual officer, Captain Weldon Pemberton, a complex and sadistic man who is both bizarrely attracted to and simultaneously repulsed by his subordinate. The captain discovers Williams secretly watching his sleeping wife, Leonora Pemberton, at her bedside (a practice Williams has been observing for several weeks), and shoots him dead. Bienek's comment in "Mit einem Rucksack voll Dämonen" on the inscrutability of the Pemberton/Williams relationship and its denouement is certainly instructive here; in it he acknowledges the psychological integrity of McCullers' characterisation:

Carson McCullers operiert hier mit nichtrationalen Elementen, mit Motiven, die im Unbewußten angesiedelt sind, die wir selbst nur erahnen, kaum vermuten, nicht aussprechen können (MR, 110).

In *Die erste Polka* Bienek replicates two specific motifs from *Reflections in a Golden Eye*, blending them into his Upper Silesian narrative, as a means of highlighting the

⁴¹⁵ See *europäische ideen*, p. 12.

bizarre and unique nature of the former German province. The first of these concerns Bienek's fascination in *Die erste Polka* with the Japanese paper flowers he remembered from his youth. ("Die japanischen Papierblumen, die im Wasser aufgehen, haben Kinder damals stark beeindruckt", he reflected in *Beschreibung einer Provinz*) (BP, 20). The paper flowers make a first appearance in *Die erste Polka* as Josel Piontek, Bienek's principal adolescent figure in the novel, makes his final visit to his dying father's sickbed, and discovers his father busying himself with a basin of water filled with these paper novelties. They are gifts from Leo Maria's eccentric sister Wassermilka. He motions his son to his bedside and hands him one; each then throws a new paper flower into the basin and awaits the unfolding process.

Sie sahen beide weg; man mußte bis fünfundzwanzig zählen und sich erst dann umsehen: da waren die Blumen aufgeblüht! Zuzusehn wie das Papier langsam aufweichte und sich öffnete, wie die Blume sich entfaltete und aufrichtete, das hieße dem Wunder das Geheimnis nehmen, das würde Unglück bringen. [...] Es gab Erwachsene, die daraus ihre Zukunft deuteten (EP, 26).

On the surface the scene depicts a tender moment between a chronic asthmatic in the final hours of his life (Leo Maria dies in the early hours of the following morning) and his teenage son. But the underlying significance of the episode is to be found elsewhere. The paper flowers motif derives not only from childhood memories, but also from an incident in McCullers' second novel *Reflections in a Golden Eye* in which two characters, Alison Langdon and her effeminate Filipino servant Anacleto (both quite grotesque figures in their discrete ways), appear to take delight in the flowers, just as Leo Maria and Josel Piontek had done in *Die erste Polka*. The pair are discovered by Alison's husband, Major Morris Langdon in the early hours of the morning:

'[...] And what was it they were doing?' The Major pressed his blunt fingers against his eyeballs and shook his head again. 'Oh yes. They were dropping little things into a bowl of water. Some sort of Japanese mess Anacleto had bought at the ten-cent store—these little

particles open like flowers in the water. And they were just sitting there at four o'clock in the morning trifling with that [...] (CN, 384).

In *Die erste Polka* Bienek creatively appropriates the McCullers' scene to make a statement about the nature of the Upper Silesian mindset. In the two Gleiwitz protagonists' whimsical fascination with the exotic flowers, and their improbable faith in the superstition and myth surrounding them, Bienek is highlighting the idiosyncratic core at the heart of the Upper Silesian character.

The second influential incident in *Reflections in a Golden Eye*, the more important of the two, was the self-mutilation of Alison Langdon. This was so psychologically telling that Bienek incorporated it directly into *Die erste Polka*. Undoubtedly Alison has both physical and psychiatric issues to contend with. "She was very ill and she looked it", the novel's narrator advises. "Not only was this illness physical, but she had been tortured to the bone by grief and anxiety so that now she was on the verge of actual lunacy" (CN, 319). In an early episode in McCullers's novel, Alison and her husband are spending the evening with their friends Captain Weldon Penderton and his wife Leonora in the Penderton sitting room. The group is not entirely comfortable. "For one reason, a strange and tragic thing had happened among these four people a few months ago", the narrator explains:

They had been sitting like this late one night when suddenly Mrs. Langdon, who had a high temperature, left the room and ran over to her own house. The Major did not follow her immediately, as he was comfortably stupefied with whiskey. Then later Anacleto, the Langdons' Filipino servant, rushed wailing into the room with such a wild-eyed face that they followed him without a word. They found Mrs. Langdon unconscious and she had cut off the tender nipples of her breasts with the garden shears (CN, 327).

Mrs Langdon is actually grieving for her lost baby and is angry and distressed about the breakdown of her marriage; her original intention appears to have been suicide ("She had seen the garden shears on the wall and, beside herself with anger and despair, she had tried to stab and kill herself. But the shears were too blunt.") (CN,

338). She is ashamed about her act and appears unclear about her motivation: “[...] for a few moments she must have been quite out of her head, for she herself did not know just how it had happened” (CN, 338).

In what way are we to understand this extreme level of gender-based violence against her own person? Certainly, Alison’s attempt at suicide (which in actual fact closes out as extreme self-harm) appears to stem from her distress at her baby’s death; it can also be viewed as a desperate protest against male dominance, and the humiliation she is subjected to in her daily life. The duplicity of her husband who is having an affair with Captain Penderton’s wife has also adversely affected her mental health. She feels unworthy as a woman: her deliberate mutilation appears a means of disavowing gender entirely; for Robert K. Martin, her self-harm represented not only a renunciation of “her role as mother after the death of her child but symbolically indicated her exclusion from the world of women”.⁴¹⁶ A complex woman, Alison is also laden with self-loathing; for Margaret B. McDowell, a reliable McCullers commentator, her episode of self-harm was “an exaggerated rite of self-abasement”.⁴¹⁷

In *Die erste Polka* there is a similar incident where McCullers’ self-mutilation motif is reproduced at face value as an example of what is also possible in Upper Silesia, however extraordinary it may seem to be. In *Die erste Polka* Rosa Willimczyk, a Catholic bookseller, who having been sexually assaulted at the Piontek wedding reception by the drunk Feldweibel Metzmacher (EP, 279) (in *Septemberlicht* we learn that he has a history of assaulting women) (SL, 141) also resorts to a similar form of self-violation. There is some suggestion that Rosa may initially have had some feelings for the sergeant (EP, 276). In any case, following the assault she

⁴¹⁶ Robert K. Martin, ‘Gender, Race and the Colonial Body: Carson McCullers’s Filipino Boy, and David Henry Hwang’s Chinese Woman’, *Contemporary Literary Criticism: Volume 196*, edited by Jeffrey W. Hunter, Farmington Hills: Thomson Gale (2005), 174-179 (p. 176).

⁴¹⁷ Margaret B. McDowell, *Carson McCullers*, Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1980, p. 60. (Subsequently referred to as “McDowell”).

runs to the hotel kitchen, grabs a pair of poultry shears, “und wollte damit tatsächlich die Brustwarzen abschneiden. Sie war ganz still dabei [...]” (EP, 280). The utter grotesqueness and black humour of the incident—a kind of humour, incidentally, missing in the McCullers source text—is accentuated by the reaction of the kitchen staff: “die Köche, die das Blut heruntersickern sahen, liefen herbei und versuchten die Wunden zu stillen, indem sie eingeweichte Brötchen darauf legten” (EP, 280).

What did Bienek hope to achieve in this appropriation from *Reflections in a Golden Eye*? The intertext of course focused attention on that link Bienek believed existed between Upper Silesia and the US Southern states (in this case the sense of irrationality and unpredictability which characterised the two regions’ peoples). It was not, however, an attempt to compare the two protagonists personally. Bienek’s Rosa Willimczyk is a very different person to Alison Langdon, and her circumstances are decidedly dissimilar. What the two women, however, do have in common is firstly that sense of self-abasement quoted by McDowell above, and secondly an inability to act (or an aversion to acting) in their own best interests. For Bienek these were the principal connecting factors, and the grounds for his intertext. He has, however, his own Upper Silesia agenda. He replicates Alison Langdon’s breast-mutilation in *Die erste Polka* as an illustrative manifestation of the Upper Silesian tendency to accept suffering, pain, and humiliation rather than to stand up to circumstance as it happens and exercise the kind of agency which could bring appropriate resolution and closure. Rosa’s self-mutilation—ultimately an extraordinarily self-abasing reaction in the face of Metzmacher’s assault—represents that propensity to submit which (as we have seen on several occasions above) Bienek believed contributed materially to the downfall of the Upper Silesian province in 1945.

For the reader it was—though not vital—important to recognise the intertext to appreciate the author’s full intention. It is interesting to note that in his influential

review of *Die erste Polka*, Heinrich Böll, despite being an avid reader of McCullers, and something of a McCullers aficionado,⁴¹⁸ failed to notice (or did not comment on) the informing source of Rosa Willimczyk's self-mutilation. In a sense, of course, all was not lost: in the context of the novel Böll understood to some extent what Rosa Willimczyk's erratic behaviour was all about, while remaining sceptical: "das mag vorgekommen sein und vorkommen: ist aber dann doch zu »oberschlesisch«, he wrote about Rosa's self-mutilation, adding ironically, with an allusion to Valeska Piontek's penance following a sexual indiscretion in her own hallway with a salesman from *Westermann's Monatshefte*, "Valeska Pionteks fünfzig freiwillige Vaterunser und zehn Credos sollten doch genügen".⁴¹⁹ Nevertheless, recognition of the intertext could have opened up new layers of meaning for Böll: in the context of *Spiegelbild im goldnen Auge* the Willimczyk self-harming might have elicited a more textured interpretation.

5.9 THE MEMBER OF THE WEDDING (1946)

The correspondence we have noted between the liminality of the adolescent and that of the state or territory becomes more apparent as we proceed to McCullers' third novel *The Member of the Wedding*.⁴²⁰ Like *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, this novel also concerns the coming-of-age process, this time of a twelve, going on thirteen-year-old adolescent tomboy called Frankie Addams. The year is 1944, and the setting again is small-town Georgia. The stages in the girl's transformation from childhood to adulthood are roughly marked by her adoption of several name changes which reflect her evolving self-perception. In Part I of the novel she is "Frankie", a rebellious adolescent on the verge of change, searching for an identity, for connection, and a means to break free; as Frankie she lives to no little extent outside the social boundaries demanded by her Southern environment. In Part II she replaces her childhood name with "F. Jasmine" when she confidently (and

⁴¹⁸ Böll owned a copy of McCullers' *Spiegelbild im goldnen Auge*. See Heinrich Böll, *Werke*, Kölner Ausgabe, Volume 6, 1952-1953, Cologne: Kiepenheuer und Witsch, 2007, p. 673.

⁴¹⁹ *Das Schmerzliche an Oberschlesien*, p. 198.

