

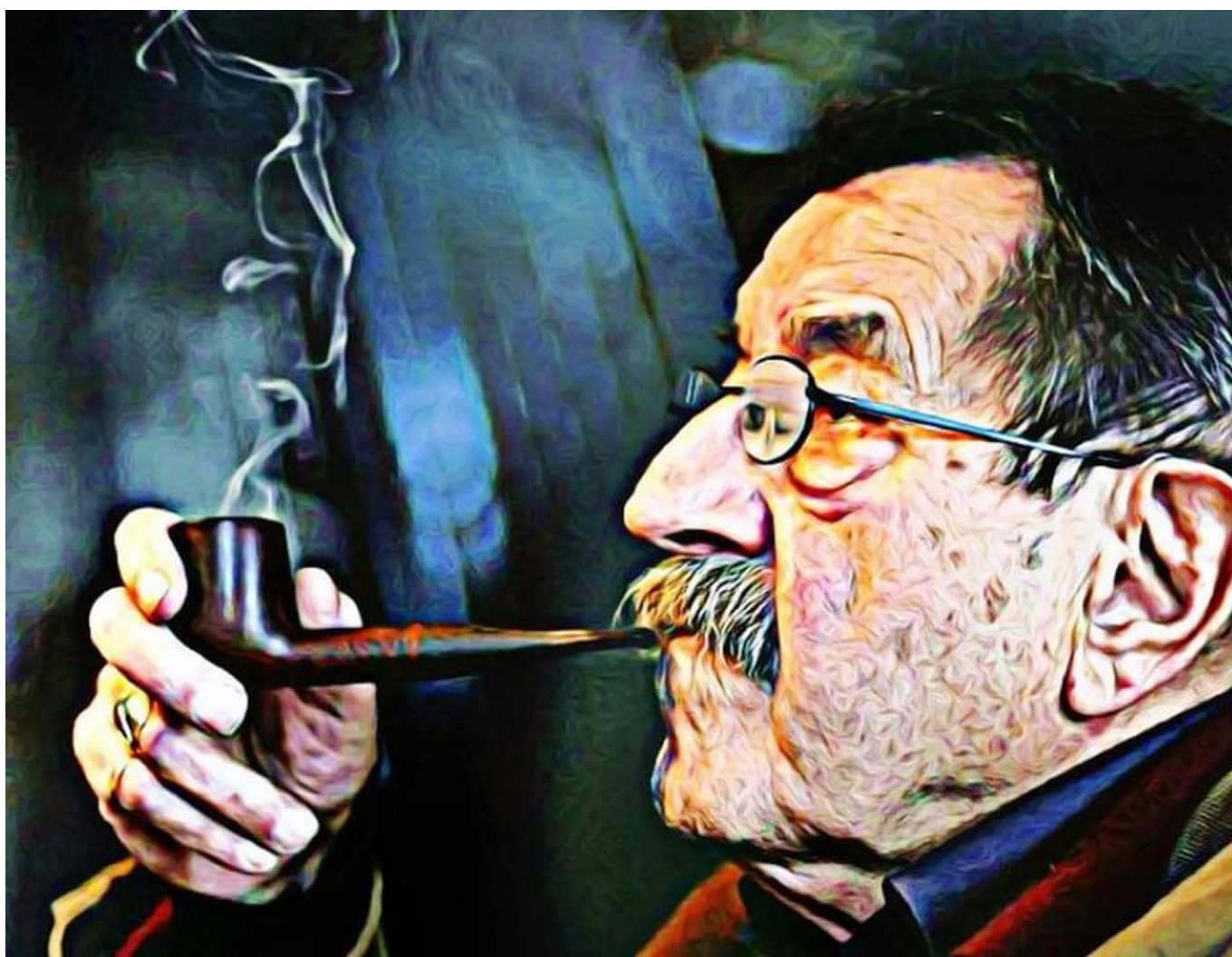
In Defense of Gunter Grass

by

Dr. William A. Cook

on

[Dissident Voice](#)



What must be said - Günter Grass

Why did I remain silent, silent so long,
about something so clear we used
in war games, where, as survivors,



we are just the footnotes?

