

## Intertextuality in Daniel Kehlmann's Novel *Tyll*

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### Abstract

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This article examines intertextuality in the novel *Tyll*, by Daniel Kehlmann, from 2017. The Name Tyll refers to the old medieval figure Till Eulenspiegel. Eulenspiegel, a real-life character became popular through folk songs of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries in Germany, but Kehlmann creates a historical novel, placing his Tyll in the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648), a war tormenting central Europe. Kehlmann employs literary borrowings from the original rough farce and Charles De Coster's world-famous version of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, *The Legend of Ulenspiegel and Lamme Goedzak*. But while De Coster presented his Till as a freedom fighter for the Protestant Netherlands against Catholic Spanish oppression, Kehlmann pictures an entirely different character. Moreover, in contrast to the rough farce, Kehlmann equips his Tyll with an individual biography. Tyll, suffering from childhood trauma, runs away from home and becomes a travelling artist. Caught up by the whirlwind of the Thirty Years' War, unprotected by law, Tyll turns from an able trickster similar to the character from the popular folk song into a fool for the so-called Winter King of Bohemia, Frederick V. Kehlmann creates an intertextual riddle, shifting back and forward in time, deliberately full of flaws and conceptual loopholes.

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### 1. Introduction

Till or Tyll Eulenspiegel, a figure in German literature wellknown since the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, and seen as a typical hero of a rough farce, became world famous through works of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In 1867, the Belgian author Charles de Coster wrote a version entitled *The Legend of ThylUlenspiegel and LammeGoedzak*, presenting Till as a Protestant Flemish resistance fighter against the oppression of the Catholic King Philippe II and the Duke of Alba during the time of the Spanish Netherlands in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Not much later, in 1894-95, Richard Strauss created a popular tone poem with the title *Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks*, which is still played today and keeps the character alive, even beyond literary educated circles. However, the musical realisation by Strauss seems to portray a light-hearted hero, a trickster playing with the credulity of people, more in keeping with the original version than De Coster's account. According to the scholar Bernd Hucker, this character Till Eulenspiegel or Ullenspiegel, has a real-life model, Till von Kneitlingen, who lived in the 14<sup>th</sup> century near the German city of Brunswick, and belonged to the lower nobility (Hucker 10). Hucker doubts that he has very much in common with the fictional hero of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries (Hucker 20), despite describing him as a suspected robber knight, undermining the existing systems through his actions (Hucker 9). Historical sources do not indicate that he was a trickster, comparable with Till well known through the popular folk song – a character who intends to show the members of society their own image in all their ugliness and squalidness. Daniel Kehlmann's *Tyll*, published in the year 2017, picks up on these intentions, but places his Tyll in the Thirty Years' War.

To this extent, there is a similarity with Charles De Coster's version from 1867, because both literary figures lived through brutal times of war and conflict; moreover, both suffered the terrible fate of living through religious wars and both novels link their heroes' fictional biography with key moments of history, still Kehlmann's *Tyll* clearly

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differs from De Coster's novel. This article focuses on the intertextual relations: allusion in Kehlmann's novel and his handling of historical facts and dealing with fictionalised models.

## 2. Models

In Germany, more than 500 fictionalised versions of this anti-hero and outcast exist, which place him in different surroundings and locations. Notable of these is, for instance, a version in hexameters by Gerhart Hauptmann, written in the years 1920-27. Hauptmann created a hero as a reflection on his own times – Germany's first democracy, the struggling Weimar Republic of 1918–1933. Hauptmann tried to create a complex character for adult readers, but never reached a wider audience with this work. Today the rough farce from the early modern period called *Eulenspiegel*, translated usually as *Owlglass*, is mostly studied in German schools by younger pupils, since the rough jokes and pranks Till plays on society are farce literature and the individual chapters are hardly inter-linked with one another. Although Hauptmann provides a cohesive storyline, he focused perhaps too much on regional events and characters, therefore he was unable to reach the same success as De Coster had with his version (Bollenbeck 273). Moreover, Hauptmann's Till is more an observer than an active figure, who commits suicide at the end (Hauptmann 916). This is a fate, the unflinching and unabashed hero of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century tale would never have considered. Certainly, there is a seriousness behind the practical jokes and funny magical tricks Till plays in Hermann Bote's well-known version from the 16<sup>th</sup> century. In this farce, Till is an outcast, unhappy with the emerging bourgeois society (Bollenbeck 29), but his actions are silly, and the concept of the character is rather one-dimensional. Till always wins and is never emotionally involved in his actions, or if so, the reader does not learn much about his mindset.