⁴²⁰ German translation: *Das Mädchen Frankie* (1951).

unilaterally) declares herself to be a “member of the wedding” (her intention is to leave the constrictions of her small Southern town, and permanently share with her brother and his bride the life of travel and adventure she associates with being grown up), only to change her name again in Part III to the more formal “Frances”, when after a series of traumatic learning events (including a stark realisation when she is rejected by her brother and his bride that she can never become a “member of the wedding”), she definitively believes herself to have reached adulthood.⁴²¹ But her transition brings what appears in the terms of the novel to be a flawed outcome. When the novel ends she has in essence abandoned her quest for meaningful identity by acquiescing to white Southern convention regarding the role of women in society.

Just as he had been impressed by the narrative of Mick Kelly in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, Bienek was also struck by Frankie’s story, describing it as, “sehr kunstvoll und mit den Mitteln einer klugen und sensiblen Psychologie gestaltet” (MR, 110). He also admired the intensity with which McCullers presented Frankie’s adolescent predicament. “Der McCullers ist es gelungen”, he wrote, “diese Figur der Frankie in ein beredtes Feuer intensiver Erfahrung zu tauchen [...]” (MR, 110). This was significant, as it became the rite-of-passage paradigm Bienek emulated in *Die erste Polka* in his portrayal of Josel Piontek. The influence of Frankie Addams on Bienek’s portrayal of Josel was significant. Here was an alienated, awkward, yet imaginative and complex adolescent girl straddling that divide between childhood immaturity and adult cognisance, ready to make the move into adulthood. This was also Josel’s situation in Gleiwitz in 1939. I have described at length Josel’s journey from childhood to adulthood elsewhere;⁴²² therefore in this study I will concentrate on areas of connectivity between the two adolescents’ characters and experiences. In the first instance what links Josel and Frankie are their imaginative inner lives,

⁴²¹ For reasons of clarity the name “Frankie” is used throughout this study.

⁴²² See McIvor 1986.

predicated predominantly on fantasy and illusion (Frankie's dream of becoming an integral part of her brother and his bride's lives after they marry, Josel's fanciful reveries of one sort or another throughout *Die erste Polka*). Secondly the two protagonists share a deep sense of spiritual isolation and loneliness in their respective lives: Frankie has been abandoned by her erstwhile clubhouse friends, and is now a "member of nothing" (CN, 461); Josel Piontek longs for someone to whom he can divulge his complicated adolescent problems, and fervently wishes that his newly arrived Breslau cousin Andreas can fulfil this role. Confusion and misinformation about love and sexuality also link the two protagonists, although Josel as a 14-year-old does appear much more in the know. Frankie, two years younger, is curiously naive about sexual matters (she complains about her former friends "talking nasty lies about married people" (CN, 470) and believes she has witnessed a "fit" when, on hearing noises she cannot place, takes a look into the unlocked bedroom of a married couple who rent the front room in her home). It does seem, however, that she has engaged in some sort of sexual activity with a boy called Barney MacKean—unspecified, though given her lack of knowledge it is unlikely to have been very advanced ("they committed a queer sin, and how bad it was she did not know") (CN, 482). By way of contrast, Josel's confused understanding of love and sex is a particularly equivocal combination of sentimentality and prurience. He coyly remembers kissing his friend Ulla Ossadnik once in the past, and at his sister's wedding reception naively resolves to propose marriage to her the following day; yet, as if to belie this sense of innocence, Josel's "Baubaracke" activity in *Die erste Polka* represents undoubted acts of delinquency and opportunism. This involves the renting out of an abandoned builders' hut to soldiers and their women. In *Septemberlicht* he recalls boring a hole in the wall of the hut to view the activities inside (SL, 162).⁴²³

⁴²³ This incident might well have been inspired by an event in William Faulkner's final novel *The Reivers* (1962) (*Die Spitzbuben*) where Otis, a loutish, irredeemable fifteen-year-old adolescent (and quite unlike Josel Piontek in other respects) boasts unashamedly of operating a peephole in an Arkansas brothel,

It is certainly interesting that the precipitant which finally convinces Frankie Addams that her childhood is over is so very similar to that of Josel Piontek in *Die erste Polka*. Parallel plotlines relating to the two adolescent characters indicate a clear intertextual relationship between the two novels. It is highly probable that one of Frankie's most harrowing learning experiences in *The Member of the Wedding* was the source of those episodes in *Die erste Polka* where Josel Piontek on his way home from his sister's wedding reception strikes the hopelessly drunk Feldwebel Metzmacher on the head with a bottle in an attempt to save his friend Ulla Ossadnik from being raped, and subsequently decides to flee Gleiwitz. This incident derives from Frankie Addams' ill-judged visit to a dingy Blue Moon hotel room, when she, defending herself from the sexual advances of an intoxicated soldier whom she has innocently and naively followed upstairs (he believes her to be much older) bites his tongue, and smashes a glass pitcher on his head. Both Frankie and Josel in their respective situations believe the men they have injured could very well be dead, and fear prosecution (in fact neither has died). What is important from the perspective of the intertext is that the two quite comparable episodes ultimately signal a realisation for each character that childhood is over. Bienek has followed McCullers' methodology: a series of traumatic learning events finally leads to a conscious end of childhood for each of the protagonists. A further learning event in Frankie's life—the rejection of her request to be allowed to accompany her brother and his bride on honeymoon, and moreover to share their lives—confirms her realisation that everything has changed. The limitations of her former mode of thinking become suddenly clear:

[...] she recalled the silence in the hotel room; and all at once a fit in a front room, the silence, the nasty talk behind the garage—these separate recollections fell together in the darkness of her mind [...], so that in a flash there came in her an understanding (CN, 598).

charging the public to secretly view a prostitute (who happens to be his aunt) with her clients. William Faulkner, *The Reivers*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970, p. 133.

She has become a different person. It is a kind of epiphany: “It was as though the things that she had done, the sins committed, had all been done by someone else—a stranger a long time ago” (CN, 599). Similarly, following his altercation with Metzmacher, Josel Piontek feels a chapter in his life has closed (at one point the event is described as “die Zäsur in seinem Leben”) (EP, 332). The measure of the transformation is such that, when leaving Georg Montag to whom he has gone for advice and support following the incident, it is obvious that he can never return to his former state: “Wenn die Tür hinter mir zuschlägt”, he speculates, “ist etwas verschwunden, auf immer weg. Irgend etwas, das spürte er, hörte auf, wenn er den Raum hier verließ, das Haus, den Garten.” (EP, 340). It is properly a rite-of-passage moment. Speaking of this incident (and of Ulla and Andreas’s loss of childhood) in a letter to me some six years after the publication of *Die erste Polka*, Bienek claimed that nothing less than a change of mindset had taken place (“[...] in diesem Fall, wo durch das Geschehen auch die Psyche verändert wird, fühlen sie, mit der (Unschuld der) Kindheit ist es vorbei...”),⁴²⁴ a statement which could also easily apply to Frankie Addams in her loss of innocence moments.

Josel flees Gleiwitz that night; we know from *Septemberlicht* that he crosses the Oder by train but only makes it as far as Twardawa from where he is collected by his uncle a few days later. Frankie for her part also attempts to flee when she reluctantly returns from her brother’s wedding ceremony in Winter Hill. She too is unsuccessful. Killing time before her train departs, she returns to the Blue Moon hotel to find out whether she has killed the soldier, where she is recognised by a police officer, and taken home by her father. It is significant that in their attempted flights both children pass through metaphorical thresholds. Josel, when he leaves Montag’s home, “stieg über den Zaun und ging über das abgeerntete Weizenfeld”, we are told (EP, 341), and Frankie who throughout *The Member of the Wedding* has been described as hanging around or standing in doorways, now passes

⁴²⁴ Private letter of 11 May 1982 to Joseph Gerard McIvor.

through. About to secretly flee her home in the dark, we read that she “groped to the back door, unlocked it, and stepped outside” (CN, 595).

My contention is that McCullers intended the liminality of Frankie’s situation as a symbol or analogue of a changing world. Undoubtedly this was inspiring for Bienek as he pursued his end-of-childhood/end-of-province analogy in the Gleiwitz novels. *The Member of the Wedding* suggests World War II as the catalyst of significant global change. The world is undergoing readjustment (much of the narrative takes place in August 1944), and realities well beyond Frankie Addams’ Georgia experience begin to encroach upon her consciousness. The inevitable consequence of conflict is brought close to home as she remembers a local soldier killed in Italy whom she knew by sight. It is significant that she thinks of the world in essentially liminal terms: the world was not, “a round school globe, with the countries neat and different-colored” (CN, 479). Rather it existed in a constant state of flux (“huge and cracked and loose and turning a thousand miles an hour”) (CN, 479) where national borders could shift and fluctuate: “The geography book at school was out of date; the countries of the world had changed” (CN, 479). Is there a trickle-down effect from this global change on Frankie’s Southern town? The answer is yes, but it proceeds slowly. While racial violence and segregation remain a constant presence in the town, dissatisfaction over discrimination and disenfranchisement is brewing under the surface. Frankie’s black carer and surrogate mother, for example, despite feeling powerless to effect change, is not unforthcoming in expressing her opinion on Southern racial policy, speaking not only of her own frustration, but also that of her foster brother Honey Camden Brown, a troubled and excluded black man: “He feel like he got to break something or break himself”, she tells Frankie about his situation, “Sometimes it just about more than we can stand” (CN, 567). The town actually feels ripe for change, but not quite yet. It is to McCullers’ *Clock Without Hands*, we must turn for an indication of what is possible in the future. In this, her final novel, politics is clearly changing.

5.10 *CLOCK WITHOUT HANDS* (1961)

In Carson McCullers' final novel, *Clock Without Hands*, the flux in the political and social situation in the fictional town of Milan, Georgia where the work is set appears even more pronounced. The novel, published in Germany in 1962 as *Uhr ohne Zeiger*, commences in 1953 (ten years after *The Member of The Wedding*). It was of all McCullers' works the one which dealt most comprehensively with the legacy of the Southern past, and in particular with the repercussions of Civil War defeat and that old reliable Southern preoccupation, the obsession with antebellum glory. For Horst Bienek the social, racial, and historical aspect of the narrative eclipsed the storyline of the main protagonist, the pharmacist J. T. Malone, whose diagnosis of leukaemia and subsequent death open and close the novel:

Der McCullers geht es nicht um das Sterben des Mannes Malone allein, sie versucht zugleich die komplizierte soziale Struktur der Südstaaten zu entwerfen. Nach und nach wird das Schicksal Malones zur Rahmenhandlung degradiert, die das Geschehen auf fünfzehn Monate befristet. Wichtiger wird ihr der alte schrullige Richer Fox Clane [...].⁴²⁵

Whether Bienek meant this "downgrading" of the Malone narrative as a criticism of McCullers is not clear (my impression is that he used the term "degradiert" somewhat neutrally here). In any case, what appears more important for Bienek in the novel is McCullers' depiction of an American region almost ninety years after Civil War defeat still essentially in a state of liminality, straddling a threshold between lingering white supremacism on the one hand and the possible, even prospective, normalisation of what we might term acceptable social structures on the other. White supremacism is represented by the octogenarian one-time judge and congressman, Fox Clane ("Ein verbohrter Reaktionär, ein sentimentaler Politiker, der immer noch von der Zeit der Sklavenherrschaft träumt" as Bienek describes him),⁴²⁶ while hope and belief in the necessity of change is personified

⁴²⁵ Horst Bienek 'Tod auf Termin'.

