

Stuck in the beats of repetition: A Journey

through Günter Grass's 'The Tin Drum.

N. Troeger¹

1 SPP Portugal, Lissabon, Portugal

Abstract Content (EN)

The Tin Drum` (1959) by Günther Grass, an award-winning, yet initially not uncontroversial novel, contains the story of the scurrilous main character Oskar Matzerath who takes the reader, retrospectively, through five decades of German history. Whereas the storyline alludes to the problem of historical consciousness and collective guilt, the child Oskar and his surrounding main characters are trapped in unaltered patterns of repetition compulsion as a primary form of un - freedom. Oskar is a complex, multi-layered and paradoxical figure who displays both precocious and regressive features, which can be linked to the vicissitudes of the primitive infantile operating in the adult's mind. The author proposes to reflect on this dilemma of repetition in the light of object relations theory and its role in transgenerational phenomena. It is suggested that a well-developed sense of self and identity is vital for accepting otherness, as well as for relating constructively in a three-person dimension, by this moderating the urge for violence. Oskar's inability to be empathic and having a third-party perspective not only inaugurates his personal tragedy, but the tragedy of a whole generation and can be viewed as a cornerstone of what Hannah Arendt (1963) regarded as the "banality of evil".