That is the claimed right to the formal preventive aggression

which could erase the Iranian people

dominated by a bouncer and moved to an organized jubilation,

because in the area of his competence there is the construction of the atomic bomb.

And then why do I avoid myself

to call the other country with its name,

where since years – even if secretly covered -

there is an increasing nuclear power,

without control, because unreachable by every inspection?

I feel the everybody silence on this state of affairs,

which my silence is slave to,

as an oppressive lie and an inhibition that presents punishment

we don't pay attention to;

the verdict "anti-Semitism" is common.

Now, since my country,

from time to time touched by unique and exclusive crimes,

obliged to justify itself,

again for pure business aims - even if

with fast tongue we call it "reparation" -

should deliver another submarine to Israel,

with the specialty of addressing

annihilating warheads where the

existence of one atomic bomb is not proved

but it wants evidence as a scarecrow,

I say what must be said.

Why did I stay silent until now?

Because the thought about my origin,

burdened by an unclearing stain,



had avoiding to wait this fact
like a truth declared by the State of Israel
that I want to be connected to.
Why did I say it only now,
old and with the last ink:
the nuclear power of Israel
threat the world peace?
Because it must be said
what tomorrow will be too late;
Because - as Germans and with
enough faults on the back -
we might also become deliverers of a predictable
crime, and no excuse would erase our complicity.
And I admit: I won't be silent
because I had enough of the Western hypocrisy;
Because I wish that many will want
to get rid of the silence,
exhorting the cause of a recognizable
risk to the abdication, asking that a free and permanent control
of the Israel atomic power
and the Iran nuclear bases
will be made by both the governments
with an international supervision.
Only in this way, Israelis, Palestinians, and everybody,
all people living hostile face to face in that
country occupied by the craziness,
will have a way out,
so us too.

Translation by Alessandro Ghebreigziabiher



Throughout history, it has been the inaction of those who could have acted, the indifference of those who should have known better, the silence of the voice of justice when it mattered most, that has made it possible for evil to triumph. – Haile Selassie

Have our Jewish sisters and brothers forgotten their humiliation? Have they forgotten the collective punishment, the home demolitions, in their own history so soon? Have they turned their backs on their profound and noble religious traditions? Have they forgotten that God cares deeply about the downtrodden? – Bishop Desmond Tutu

These two cautionary admonitions capture the thrust of Günter Grass' electrifying poem, "What Must Be Said," that has brought an avalanche of invective – some scurrilous, some vituperative, some even personal vilification – against the man who warns the people of the world as well as the Jewish people of the dangers inherent in the actions of the Zionist controlled government of the State of Israel. Such condemnations avoid direct rebuttal of Grass' pointed cries of despair as he contemplates continued indifference to the slow yet calculated genocide that exists in Israel's occupation of Palestine reverting instead to derogatory innuendo, ignorance of conditions prevalent in the occupied territories, ignorance of those determined to destroy Israel, and personal guilt as a German. There is no reflection on the worst sin human kind can inflict on their fellow human beings, the silence of indifference to the plight of the Palestinians or to the potential danger facing the people of the mid-east should Israel pre-emptively strike Iran.

The title of his poem, "What Must Be Said," echoes the prophets of old, cries of those weeping in the wilderness to heed the obvious, to hear the hypocrisy that masks the reality of a nation that cries for peace as it stealthily steals more land, that demands dismantling of Iran's nuclear plants as it declares its right to Dimona and untold weapons of mass destruction, that denounces with all brazen duplicity, indeed silences those who criticize the state of Israel while they are free to attack them as anti-Semitic.

"Why silence so long," Grass asks of himself and answers, as must we all, that we are "slaves to an oppressive lie," what cannot be said without condemnation because Israel has the "right" to demand and defend what it will. Is it wrong to criticize the obvious? Is it wrong to bare truth when silence once before begot a holocaust? Is it wrong for the German people to mark what they have learned through decades of reflection and reparation and not reveal what they have lived and learned? Is it wrong to speak when devastation threatens, when arrogance buries truth, when the weak have no voice, when the unknown consequence of brutal, raw, preemptive power is imminent?