⁴²⁶ Horst Bienek 'Tod auf Termin'.

by his forward-looking 17-year-old grandson, Jester Clane, a boy determined not to accept the Southern past as a paradigm for the future, and who strongly espouses the ending of racial division in the South.

Several aspects of the novel were influential for Bienek. One was undoubtedly the search for selfhood of two adolescent characters, the above-mentioned Jester Clane, and the orphan Sherman Pew who presents as African American, but possesses striking grey-blue eyes (he is in fact biracial). Here again as in *The Member of the Wedding* was a depiction of ambivalent identities, set against the backdrop of vacillating social and political structures, which I believe Bienek recognised as typical of his own childhood German province. From his 1962 review it is clear he was fascinated and impressed by McCullers' portrayal of the two adolescents' relationship to each other and to their Southern environment:

Hier in dem pubertären, verworrenen und erotisch gespannten Verhältnis der beiden zueinander, zu ihrer Umgebung, zu der in Vorurteilen verstrickten Gesellschaft, beweist sich die psychologische Meisterschaft der Autorin; das ist ihr Thema, da gelingen ihr große Szenen.⁴²⁷

In each boy there is a classic mix of conflicting characteristics. Jester has never known his parents (his lawyer father Johnny Clane took his own life before he was born, his mother died in childbirth). Only when Jester learns of his late father's liberal views, and his representation of a black man wrongly convicted by an all-white jury of the murder of his white lover's husband (it was self-defence) and executed, does Jester ultimately find himself, and a purpose in life; his decision to become a lawyer himself represents for him a means of redressing the racial and social degeneracy still prevalent in the South and in practice supported by his grandfather. Jester appears to symbolise the changing South itself. His perplexing experience of adolescence is complicated by his love (unreturned, indeed scorned) for the overbearing Sherman Pew, a figure like himself who never knew his parents: Sherman's white mother also died in childbirth, and his black father was the man

⁴²⁷ Horst Bienek 'Tod auf Termin'.

defended by Johnny Clane and executed for the murder of his mother's husband. As neither boy nor man, and as possessing neither a fully black nor a fully white heritage, Sherman appears doubly caught in a liminal bind. He too is searching for selfhood in a transitioning environment: he chooses identification with the oppressed black community. But he is impatient for change and dies violently. In headstrong pursuit of equivalence and social acceptability he rents a home in a white neighbourhood, and, despite being warned by Jester Clane of a plot against his life, he is killed by a bomb thrown by a white fanatic. Despite the terrible nature of his death, however, Bienek judged McCullers' style in the novel to be "sachlich, aber nicht mitleidlos, sie duldet keine Sentimentalitäten. Der Tod des jungen Sherman [...], ist für sie kein soziales Lamento",⁴²⁸ indicating his belief that McCullers was content to let her writing do the talking, rather than wishing to prescribe any particular response from the reader. As we know this was also to be Bienek's goal in the tetralogy.

Clock without Hands ends on the day J. T. Malone dies, the same day the U.S. Supreme Court announces desegregation in schools: the judge is apoplectic, but his day is patently, if slowly, ebbing away. Bienek must have noticed the nature of the judge's vain protest in the face of the historic decision (in essence it is the same stubborn, hopeless defiance bleated out in Bienek's *Erde und Feuer* by the few Nazi stalwarts left in Gleiwitz as the Russians approach the city in 1945). Visiting the bedridden Malone, Clane pins his recalcitrant colours regarding the Supreme Court decision to the mast:

"There are ways we can get around it", cried the judge. "It will never happen. We will fight. All Southerners will fight to the last ditch. To the death. Writing it in laws is one thing but enforcing it is another" (CN, 802).

He is on his way to a radio interview and exhorts the dying Malone to listen in to the transmission. In a scene which I believe became the inspiration for Bienek's

⁴²⁸ Horst Bienek 'Tod auf Termin'.

portrayal in *Die erste Polka* of the terminally-ill Leo Maria Piontek's tuning in to the radio broadcast interrupted by "insurgents" as the faked attack proceeds at the Gleiwitz radio station, the dying Malone and his wife listen to the incomprehensible mutterings of the old judge (excerpts absurdly, given his extremely bigoted views, from the Gettysburg address).⁴²⁹ It was a useful plot device for Bienek to imitate, allowing him to clarify what he believed from his research⁴³⁰ actually took place inside the Gleiwitz broadcasting station itself, as a kind of counterpoint to the rather dreamier, starlit proceedings as perceived from the outside by Ulla Ossadnik and Andreas Pilgrim earlier in the evening. Leo Maria explains to his wife what he heard, as the normal broadcast was interrupted:

Die Stimme sagte ganz deutlich: Achtung, Achtung, hier ist Gleiwitz. Der Sender befindet sich in polnischer Hand ... (EP, 309).

In a further replication from *Clock without Hands*, Leo Maria Piontek dies following the Gleiwitz broadcast, just as Malone was to die soon after Judge Clane's transmission.

And what about that Supreme Court desegregation landmark decision? The date was 17 May 1954. Is this the moment this stage of liminality ends for the South? Gore Vidal whose review of *Clock without Hands* Bienek so admired, was not so sure. "At the book's end, the old judge, enraged by the Supreme Court's decision, goes on radio to denounce the Court [...]", Vidal wrote, adding with some scepticism, "Are we to take that as the South's last gasp as a new order begins? If so, I don't believe it".⁴³¹ Nor is Margaret B. McDowell convinced that the 17 May

⁴²⁹ The short speech delivered by President Lincoln on 19th November 1863 in Gettysburg, a battlefield site of the Civil War. McClane risibly quotes Lincoln's words concerning the foundation of the United States: "our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal" (CN, 803).

⁴³⁰ Bienek relied heavily on Jürgen Runzheimer's research paper, 'Der Überfall auf den Sender Gleiwitz im Jahre 1939', (*Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, Jahrgang 10, Heft 4, 1962, p. 408-426). For further information see also McIvor 1986, pp. 71-72.

⁴³¹ Gore Vidal, 'Carson McCullers's "Clock without Hands"', *Rocking The Boat*, Boston: Little, Brown & Company (1963), 178-183 (pp. 182-183).

1954 possesses the significance the Judge assumes it to have. She points out that although McCullers began *Clock without Hands* in 1951 the novel was not published until 1961, seven years after the Supreme Court decree. "In recalling the day of the court decision from the remoteness of seven years", McDowell therefore writes, "McCullers with modulated irony, implies that this day was not the turning point the Judge understood it to be".⁴³² And it is true that the Supreme Court decision hardly constitutes the old racial order in irreversible meltdown; nevertheless there is a sure sense here that something of great historical significance has occurred in the Southern states. A threshold has certainly been crossed, and in relation to the tetralogy this was surely what Bienek took from the novel. In many ways the threshold analogy was to work much more cogently for Bienek in the tetralogy than for McCullers in *Clock without Hands*; the arrival of the Russians in Gleiwitz was to mark an unassailable end of the old structure.

5.11 TRUMAN CAPOTE AND POETIC REALISM

In comparison with Bienek's interest in the complete Carson McCullers' canon, Bienek engaged materially during the writing of the Gleiwitz tetralogy with only one Truman Capote work. That work, Capote's first novel, was *Other Voices, Other Rooms*. From the outset, however, it must be said that while Bienek's *poetischer Realismus* moniker more or less describes Carson McCullers' style, the term appears less compelling with regard to *Other Voices, Other Rooms*. This is mainly because Capote's novel is very much more poetic than realist: its representation is one of a wholly imaginary dream world, removed from any semblance of reality. In a short critique of the novel Orville Prescott put it this way: "The recognizably real world known to most of us is not Mr. Capote's. Reality for him is not material and specific; it is emotional, poetic, symbolical, filled with sibilant whisperings and enigmatic verbal mysteries".⁴³³ Capote's biographer even wondered whether the

⁴³² McDowell, p. 102.

⁴³³ Orville Prescott, *In My Opinion: An Inquiry into the Contemporary Novel*, Indianapolis and New York: Charter Books, 1963, p. 114.

book should be judged as a novel (“In its lack of realism and its reliance on symbolism, *Other Voices* is less a novel than a romance”).⁴³⁴ Nevertheless, as we know from “Mit einem Rucksack voll Dämonen”, Bienek was content to include Capote in his roster of Southern poetic realists, while paradoxically in the same breath speaking of the, “magisch-versponnenen Verrücktheiten eines Truman Capote” (MR, 107), a phrase which seems to preclude the likelihood that realism was part of Capote’s stylistic mix. This would certainly give the impression that for Bienek, poetic realism as a concept was to be used loosely, rounded up or rounded down as required. By way of contrast, Capote’s novella *The Grass Harp* (1951), published in German as *Die Grassharfe* (1952), a frankly improbable tale about an idiosyncratic group of people in small-town Alabama who against the will of the local community repair to a tree house in search of solace, independence and companionship, and thereby scandalise the local populace, at least engaged with a recognisable social community. While *The Grass Harp* is a nostalgic and intensely poetic flight of fantasy, it nevertheless (in a restrained and limited way) also covers real-life issues such as social relationships, homosexuality, illness, and death. Nor does it eschew a sense of the political: the tree house idyll of the novella proves to be an imperfect refuge, and the authority of the establishment ultimately prevails. In his review of the novella for the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Heinrich Böll characterised *The Grass Harp’s* style (admittedly in quotation marks as if he had some reservations about its paradoxical character) as “realistische Romantik”,⁴³⁵ a phrase we might be permitted to interpret as another (near) term for what Bienek’s called “poetischer Realismus”, where the poetic qualities of the prose (such as

⁴³⁴ Gerald Clarke, *Capote. A Biography*, London: Cardinal, 1989, p. 152.

⁴³⁵ ‘Das andere Amerika. Über Truman Capote, “Die Grassharfe”’, Heinrich Böll, *Werke, Essayistische Schriften und Reden I, 1952–1963*, edited by Bernd Balzer, Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch (1977), 64-65 (p. 65).

symbolism and the use of metaphor) colour and deepen representation of the events narrated.⁴³⁶

5.12 THE EPIGRAPH TO *DIE ERSTE POLKA*

Bienek considered *Other Voices, Other Rooms* to be Capote's best novel, although apart from an oblique allusion in his US travelogue "In Amerika" to *The Grass Harp*,⁴³⁷ there was no mention of any other Capote work in Bienek's secondary writings until his *Tagebücher* were published in 2024. From several diary entries, however, we know that Bienek continued to read Capote as new works appeared, noting in the case of *Music for Chameleons* (1980) that Capote's writing did not match the quality of his earlier work.⁴³⁸ In any event, as far as the Gleiwitz tetralogy was concerned, *Other Voices, Other Rooms*—"ein Geniestreich" as Bienek labelled it (TB, 575)—was the only work that mattered. The novel's importance for the overall concept of the tetralogy is borne out by Bienek's use of a short quotation from the book as an epigraph for *Die erste Polka*: (Bienek marked the section with an "X" in his personal copy of the novel):⁴³⁹

Gewesen, sagte das Unkraut,
Vergangen, sagte der Himmel,
Tot, sagte der Wald ... (EP, 5).

⁴³⁶ Ironically, for Böll, the success of Capote's technique in *Die Grasharfe* was in one instance inappropriate and unwelcome. Böll was unhappy that a swindler in the novella, the businessman Dr Morris Ritz, happened to be a Jew, which, because of the novella's symbolic structure, had the effect of creating a wholly unfavourable impression. "Schon in einem realistischen Roman würde uns ein jüdischer Betrüger überflüssig erscheinen", Böll commented, adding with considerable disappointment, "aber in einem von Symbolen bestimmten, fast märchenhaften Buch, wird auch der böse Jude zu einem bösen Symbol, und es ist schade, daß man den Zauber Capotes nicht ohne diesen Giftspritzer genießen kann" (ibid.). This perspective also tells us much about West German sensitivities regarding literary representations of Jewish figures after 1945.

⁴³⁷ Horst Bienek, 'In Amerika', *ensemble 6: Internationales Jahrbuch für Literatur* (1975), 144-169 (p. 165).

⁴³⁸ Bienek described *Musik für Chamäleons* (1981) as "[...] recht gut, und gewiß besser als alles was er in der letzten Zeit veröffentlicht hat, aber es reicht nicht an sein Frühwerk heran, nein" (TB, 206).

⁴³⁹ *Andere Stimmen Andere Stuben*, Munich: Paul List Verlag, 1962, p. 164. Bienek's personal copy is available in the Horst-Bienek-Archiv (Bia 23/75).

He explained the significance of the epigraph in a statement intended for (but never published in) *Beschreibung einer Provinz*, giving notice that his primary intention for *Die erste Polka* was conceived at an early stage:

Das Motto für Die erste Polka:

Gewesen, sagte das Unkraut, vergangen, sagte der Himmel, tot, sagte der Wald ...

Aus Truman Capotes erstem und wohl bestem Roman Other voices, other rooms (Andere Stimmen andere Räume). Das war ~~eigentlich~~ schon da, bevor der Roman da war. Ja, es bezeugt das, was ich mit diesem Buch [*Die erste Polka*] will: [...] Alles ist gewesen, vergangen, tot – und hier, in diesen Sätzen, wird es noch einmal lebendig.⁴⁴⁰

The epitaph is actually part of an intensely poetic lament in the final pages of *Other Voices, Other Rooms* for the loss of a bygone and irrecoverable antebellum Southern past. Capote describes Joel Knox and his stepmother's cousin Randolph riding through autumnal woods on their way to the Cloud Hotel:

They followed the remnants of a road down which once had spun the wheels of lacquered carriages carrying verbena-scented ladies who twittered like linnets in the shade of parasols, and leathery cotton-rich gentlemen gruffing at each other through a haze of Havana smoke, and their children, prim little girls with mint crushed in their handkerchiefs, and boys with mean blackberry eyes, little boys who sent their sisters screaming with tales of roaring tigers.⁴⁴¹

But that era has now gone forever, and the natural environment appears to lament its passing (even the whippoorwill is permitted to get in on the act: in American tradition its song was considered an omen of death):

⁴⁴⁰ Horst Bienek, typescript of "Beschreibung einer Provinz, Aufzeichnungen, Reflexionen. Materialien. Dokumente. Versuch eine verlorene Provinz literarisch wiederzugewinnen", p. 164. Bienek sent the annotated document to me in the early 1980's. An amended version is included in Bienek's *Tagebücher* (TB, 575).

⁴⁴¹ Truman Capote, *Other Voices, Other Rooms*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972, p. 165. (Subsequently referred to in the text as "OV".)

Gusts of autumn, exhaling through the inheriting weeds, grieved for the cruel velvet children and their virile bearded fathers: Was, said the weeds, Gone, said the sky, Dead, said the woods, but the full laments of history were left to the whippoorwill” (OV, 165).⁴⁴²

Was, gone and dead: these words clearly struck a chord with Bienek whose vision for *Die erste Polka* from the outset was to reanimate his disappeared Upper Silesian past, a past that was, like Capote’s lacquered carriages, cotton-rich gentlemen and their children, now politically and socially irretrievable, gone forever, and only available to him in memory. *Die erste Polka* was therefore envisioned as a work of remembrance. For Bienek the deployment of the Capote epigraph was a way of signalling the primary purpose of the Gleiwitz tetralogy: the imaginative literary reconstruction of a disappeared German province. In this objective, however, Bienek differed from Capote. The passing of a historical entity was never to become a major theme of *Other Voices, Other Rooms*, as it was to be for Bienek’s Upper Silesia. While the wonderfully expressive lament for a lost era quoted above is one of several of its kind in *Other Voices, Other Rooms*,⁴⁴³ it appears to exist simply for its own sake. “Unlike Faulkner or Tate,” Helen S. Garson commented, “[Capote] is not concerned with the destruction of a region, the downfall of a class, or the decay of a family. His first novel, as well as those that succeed it, is narrower in scope than theirs”.⁴⁴⁴

5.13 A BRIEF SUMMARY OF CAPOTE’S *OTHER VOICES, OTHER ROOMS*

In order to grasp the full extent of Bienek’s debt to *Other Voices, Other Rooms* in terms of the theme, characterisation and plot of *Die erste Polka*, I will summarise Capote’s novel. Essentially a *Bildungsroman*, the novel is the story of Joel Knox, a 13-year-old Southern boy who has recently lost his mother, and his quest to find his father Edward Sansom whom he has never known (Sansom abandoned him as

⁴⁴² Elisabeth Pohr, the translator of Bienek’s personal copy of *Andere Stimme andere Stuben* (p. 164) makes it abundantly clear in her translation that Capote is speaking of a lost world: she translates “the full laments of history” as “die tiefste Klage um diese versunkene Welt”.

⁴⁴³ See also, for example, OV, 41.

⁴⁴⁴ Helen S. Garson, *Truman Capote*, New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1980, p. 13.

a child), and ultimately to discover the true nature of his own (sexual) identity. Believing his father has summoned him, he leaves his aunt and her family in New Orleans in the expectation of beginning a new life near Noon City. However, his father's home, Skully's Landing, is not as expected. A circuitous journey brings him to a grotesque and gothic world, a decaying antebellum plantation mansion known locally as "The Skulls", slowly sinking into the Southern swamplands. Early on in what essentially transpires to be more or less a house of crackpots and freaks, he has his first sighting of a white-haired woman, the mysterious "queer lady", whom he is certain he has seen in a corner window of the mansion, despite the deliberate obfuscation he is confronted with regarding her existence from his odd stepmother Amy Skully (Miss Amy), Sansom's second wife, and her effete cousin Randolph, a transvestite and homosexual, who also live at the Landing. (Randolph is the man responsible for the accidental shooting which caused Sansom's paralysis). Joel soon meets Little Sunshine, one of Randolph's "dear friends" (OV, 74), a bowlegged African American hermit (actually quite a sociable one) who resides in the dilapidated Cloud Hotel and is an articulate narrator of tall tales of superstition and intrigue. His person contributes greatly to the eccentricity and weirdness at the heart of the novel.

Joel's attempts to meet Sansom, however, are initially thwarted; eventually his father is revealed to be paralysed and bedbound, totally reliant for his care on Amy, Randolph and the two other occupants of Skully's Landing, the black servants Zoo Fever and her grandfather Jesus Fever; Joel later learns it was not Sansom who summoned him to the Landing, but rather Randolph. Sansom himself is scarcely the dynamic father figure Joel has hoped for or sought, and in time he is rejected by his son. Joel's relationship with a local tomboy, the gender-transitive Idabel Thompkins, confuses his perception of his own sexual identity (she rejects him as a lover), and compounds the sense of spiritual isolation and loneliness he feels in his new home. Very much under the influence of Randolph, the boy, following a

series of initiation rites, ultimately appears to reject heterosexuality in favour of a homosexual lifestyle (though Capote leaves his long-term fate unclear). However, it is plain at the novel's conclusion that a symbolic boundary has been crossed ("he stopped and looked back [...] at the boy he had left behind" (OV, 173) is the work's final line), that at the end of a period of liminality the adolescent has progressed from boyhood to maturity. His postliminal incorporation, however, is not into any kind of conventional Southern adulthood; in his apparent rejection of normative Southern social modes, it appears rather to be a complete break from it. In the same way, Idabel Thompkins makes her break from conventionality when she falls for and runs away with the exotic performer Miss Wisteria, a person of short stature she meets at the Noon City carnival. The novel ends when, having returned with Randolph to Skully's Landing from a visit to the Cloud Hotel where his final initiation rite takes place, Joel again sees the "queer lady" in Randolph's bedroom window, this time beckoning to him (it is Randolph himself in Mardi Gras drag). His initiation now complete, Joel, realising definitively that he has come of age, accepts Randolph's invitation to embrace a new (homosexual) future.