I would have Günter Grass speak for me, my children and grandchildren, and all others who could suffer yet another World War, by noting the obvious that has been silenced so long:

- a state provided with the fourth greatest military machine in the world to defend less than 6 million people,
- a nation, the only nation in the mid-east with weapons of mass destruction,
- a nation that refuses to sign the mid-east nuclear non-proliferation agreement,
- a nation that has demonstrated its willingness to invade its neighbors in Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, Iraq, and drools to bomb Iran,
- a nation that occupies a land provided for it by the same United Nations that gave Israel license to declare itself a nation,
- a nation that damns Iran for proclaiming that it will "wipe Israel off the map," when in fact it never made such a declaration yet innocently hides its own declaration in the Likud Party Platform that the state it professes to want peace with, Palestine, shall never have a state west of the Jordan,
- a nation that is of such demonstrable threat to world peace that if it is not condemned would be a blot on all who remain silenced and thereby complicit in its crimes, and for such inaction, such

indifference we must accept responsibility and condemnation; let the indignant ring their bells of anger and hatred, truth will prevail

Who better to speak than a citizen of a country that supplies Israel with nuclear submarines capable of terrorizing its neighbors if not the world, submarines provided as reparation to a people destroyed so they can become the destroyer. "Why silence so long?" because "this must be said" with strength, conviction, integrity and honesty, and without personal fear or trepidation because the silence has been broken by a voice that resounds throughout the world in righteous thunder against the greatest danger the world now knows, an Israel that can act with impunity to crush whomever they determine to be their enemy.

Let me close this defense of Günter Grass with a story told by Professor Michael Klein years after he had escaped death at Auschwitz. Klein's brief narrative is titled "Breaking Silence." It captures what I believe is the real essence of Günter Grass' plea, both in time and shame. The story reflects on Klein's close friend, Salamon Abshalom, who had attempted escape and was to suffer death as a consequence. The story is a parable that parallels our time; what if voices had told of the Jewish plight before the trains took them to the death camps; maybe Salamon Abshalom would still be alive.

"My friend Salamon Abshalom was let out. He was barely able to walk; his hands were tied behind his back. An SS guard took him to the back of the camp yard. ... He was led to the gallows and made to climb onto what looked like a stepladder. The noose was tied around his neck.

We stood paralyzed, in bewildered despair. How could the Heavens allow this to happen on this holy Yom Kippur evening? Did the Germans set up the execution specifically for Yom Kippur to humiliate the God of Israel and His people? The silence of the Heavens screamed out in our hearts and in our souls. The desecration of the God of Israel, of the people of Israel, of Yom Kippur, and the humiliation of man created in the image of God proceeded in silence as the German hangman, the Camp's SS commander, stood over Salamon Abshalom.

Suddenly, as if from nowhere, a powerful, high pitched voice rang out over the camp yard. It sent chills down our spines, as we heard the cry of "Sh'ma Yisrael...", Hear O Israel", as Salamon Abshalom declaimed the eternal proclamation of the Jewish people's belief in one God....

With his prayer of Sh'ma Yisrael arising from his last breath, he raised all of us standing Zaehlappell to the highest spiritual level. Even as his life was extinguished by the brutal murderer to whom nothing was holy, he still proclaimed the eternity of the Jewish People, in defiance of evil, in defiance of the Germans, in defiance of the silence of humanity, and in defiance of the silence of the Heavens. Salamon Abshalom proclaimed the Godliness of the Jewish People even at a time when God seemed to be totally absent.

I slowly calmed my emotions and tried to analyze my thoughts. The Germans murdered Salamon Abshalom, but I was guilty having been silent in spite of the promise we made to each other in the camps that we will tell the world of what happened. I had kept Salamon Abshalom's memory a secret for all these years."

Silence sacrifices the innocent because it allows continuation of slaughter; silence rests in the soul as it acidifies into self-shame; silence speaks no language, offers no aid, but ensures that time will extinguish both hope and guilt. Silence is the voice of the coward and the accomplice. Silence must be extinguished.