5.14 GLEIWITZ AND NOON CITY

As a measure of its importance, it is fair to say that without Capote's novel, *Die erste Polka* would have been a very different work altogether. This is because Bienek liberally incorporates many of the novel's plots, character profiles, and literary devices into *Die erste Polka*; indeed, we shall also have occasion to examine how Bienek plainly relocates the gothic Mississippi sickroom where the seriously incapacitated father of Joel Harrison Knox wastes away, to the bourgeois Gleiwitz home of the Piontek family. This seems bold given that, on the face of it, the provincial German city of Gleiwitz appears an unlikely match for Noon City and the improbably decadent Skully's Landing in which much of Capote's novel is set. Nor was Upper Silesia a sister territory in terms of the industrial and built environment; in comparison with Capote's rural, swampy Mississippi backwater, Bienek's province boasted a highly developed industrial infrastructure, including mining,

smelting and steel production, and had a large urban population. And politically, unlike the American South—where despite deep-seated resentment the outcome of the Civil War had basically settled the national question (there was to be no unilateral secession)—Upper Silesia was a highly contentious border territory straddling three nations, where recent historical events (the Polish Uprisings, the plebiscite and subsequent partition) had merely kicked the can of national identity down the road one more time. Rather, the common denominators that linked the territories in a literary sense were twofold. Firstly, Capote’s Mississippi appeared to exist in a kind of threshold state in the same way that Bienek had understood his own German province (Mississippi manifestly presents in *Other Voices, Other Rooms* as a kind of waiting zone, from which it may—or, indeed, may never—leave). Secondly, as Bienek saw it, there was a compelling congruence between the mindset and temperament of the Upper Silesian and the Mississippi Southerner as depicted in Capote’s novel. Indeed, many of the adjectives Bienek used to describe the essence of his childhood province could also comfortably have applied to Capote’s extraordinary Mississippi setting. When Bienek told *europäische ideen* in a 1977 interview, for example, that his intention for *Die erste Polka* had been, “den Roman einer Provinz zu schreiben, Oberschlesiens, der verrücktesten und fiebrigsten und seltsamsten und unbekanntesten Provinz Deutschlands in dieser Zeit”,⁴⁴⁵ the extraordinary tenor and mood of Truman Capote’s *Noon City*, its environs and its inhabitants also appeared aptly described.

5.15 THE LIMINALITY OF CAPOTE’S SOUTH

Liminality courses through *Other Voices, Other Rooms*: from the landscape to the architecture, to the populace itself, the South is in flux. One commentator described the “in-between” world depicted in the novel particularly well:

Capote’s novel drips with the stifling air that pervades much Southern Gothic; land and water converge in the literal and metaphoric swamp of liminal places that map out the American

⁴⁴⁵ *europäische ideen*, p. 12.

South as a queer and unsettled place still impoverished and battle-weary from the Civil War.⁴⁴⁶

Skully's Landing, the gothic dwelling, is sinking into the sand ("four inches last year") (OV, 91), and much else in the region is in flux. In a dream Joel Knox imagines The Cloud Hotel, another decaying gothic structure in the swamplands, as somewhere "folks came when they went off the face of the earth, when they died but were not dead" (OV, 91). Then there are the fluid identities of many figures in the novel (the gender-transitive Joel Knox, Cousin Randolph and Idabel Thompkins for example) who physically and psychologically appear to dwell in liminal spaces. There is also the inclusion at every stage of Capote's narrative of a grotesque, deformed and freakish humanity: all contribute to the reader's sense of Capote's Mississippi as caught in van Gennep's dynamic liminal condition of being permanently "betwixt and between", and go some way towards explaining Horst Bienek's intense interest in *Other Voices, Other Rooms* as he commenced his own Upper Silesian narrative of a threshold world tottering on an existential precipice of its own.

5.16 HORST BIENEK'S AGENDA OF THE "GROTESQUE"

So open was Bienek to *Other Voices, Other Rooms* that Capote's aesthetic of the liminal clearly informed his presentation of his reconstructed borderland province. It is certainly worth noting some of the instances where Bienek uses grotesque, and sometimes gothic elements (the latter much less frequently), to recreate Capote's programme of the liminal in his own novels. Examples (the following are direct intertextual appropriations from *Other Voices, Other Rooms*) include an unusual mention of a grotesque circus exhibit, "das Mädchen mit den zwei Köpfen" (EP, 226),⁴⁴⁷ and in the final two novels several bizarre (and sometimes surreal) depictions of a group of Upper Silesian women as witches acting out a scene from

⁴⁴⁶ Ardel Haefele-Thomas, 'Queer American Gothic', *The Cambridge Companion to American Gothic*, edited by Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2017), 115-127 (p. 117).

⁴⁴⁷ In *Other Voices, Other Rooms* there are several references to a two-headed baby in a glass tank on show at the Noon City Carnival (OV, 95; 145).

Macbeth (ZG, 284; EF, 58, 191 and 194),⁴⁴⁸ and allusions to Upper Silesian swamplands.⁴⁴⁹ There are also (without direct matches in *Other Voices, Other Rooms*) references to the skeletons of lovers found in the woods (EF, 126), to a bizarre “Gläsernen Frau” (“Wenn man bei der auf einen Knopf drückte, dann leuchteten die Geschwüre und Wunden auf, die man von den einzelnen Geschlechtskrankheiten bekommen konnte”) (ZG, 305), and to a variety actress “ohne Unterleib, die am Schluß zersägt wurde” (ZG, 241). And in *Septemberlicht* we have the weird *Klageweiber*, who for a modest fee put on a freakish wailing show at a Gleiwitz graveside, as well as the macabre Nieradczyk sisters, who have the reputation of never missing a funeral (one of whom, when she reappears in *Zeit ohne Glocken*, is described in gothic mode as a black jackdaw) (ZG, 250). In the same novel we also have the strange figure of Skrobek, a taxi driver and part time poet, who chooses such gothic titles as “Nachtsonne”, “Höllenzauber”, “Der schwarze Engel”, “Flucht nach unten”, and “Götterdämmerung” for his verses (SL, 269).

To my knowledge, Bienek’s use of motifs which derive from the Southern tradition of the grotesque has not yet been identified in commentaries on his work. Indeed, in Rudolph Hartung’s review of *Septemberlicht*, Bienek’s use of the grotesque as a signifier for the liminal remained unrecognised. This lack of recognition concerned the reviewer’s commentary on a short episode in the novel describing a diverse group of bystanders congregating around the Gleiwitz office of the newspaper “Die oberschlesische Wanderer”. It is the 4th of September 1939, and war with Poland is into its fourth day. In an office window a large map of Poland and the German border is displayed, on which the extent of German military progress into Eastern

⁴⁴⁸ In *Zeit ohne Glocken* a Gleiwitz woman quotes directly from *Macbeth*: “Wann werden wir uns wiedersehen, im Blitz und Donner oder im Regen” (ZG, 284). This line is also quoted by Randolph in *Other Voices, Other Rooms*: “When shall we three meet again In thunder, lightning, or in rain?” (OV, 158).

⁴⁴⁹ “[...] überhaupt wurde die Luft schwerer, denn in der Nacht begannen die Sümpfe aufzusteigen” (EP, 298). Swamps (a frequent gothic motif) play an important part in the extraordinary landscape of *Other Voices, Other Rooms*.

Upper Silesia (and beyond) is marked with small swastika flags. In the small crowd there are mixed views about the German advance. Some bystanders appear to welcome developments, others, such as an anonymous woman, have serious reservations: the woman has a sister across the border in Königshütte (a former German city ceded to Poland in the aftermath of the 1921 Upper Silesian plebiscite), and fears for her relative's safety. The incident is intended to highlight the fraught German/Polish identity problematic at the heart of Upper Silesian life at this historic juncture. However, this woman is also interesting because of a distinctive facial characteristic: "Die Frau hatte eine dicke Warze am Kinn und darin zitterte ein einziges schwarzes Haar" (SL, 176), someone—it's not clear who—notices. In any event, it is an unusual and arresting image that magnifies a witch-like facial feature and thereby communicates in bodily form a sense of the distorted times the people of the region find themselves in. However, in his review of *Septemberlicht* Rudolf Hartung was unhappy with the observation, claiming, "daß hier solche Bagatell-Informationen nur Füllsel sind [...]"⁴⁵⁰ Nothing, however, could be further from the truth. As illustrated above, the motif is by no means arbitrary or gratuitous. And beyond this, it derives directly from Truman Capote's *Other Voices, Other Rooms*. That same grotesque and memorable characteristic is to be found almost verbatim on the face of Capote's Roberta Lacey the proprietor of R.V. Lacey's Princely Place, a dilapidated Noon City restaurant: "there was a wart on her chin, and decorating this wart was a single antenna-like hair" (OV, 21). Rather than mere "filler" Bienek's replication of Roberta's facial attribute is an attempt to establish an overt association between his own childhood province of Upper Silesia and the American South in such a way as to convey Upper Silesia as a marginal, liminal territory populated by grotesque bodies.

⁴⁵⁰ Rudolf Hartung, 'Oberschlesien im Roman: *Septemberlicht* von Horst Bienek', *Neue Rundschau*, 88.4 (1977), 635-640 (p. 637).

An agenda of the grotesque also extends to the living spaces the two bedridden figures, Edward Sansom and Leo Maria Piontek, inhabit in their respective homes. Given Bienek's construct that a compelling association existed between his childhood province and the South, it was perhaps not surprising that in his portrayal of Leo Maria's sickroom he should borrow the high gothic template of Skully's Landing provided by Capote, and in this way identify Upper Silesia analogously as an intermediate (in-between) space. And unquestionably *Other Voices*, *Other Rooms* presents Sansom's domestic space as Southern Gothic to its core. Capote's use of the Gothic device is of course all about his attempt to explore symbolically the underlying and often hidden or inexplicable attributes and ethos of a liminal region and population. When Joel Knox is introduced to his paralysed father for the first time since arriving from New Orleans, he enters a sickroom which is decadent, grotesque, and extravagantly fluid: it is stuffy with the smell of asthma cigarettes, the room itself full of misshapen candles, "the heat of the night made them lean limp and crooked" (OV, 93), with Sansom's two carers, his wife Amy and her cousin Randolph "fused like Siamese twins: they seemed a kind of freak animal, half-man half-woman" (OV, 93). And there is the odd and farcical spectacle of Sansom dropping red tennis balls from under his quilt as a means of communicating with his household; sometimes these tennis balls thump down the staircase and roll silently through the decaying mansion. We later learn that Sansom's eyes, grotesquely, "were seldom shut, always open and staring, even in sleep" (OV, 96). In *Die erste Polka* Bienek was to gain the same kind of symbolic traction by a comparable deployment of the Gothic. In essence Bienek transplants Sansom's other-worldly sickroom to the Piontek family home in Gleiwitz in such a way that those in the know—Bienek does not acknowledge his debt to Capote—observe Leo Maria's bedside environment through the prism of Skully's Landing. As was the case with Edward Sansom, Leo Maria's bedroom (he has confined himself there for three years) is described in terms of the odd, the weird, and even the sinister. On one occasion the room resembles a "tomb", and from time to time

Josel finds it a little spooky (*unheimlich*), for example in the early evening before darkness falls, or when his mother lights up incense candles and the air fills with billows of green smoke. And no wonder Josel feels uneasy: if he stares long enough the billows are liable to form themselves into a series of grotesque facial images (a typical Capote motif).⁴⁵¹ Piontek himself, who unlike Sansom is able to engage in conversation, comes across occasionally as gentle and kind (especially towards his son), more often as outlandish; to his wife he is a figure of derision, unknowable and irrelevant. At one stage as he listens to an old crystal detector radio Valeska dismisses him as “ein spinnenhafter Mensch, weiß in weißen Kissen, der pfeifend die Luft ein- und sie rasselnd ausatmete, mit runden schwarzen Hörmuscheln auf den Ohren [...]. Was hatte das alles mit ihr zu tun?” (EP, 312). And having delivered his messianic “Vefluchtes Stück Erde” declamation in the final chapter of *Die erste Polka*, Andreas Pilgrim, at his dying uncle’s bedside, notices a change in Leo Maria’s demeanour, “in seine Augen kam ein schwärmerisches Glotzen” (EP, 374), surely the same staring eyes Joel Knox notices in the face of his father in *Other Voices Other Rooms* (OV, 96). In fact, it is worth referring again to Leo Maria’s speech as it marks the point where the similarities between the two sickroom venues effectively come to an end: as we know from an earlier section of this study Leo Maria’s speech is highly political, and indeed polemical to boot. It shows Bienek departing from the fantasy milieu of *Other Voices, Other Rooms*, by introducing stark, real-world politics into the equation, where there was none in Capote’s freaky sickroom domain.

5.17 CAPOTE’S IMPACT ON BIENEK’S UPPER SILESIAN PROTAGONISTS

For Bienek, Upper Silesia in the tetralogy was to be as eccentric, weird, feverish, and unhinged as Noon City and Skully’s Landing had been in *Other Voices, Other Rooms*. As part of this dynamic, it was perhaps not surprising that, particularly in *Die erste Polka*, Bienek borrowed liberally from the personal characteristics and

⁴⁵¹ In *Other Voices, Other Rooms* Joel Knox sees strange heads and figures in the flames as he stares into a fire at the Cloud Hotel (OV, 168).

foibles of Capote's Southern populace. In truth, however, he also appropriated in his first Gleiwitz novel many of the plotlines and situations of *Other Voices, Other Rooms* outlined above, conclusively linking the two novels intertextually, and thereby stressing the connection between the two regions where the respective novels are set. Some of the personal characteristics of Bienek's Willi Wondrak, Valeska Piontek's brother, a closet homosexual with a penchant for wearing hairnets who delights in the occasional cross-dressing episode (he is known to dress up as Zarah Leander, and as part of the evening's entertainment at his niece's wedding reception does so), for example, closely resemble those of Capote's Randolph, who although idle (as opposed to the very industrious Wondrak) is like the lawyer a homosexual, and an all-round sly and cunning operator; he is also a full-on transvestite. And another of Capote's odd protagonists in *Other Voices, Other Rooms* has, perhaps a little more substantially, found a counterpart in the tetralogy. The *wilder Mönch* (Bruder Franz), Bienek's outcast Gleiwitz churchman and schnapps distiller, believed by the local population to have clairvoyant powers, is instantly reminiscent of the above-mentioned Little Sunshine, who is also a distiller of alcoholic drinks, and, in addition, a supplier of worthless magic charms to a superstitious Noon City community. In the case of the *wilder Mönch*, however, Bienek not only dips into the romanticism of Capote's hermit but also adds a brand of political reality to the narrative, unthinkable in the fantastical world of the Cloud Hotel. The state punishes the monk for his eccentricities: "[...] immer waren sie hinter ihm her, und jedes Jahr mußte er woanders hinziehen, einmal hatten sie ihn bereits in ein Lager gesperrt" (EP, 67), and by the time the reader reaches *Zeit ohne Glocken* the monk has become an obsessive fire and brimstone preacher whose apocalyptic sermons appear dangerously prescient as the catastrophic Stalingrad campaign collapses and total victory for the Reich seems less and less likely.⁴⁵²

⁴⁵² [...] denn die Zeichen mehren sich, und bald werden Feuer und Sturm über die Landschaft rasen, die Tiere verenden, die Menschen fliehen über verschneite Felder, vereiste Flüsse, durch tote Städte, und der Teufel, der sie verführte, wird geworfen in den Pfuhl von Feuer und Schwefel [...] (ZG, 370).

However, it was the 13-year-old New Orleans protagonist Joel Knox who provided Bienek in *Die erste Polka* with the most compelling character model, or, as it transpired, models—for in Truman Capote's adolescent boy Bienek found a template for both Josel Piontek and Josel's cousin Andreas Pilgrim. It is a mark of his reliance on Capote that in Josel Piontek, Bienek replicated Joel Knox's recalcitrant yet sensitive nature, his essential isolation, and his marked propensity for fantasy, and in Andreas Pilgrim, his status as an outsider, his basic back story, his effeminacy, and his latent homosexuality. That both Josel and Andreas should incorporate various aspects of Joel Knox (with some overlapping)⁴⁵³ is perhaps understandable in a novel where Bienek, having written the first 200 pages of *Die erste Polka* (more than half the novel) with Josel Piontek as first-person narrator, took a decision to divide his original adolescent narrator into two separate figures, for reasons elucidated in *Beschreibung einer Provinz*:

Die Ich-Figur des erzählenden Josel geht in zwei Figuren auf: in Josel, der aus Gleiwitz stammt und dem alles vertraut ist. Und in Andreas, den ich aus Breslau kommen lasse, der alles mit anderen Augen sieht.

Nach zweihundert Seiten gebe ich die Ich-Perspektive auf. Komme damit nicht an die Beschreibung der *Provinz* heran (BP, 31-32).

Bienek believed that an objective third person narrator rather than the limited perspective of an adolescent boy could give a more credible and comprehensive account of Upper Silesia, the novel's primary theme (AE, 104). Within this process a new pair of eyes functions effectively: Andreas Pilgrim becomes an effective foil for the excitable Gleiwitz boy Josel Piontek, for example during the boys' bicycle trip around Gleiwitz in Chapter 7 of *Die erste Polka*, where the calm outsider from

⁴⁵³ It should be noted that there are some vestiges of homosexuality in Josel too, for example during his sightseeing trip through Gleiwitz with Andreas he feels a marked connection with a bell boy at the Hotel Haus Oberschlesien: "Josel glaubte einen Moment lang, ihre Blicke hätten sich getroffen und dabei hätte auch ein kleiner unsichtbarer Blitz zwischen ihnen gezündet, er hatte jedenfalls einen Schlag in seinem Körper gespürt, ohne Zweifel" (EP, 85). Ahrens also sees this incident in homoerotic terms (Ahrens, p. 209).

Breslau (“Es war seine Art, aufregende Sachen runterzuspielen”) (EP, 193) puts Josel’s feverish and tortured Gleiwitz life firmly into perspective.

5.18 CAPOTE’S JOEL KNOX AND BIENEK’S JOSEL PIONTEK

It is almost certainly no coincidence that the given names of Josel Piontek and Joel Knox are so similar. There are also numerous points of association between the two boys. The fact that both Josel and Joel have disabled, bedridden fathers establishes an important link. Neither boy has a satisfactory relationship with his father, indeed Josel’s relationship with Leo Maria Piontek, once cordial, has long become more circumspect than loving, and Joel Knox can scarcely relate at all to his paralysed, unresponsive father. More importantly the two boys are not only fantasists and dreamers but also accomplished liars. Both furthermore share an unhealthy habit of peeping secretly through strangers’ windows or unobtrusive spyholes (OV, 52), (SL, 162). Joel Knox as a boy in New Orleans calls the practice “Blackmail”, and has witnessed many “peculiar spectacles”:

[...] he’d watched a young girl waltzing stark naked to victrola music; and again an old lady drop dead while puffing at a fairyland of candles burning on a birthday cake; and most puzzling of all, two grown men standing in an ugly little room kissing each other (OV, 52).

Josel too is a voyeur (though Capote’s specific same-sex kissing allusion quoted above is not replicated in *Die erste Polka* but rather in *Septemberlicht*, where Bienek entrusts it to the troubled adolescent youth Bruno Ossadnik).⁴⁵⁴ For Josel, however, voyeurism has become a dangerous obsession, especially regarding his “Baubaracke” activity. Finally, both boys make the transition to adulthood in the respective novels. While Bienek, as we have seen, mostly follows the Carson McCullers’ precedent (Frankie Addams in *The Member of the Wedding*) it is interesting that he further consolidates his narrative by borrowing several motifs from Capote and fusing them with narrative threads from McCullers. Some way

⁴⁵⁴ “Ein andermal hatte er [Bruno] durchs Fenster beobachtet, wie sich zwei Männer hinter einem Wandschirm umarmt und geküßt haben, sie wollten gar nicht mehr auseinandergehen” (SL, 318-319).

through his initiation process, for example, Joel Knox notices when looking in a hand mirror that, “about his face there were certain changes: baby-fat had given way to a true shape, the softness of his eyes had hardened” (OV, 156); Georg Montag likewise detects a change in Josel Piontek’s face when the boy visits him following his traumatic experience with Metzmacher after the wedding reception: “sein Gesicht war nicht älter geworden, aber vielleicht etwas härter, fester, männlicher” (EP, 337), and there is certainly a conspicuous similarity in syntax between Joel Knox’s and Josel Piontek’s respective realisations following a succession of learning events, that childhood is over. In the final lines of *Other Voices, Other Rooms* we are presented with Joel Knox’s definitive awareness that he has come of age:

[...] unafraid, not hesitating, he paused only at the garden’s edge, where, as though he’d forgotten something, he stopped and looked back at the bloomless, descending blue, at the boy he had left behind (OV, 173).

Bienek was clearly thinking of this phrase when he described Josel Piontek’s end of childhood realisation in similar terms, as if to establish a connection between the two boys, and in a sense to universalise the rite-of-passage experience:

Er wußte plötzlich, er hatte seine Kindheit hinter sich gelassen, er drehte sich rasch um, als könnte er sie noch einmal mit einem Blick zusammenfassen und von ihr Abschied nehmen [...] (EP, 341).

5.19 CAPOTE’S JOEL KNOX AND BIENEK’S ANDREAS PILGRIM

While Josel Piontek is thematically the more important of the two Silesian boys, given that his plotline threads through all four Gleiwitz novels, Andreas Pilgrim, the visitor introduced to the narrative to bring an outside perspective on the province,⁴⁵⁵ shares much more of Joel Knox’s backstory. The biographical profiles

⁴⁵⁵ Andreas is “Pilgrim” both by name, and (metaphorically) by nature: Bienek saw his memory writing as a kind of pilgrimage. “Ich entdeckte meine Kindheit. Das verlorene Land. Ich ging in der Erinnerung zurück”, he once wrote in an essay on Proust. “Ich wallfahrte in die Vergangenheit. Mein Combray war Gleiwitz. Es lag am Fluß Klodnitz. Am Fluß Erinnerung”. Horst Bienek, ‘Auf der Suche nach Proust’, *Marcel Proust, Leseerfahrungen deutschsprachiger Schriftsteller*, edited by Achim Hölder, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp (1998), 254-260 (pp. 259-260).

of the two boys are remarkably similar. Like Joel, Andreas is a bereaved adolescent boy; both boys have lost their mothers—Joel somewhat recently, Andreas five years before—and are travelling to relatives to be cared for: Joel from an aunt to a father who abandoned him as a baby, and whom he has never actually met, and Andreas, conversely, from a father to an aunt he has not seen for five years. Both *Other Voices*, *Other Rooms* and *Die erste Polka* describe the respective circuitous journeys of the boys from *Großstadt* to province. In *Die erste Polka* the journey is from Breslau, the capital of Silesia, to Gleiwitz, a border town on tenterhooks; in *Other Voices* *Other Rooms* it is from New Orleans to a rural, swampy Southern backwater, also twitching in its own way on the brink of change. Both journeys are from the familiar to the unaccustomed and extraordinary and serve as a kind of introduction to each adolescent protagonist (and indeed to the reader) to the “otherness” of the respective destinations. A kind of symbolic border is crossed: from New Orleans we travel into a gothic space of “swamplike hollows where tiger lilies bloom the size of a man’s head,” (OV, 7), and from Breslau to a place of magic: “das Wort Gleiwitz bekam für ihn [Andreas] fast so etwas wie einen magischen Klang,” (EP, 50). Both boys are effeminate and pretty: where Joel Knox is “Sissy-britches” or “babylove”, Andreas Pilgrim is a fop,⁴⁵⁶ and there is a marked air of sexual ambivalence about each of the boys. Joel, for example, resembles a girl (“[...] a girlish tenderness softened his eyes”) (OV, 8), and Andreas is defined as hovering on the edge of gayness; he clearly develops a crush on a soldier during his train journey to Gleiwitz, and delights in a statue of three naked men (actually fauns) outside the Hotel Haus Oberschlesien. When the boy reaches Gleiwitz, Bienek reworks further incidents, scenes and tropes from *Other Voices*, *Other Rooms*. Having arrived at their new homes, both Joel and Andreas wake up in an unfamiliar room, each similarly to reflect upon the events of the evening before. Both new homes are inhabited by their bedridden relatives, whose importance to the

⁴⁵⁶ In Upper Silesian vernacular “ein Fircky” (EP, 187).

narrative is crucial; in Skully's Landing we have Joel's paralysed father, Edward Sansom, in Gleiwitz Andreas's bedridden uncle Leo Maria Piontek, who is a chronic asthmatic (as Cousin Randolph in *Other Voices, Other Rooms* is also asthmatic, each new home rattles with the sound of coughing, and is suffused with the characteristic smell of asthma cigarettes or incense). Both boys are eager to meet their relative. Joel's desire to meet Sansom is a constant refrain in the first half of *Other Voices, Other Rooms*. "Where is my dad? I mean, couldn't I see him, please, ma'am?" he asks Miss Amy (OV, 41). It comes as no surprise when Andreas too makes a similar request to his aunt Valeska: "Und morgen werde ich doch Onkel Leo sehen, nicht wahr?" (EP, 288). Furthermore, each boy befriends a local girl (Idabel Thompkins and Ulla Ossadnik respectively), though neither girl transpires to be an appropriate long-term choice: Idabel is a gender-transitive tomboy who eventually runs off with the carnival performer Miss Wisteria, and Ulla is a self-centred and obsessive young Gleiwitz pianist with an eye only for her own career prospects.

Andreas Pilgrim undergoes a more "traditional" loss of childhood experience than Joel Knox or Josel Piontek, however extraordinary the circumstance (as we know it takes place as the faked attack is underway at the Gleiwitz radio station, and in any case—as we have seen—is based on an incident in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* rather than on one in *Other Voices, Other Rooms*). Nevertheless, it is perhaps ironic given Andreas's marked effeminacy that he and his new Gleiwitz friend, Ulla Ossadnik, should experience a quite conventional heterosexual rite of passage (in *Other Voices, Other Rooms* an encounter between Joel Knox and Idabel Thompkins had not led to sexual intimacy: Idabel, a combative tomboy, firmly rejects Joel's affectionate advances). This affirms an interesting feature of *Die erste Polka*, and indeed of *Septemberlicht*, the other Gleiwitz novel in which Andreas Pilgrim plays a part: that the boy's effeminacy, while adapted from Capote, remains incidental,

and is soon forgotten, whereas Joel Knox's developing awareness of a homosexual identity is the principal theme of *Other Voices, Other Rooms*.⁴⁵⁷

It is fair to say, however, that Bienek's handling of the rite-of-passage trope has an added dimension over Capote's: the coming-of-age of the adolescents in the tetralogy anticipates and symbolises the eventual metamorphosis of Upper Silesia itself as it changes almost overnight from German province to Soviet satellite. With Capote there was to be no such analogy: as we know *Other Voices, Other Rooms*, despite those wonderfully crafted poetic allusions to an antebellum past, was never about the fall of the traditional South; it was quite a short work, and the limited scale of Capote's engagement with his homeland tended to preclude this. In any case, *Other Voices, Other Rooms* did not generally have much to say about the outside world: as John W. Aldridge, an influential Capote critic put it, "Capote's Joel, Idabel, Randolph, and Edward Sansom, while superbly and grotesquely effective in themselves, illuminate nothing beyond themselves. Their meaning is confined within the world they have created".⁴⁵⁸ Conversely, Bienek's tetralogy (admittedly a work considerably wider in scope) was, despite its poetic agenda, a highly politicised account of life in Upper Silesia, and his adolescent figures were certainly not excluded from this programme.

⁴⁵⁷ For a brief overview of the quite limited homosexual agenda in the Gleiwitz tetralogy see Gottfried Lorenz, *Töv, di schiet ik an. Beiträge zur Hamburger Schwulengeschichte*, Berlin/Münster: Lit Verlag, 2013, pp. 334-335 and pp. 352-353. Surprisingly, Andreas Pilgrim is not mentioned in Lorenz's short analysis of the Gleiwitz tetralogy (the Gleiwitz discourse in the work concentrates predominantly on the lawyer Willi Wondrak).

⁴⁵⁸ John W. Aldridge, *After the Lost Generation: A Critical Study of the Writers of Two Wars*, New York: Arbor House, 1985, p. 202.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

Adieu, meine Lieben. Valeska und Irma und Willi und Josel und Ulla und Anna, und Franzek, und Kotik, die ich euch erdacht habe, die ihr mich aber über zwölf Jahre nun begleitet habt [...].⁴⁵⁹

6.1 BIENEK'S QUEST FOR LITERARY SUCCESS

In an afterword to Horst Bienek's *Tagebücher 1951-1990*, published last year, Michael Krüger, at the time a *Lektor* at Bienek's publisher Carl Hanser Verlag, spoke of the great success of Walter Kempowski's 1971 autobiographical novel *Tadellöser und Wolff*. The novel, published by Hanser, described growing up in a middle-class family in Rostock during the war years. The success of *Tadellöser und Wolff* was clearly a lesson for Krüger in relation to Horst Bienek's literary future: if Bienek wanted success ("und er wollte es mit allen Mitteln!") (TB, 1655), then he would have to discontinue what Krüger called his experimental phase—I assume he is referring here to avant garde works such as *Vorgefundene Gedichte. Poèmes trouvés* (1969) or *Bakunin, eine Invention* (1970) which achieved relatively modest sales—"und sich endlich an seinen Lebensroman machen" (TB, 1655). Krüger had been intrigued with what he knew of Bienek's life's story (even for him Upper Silesia and its history were a bit of a mystery):

Inzwischen hatte er [Bienek] mir so viel von seiner Herkunft erzählt, dass ich neugierig geworden war, denn auch für mich waren Gleiwitz und Oberschlesien, die Klodnitz und der besondere Geruch der auf Kohlenhalden stehenden Birkenwälder ein unbekanntes Kapitel deutscher Vergangenheit (TB, 1655).

"Das kann ich auch", Bienek told Krüger in respect of Kempowski's *Tadellöser und Wolff*, "aber ich muß es ganz anders anpacken: Kempowski erzähle immer nur von

⁴⁵⁹ In his diary at the end of April 1982 Bienek bid an emotional farewell to his characters. He had completed *Erde und Feuer*, the final volume of the tetralogy (TB, 432).

sich und seiner Familie, er dagegen wolle die »Seele« seiner Kindheit in Oberschlesien zum Vorschein bringen” (TB, 1655-1666). And indeed, true to his word he fulfilled his pledge to bring to light his Upper Silesian childhood by publishing what became known as the *Gleiwitzer Tetralogie*. This was Bienek’s epic narrative of provincial life between 1939 and 1945, in which he recreated in four substantial novels his own childhood and coming-of-age against the private, political, and historical backdrop of his childhood *Heimat*, the contested borderland province of Upper Silesia, a region ultimately destined for extinction. My argument in this study is that the extensive use in the tetralogy of what we might call a Southern US “vocabulary” (in the widest sense of that word) was an integral part of his agenda to reveal the “soul” of the province.

6.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE AND ITS IMPORTANCE

My research objective was therefore to examine and evaluate the influence of four specific Southern US writers (Faulkner, Wolfe, McCullers and Capote) on Horst Bienek’s Gleiwitz novels, based on the premise that an analysis of their influence was vital to a proper understanding of Bienek’s imaginative reconstruction of his childhood province (and, indeed, that the influence was so integral that without it the Gleiwitz tetralogy would have been a very different memorial). Surprisingly perhaps, despite the ever-growing body of critical scholarship devoted to Bienek’s writing, a dedicated study on the impact of Southern fiction on the tetralogy had not yet been attempted. This research has now addressed that gap.

The research is important in that it has opened new avenues of scholarship which offer fresh insights into Bienek’s authorial intentions, and ultimately to enrich the reader’s understanding of his Gleiwitz fiction. Above all, the author’s intention was to reconstruct artistically the lost province, and by doing so to explain it for future generations. And, as I hope to have demonstrated, the adoption of a Southern “mode of expression”, derived from the literary practices of the four specified Southern authors, represents a successful and illuminating means of achieving this

literary goal, while simultaneously lending the writing a unique resonance, accent and style: in its various manifestations the Southern influence very much enhanced the tetralogy's literary value.

6.3 THE DEGREE OF THE SOUTHERN INFLUENCE

It should be said, however, that when *Die erste Polka* was published in 1975 the influence of specifically Southern writing on German fiction was actually already well established: in my introduction I have noted some of the most prominent German writers whose literary fiction was impacted by it (and especially, it must be said, by William Faulkner): these included Andersch, Böll, Grass, Johnson, and Koeppen. Bienek's indebtedness to selected writers from the US South was therefore not unique in the decades following the defeat of Germany in 1945. Nevertheless, one of the central findings of my research is the quite extraordinary extent of the influence the Southern literary quartet exerted on Bienek in the Gleiwitz tetralogy: not only was Bienek inspired by the poetic-realist style of these writers, he was also informed and stimulated by their themes, motifs and symbols, by the unique sense of place they constructed in their writing, by their handling of plot and character, and by the formal (modernist) aspects of their work. The debt is quite overwhelming.

Horst Bienek's fellow Upper Silesian Heinz Piontek was one of the few reviewers of *Die erste Polka* who claimed an American influence for Bienek's first Gleiwitz novel. In a generally favourable review of the work, Piontek praised the author's achievement: Bienek in his first Gleiwitz novel had zealously declared, "dieses herbe und häßliche O.S. [Oberschlesien] mit wirklicher Inbrunst und Zärtlichkeit zu einem Landstrich der Poesie".⁴⁶⁰ Piontek, a published poet and novelist himself, went on to speculate on possible literary influences:

⁴⁶⁰ Piontek, pp. 182-185.

Wenn ich mich nicht täusche, haben ihn darin große amerikanische Erzähler (wie Thomas Wolfe und Carson McCullers) durch ihr Vorbild bestärkt. Das klingt seltsam, kommt aber der Ausdrucksskala neuer deutscher Erzählprosa zugute.⁴⁶¹

Piontek noticed that the poetic complexion of Bienek's prose in *Die erste Polka* derived to some extent from "great American writers" such as Wolfe and McCullers. Unfortunately, he did not explain why found this "strange"; nevertheless, he was clearly positive about the benefits such an influence could bring to new German narrative prose (in the case of Bienek this was a pertinent observation).

In his review Piontek did not speak of any other literary *Vorbilder* (including William Faulkner and Truman Capote). That is, however, not to say that there were no other artistic influences on Bienek's first Gleiwitz novel, or indeed on the tetralogy as a whole. In my introduction I have outlined several writers whose impact on Bienek was also significant. Of these, the importance of Joseph von Eichendorff has already been competently researched (see section 1.3 of this study). Going forward, however, the influence of two additional writers remains to be investigated in greater detail by Bienek scholars. The first of these is Fyodor Dostoyevsky, with whose writing Bienek enjoyed a lifelong reading engagement⁴⁶² (he even read Dostoyevsky as a boy in Gleiwitz, borrowing the books from his local *Stadtbücherei*),⁴⁶³ and it certainly appears significant that *Crime and Punishment* (1866) was as affecting to Bienek as *Look Homeward, Angel* had been.⁴⁶⁴ We already know that Dostoyevsky's short novel *Notes from Underground* (1864) proved extremely important in Bienek's portrayal of Josel Piontek in *Zeit ohne*

⁴⁶¹ Piontek, p. 185.

⁴⁶² Bienek was fully conversant with Dostoyevsky's work. In 1981, the anniversary year of the Russian author's death, he was entrusted to edit and introduce a Dostoyevsky anthology for Piper Verlag: *Dostojewski für alle*, ausgewählt und eingeleitet von Horst Bienek, translated by E. K. Rahsin, Munich: Piper, 1981. Included in the volume were *Aufzeichnungen aus dem Untergrund*, *Schuld und Sühne*, and *Der Spieler*. (Subsequently referred to as "*Dostojewski für alle*".)

⁴⁶³ See *Bucher der Kindheit*, p. 3.

⁴⁶⁴ "Überhaupt: kein Buch habe ich damals so erlebt und erlitten wie Schau heimwärts Engel, vielleicht nur noch Dostojewskis Raskolnikow" (TB, 575).

Glocken; this alone merits greater attention. I suspect, furthermore, that several other tetralogy protagonists also owe some debt to Dostoyevsky (that, however, is for future research). In addition, Dostoyevsky's handling of narrated time also proved inspirational to Bienek. In *The Idiot* (1868), for example, the narrative unfolds in a period of just twenty-four hours,⁴⁶⁵ and in the same novel we have Dostoyevsky's preoccupation with what Bienek termed "der Stillstand der Zeit"⁴⁶⁶ (the arresting of time to achieve narrative intensity): the impact on Bienek of both these literary devices would certainly reward further enquiry.

To my knowledge there is currently only one dedicated (and relatively short) article on Bienek's debt to Dostoyevsky. While the analysis by Dirk Kemper⁴⁶⁷ does not have much to say about the tetralogy itself (it deals predominantly with Bienek's one-act play *Im Untergrund*, an adaptation of Dostoyevsky's *Notes from Underground*),⁴⁶⁸ Kemper's contribution nevertheless represents a good starting point from which to launch new (and overdue) research on Bienek's debt to Dostoyevsky.

The second writer of interest revealed by my research as worthy of further critical inquiry in relation to his literary impact on Bienek is the Australian Patrick White, whom Bienek greatly admired. He reviewed several of White's works for leading German newspapers in the 1970s;⁴⁶⁹ indeed one scholar, commenting on Bienek's *Merkur* essay "Versuch den fünften Erdteil zu beschreiben" (mentioned earlier) in which Bienek described his experiences of a 1971 visit to Australia, claimed that the author was responsible "for a modest interest in Patrick White translations in

⁴⁶⁵ *Dostojewski für alle*, p. 23: "Wer denkt schon bei der Lektüre des *Idioten* daran, daß die ganze, in immer neuen dramatischen Explosionen kulminierende Handlung in nur vierundzwanzig Stunden abläuft [...]"

⁴⁶⁶ *Dostojewski für alle*, p. 15.

⁴⁶⁷ Dirk Kemper, 'Bienek und Dostoevskij.' In: *Horst Bienek – Ein Schriftsteller in den Extremen des 20. Jahrhunderts*, edited by Reinhard Laube and Verena Nolte, Göttingen: Wallstein (2012), 102-117.

⁴⁶⁸ Horst Bienek, *Im Untergrund: Ein Stück in einem Akt nach Dostojewski*, Bad Homburg: Stefani Hunzinger Bühnenverlag, 1980.

⁴⁶⁹ "Über den australischen Romancier Patrick White habe ich mir die Finger wund geschrieben", Bienek wrote in his afterword to *Der Blinde in der Bibliothek* (BB, 150).

West Germany during the seventies and eighties".⁴⁷⁰ One illustration of Bienek's debt to *Riders in the Chariot* has been included in this study; while it was not part of a Southern agenda, it was included because of its undoubted relevance to the Silbergleit/Auschwitz narrative in *Zeit ohne Glocken*. There is, however, much more work to be done on Bienek's reception of Patrick White and the author's influence on Bienek's literary output (there is, for example, a recurring Good Friday theme in *Riders in the Chariot* (culminating in the shocking mock-crucifixion of Mordecai Himmelfarb) which Bienek surely remembered as he worked on *Zeit ohne Glocken*), and which would certainly justify further investigation.

My research in this study has also uncovered one further potential avenue of enquiry. It concerns the issue of gender in the Gleiwitz tetralogy. We are speaking here specifically of those protagonists who in various ways challenge normative gender roles. This study has gone some distance towards explaining why the topic matters in Bienek's overall representation of the province; nevertheless, much remains to be said. Bienek's gendered discourse emerges principally in two Gleiwitz figures who play important roles in the novels (they have already figured in this study), namely the fascinating homosexual lawyer Willi Wondrak, Valeska Piontek's brother, and the psychologically complex bookseller Rosa Willimczyk who becomes Wondrak's wife in what can only be described as a bizarre marriage of convenience. Just like Josel Piontek in *Die erste Polka* who was split into two protagonists—Josel and his Breslau cousin Andreas— Rosa Willimczyk was not a planned character: she emerged when Wassermilka (Emilie Piontek) was similarly split into Wassermilka and Rosa Willimczyk. According to Bienek, during the writing process Wassermilka had become "immer ambivalenter, hatte Eigenschaften, die eine Person nicht in sich vereinbaren kann",⁴⁷¹ a tantalising statement demanding further explication. To my knowledge, a comprehensive analysis of Willimczyk and Wondrak, and how

⁴⁷⁰ Manfred Jurgensen, *Eagle and Emu: German-Australian Writing 1930-1990*, St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1992, p. 212.

⁴⁷¹ Melchingen, pp. 3-4.

their social and political backstories, together with the nuances of their gendered histories, feed into Bienek's overall depiction of Upper Silesia's intrinsic nature and temperament has still to be undertaken.

6.4 EXPERIENCE OF A TRICKY RESEARCH ISSUE

Of all the influences discussed in this study perhaps the most challenging for the researcher was the issue of Southern US poetic realism, the narrative style Bienek believed best summed up the writing of the four Southern writers he admired. As discussed in Chapter 2 of this study the style's exact nature and meaning, as Bienek understood it, was never really that clear-cut (on one occasion Bienek even appeared to doubt whether there was much connection between the German and the Southern variants (BP, 11), when in reality the two were extremely close in kind), and on another he seemed reluctant to explain the style ("Mit dem "poetischen Realismus" sollen sich meine Kritiker, meine Interpreten auseinandersetzen" he told an interview panel in 1985, well after the final Gleiwitz novel had been published).⁴⁷² Critical scholarship on Horst Bienek has also found the term unclear (Ahrens: *mißverständlich*),⁴⁷³ if not perplexing (Ahrens: "Gemeint ist hier nicht etwa eine Spielart des deutschen bürgerlichen Realismus in der 2. Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts, sondern eine realistische Erzählweise",⁴⁷⁴ Schneiß: "Einen Bezug zur Literaturepoche gleichen Namens stellt Bienek nicht her").⁴⁷⁵ The research situation was also complicated by the dearth of information available on Southern poetic realism in US academic criticism (in my research, only Tony Hilfer in his monograph *American Fiction Since 1940* emerged as a knowledgeable and analytical commentator). This lack of information was in marked contrast to the very wide range of detailed material available in both German and English on nineteenth-century German *poetischer Realismus*. A further issue was how the US style was referred to. It is worth mentioning that while Bienek (and Tony Hilfer)

⁴⁷² Butzbacher, p. 36.

⁴⁷³ Ahrens, p. 86.

⁴⁷⁴ Ahrens, p. 86.

⁴⁷⁵ Schneiß, p. 255.

used the term “poetic realism”, the more common term used to describe the style in both US and German academic criticism of Southern writing was actually “symbolic realism” or *symbolischer Realismus*. Nevertheless, this study has made some contribution to the Southern poetic realism debate; for all that, however, it seems clear that a dedicated and comprehensive work on the subject as it relates to Southern US literature in general remains to be written.

6.5 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The tetralogy in the final analysis represents a literary memorial to Bienek’s Upper Silesian province, a means to take stock of, and come to terms with, the province’s and Germany’s past. In short, the four Gleiwitz novels, undoubtedly a courageous and ambitious work, could be said to signify *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* for the author. What was so striking in post-war German fiction was that Bienek’s path to *Bewältigung* was predicated so heavily on four authors from the US Southern states. In Faulkner, Wolfe, McCullers and Capote, Bienek found an appropriate narrative style and a new literary “vocabulary” through which he could narrate the “soul” of his childhood province, and his own place in it. The Southern influence ensured the Gleiwitz tetralogy became a compelling vision—one man’s vision, anyway—of a unique German province teetering on the brink of destruction, and finally, in the final Gleiwitz novel, *Erde und Feuer*, checking out forever.

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