## 3. A unique Attempt

In 2017, Daniel Kehlmann came up with a revised approach, by creating with his Tyll a character living through the dark ages of the Thirty Years War from 1618 to 1648 in the middle of Europe. Kehlmann attaches unique qualities to Tyll, atypical for a baroque hero, and he turns him into a tragic character with an individual biography badly affected by the catastrophe of this war. The storyline is artfully arranged. Kehlmann's Tyll, in contrast to De Coster's hero, never picks sides: at times he joins the Protestant forces, and at other times, the Catholic reaction. This might have to do with the fact that this war is not a fight for independence, such as the attempt by the Netherlands to free themselves from the Spanish forces. Certainly, both conflicts have the religious clash between Protestants and Catholics in common, but the Thirty Years' War is not a freedom fight; instead, each side suffers heartbreakingly, and violently attacks the other side in similar fashion. It is not for nothing that Wilson and others analyzes the Thirty Years' War as a European disaster and German trauma (Wilson 19 and Münkler 11-39).

Kehlmann calls his novel an historical novel, but the plot does not offer the reader much insight into historical detail. The Thirty Years' War is just the background for Tyll's adventures. Historical context is not explained. Instead, Kehlmann presents an intertextual riddle, shifting back and forward in time, which is deliberately full of flaws and conceptual loopholes. The narrative, for instance, has Elisabeth Stuart, while already living in Germany during the Thirty Years' war, remember in passing her childhood days in London as the daughter of the King of England. In London she sees, of course, theatre plays and meets important contemporaries, but Kehlmann does not relate that the play she was so upset about – because she did not find it convincing that the duke caught his enemies only to spare them – must have been Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. He also does not clarify that the actor who played the duke – and who was disregarded by Elisabeth as not as good as a Kemp or Burbage – must have been Shakespeare himself (Kehlmann *Tyll* 232-233). Kehlmann expect his readers to be knowledgeable and does not reveal the source of his information.

In his Frankfurt Lectures on Poetics from 2014, Kehlmann turns out to be a great admirer and connoisseur of Grimmelshausen's *Abenteuerlicher Simplicius Simplicissimus* (Kehlmann *Kommt Geister* 99-132), a canonical work of German literature dealing in a haunting and powerful way with the devastating destruction of the Thirty Years' War. But Grimmelshausen's *Simplicissimus* is still a figure of German baroque literature, 'a simple mind' (Grimmelshausen 35-36), similar to the 16<sup>th</sup> century character by Bote, and Kehlmann is well aware of it, as he analyzes in detail Grimmelshausen's characters' qualities in *Simplicissimus*, and comes to the conclusion that the author does not create coherent and cohesive characters, and there is no logical consistency or texture to be found in Grimmelshausen's novel (Grimmelshausen 106). Similarly, in Bote's early modern work, Till Eulenspiegel's qualities are hardly well developed. He goes through life like an innocent child, detached, surprised and upset by the events happening to him, but without any psychological development or individual qualities attached to his character except his being a trickster.

For instance, despite the young Till being able to take revenge on an estate tenant (Bote 31), the reader does not learn much about the effects on Till's mindset of the estate tenant's cruel actions.

This separates his version from Kehlmann's. Tyll suffers and triumphs, gets hurt, and in return hurts the feelings of his audience and others. Tyll's tragic loneliness is heartbreaking, which is a quality not attached to the 16<sup>th</sup>-century character. Kehlmann's Tyll seems to be far more well-developed and sophisticated than the original character who goes through life without any emotional relationship to anybody. While the original figure is only able to make his scholars believe that he taught his donkey merely to say hee-haw (Ramberg 100), Kehlmann's hero is a far better-trained trickster. Tyll makes his listeners believe the donkey is able to speak whole sentences and think for itself, since Tyll taught himself the art and technique of ventriloquism (Kehlmann *Tyll* 17). While Tyll's first appearance still seems to be in the spirit of the folk tale of early modern times, the storyline quickly turns into a dark tale of death and destruction. After causing confusion amongst the people of an unknown little village, in a fashion similar to the folk hero (Ramberg 18), Tyll asks a little girl named Martha to leave the village with him, but she prefers to stay, hoping that one day she will be able to tell her children about the visit of the famous Tyll. However, not much later, Martha dies through murderous warriors of the Thirty Years' War completely destroying her village (Kehlmann *Tyll* 28). The popular folk tale does not take care of his characters in such a fashion. Usually, they appear just once only to be never mentioned again.

Kehlmann's Tyll, in further contrast to the popular folk song hero, is not just a one-dimensional character. We learn from the older versions that Till was baptised three times: once in church, once after the celebration of his birth, because the godmother, who was drunk, fell from the footbridge into a stream with him, and finally because, after the fall, he needed to be cleaned in a wash tub (Bote 22). The reader might assume from this that Till might have had a difficult childhood, because the people surrounding Till apparently treat him rather carelessly, but this remains just guesswork, because the popular folk song of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries describes, rather, a random sequence of single events. Kehlmann rewrites and adds more detail about other events, in addition to the second baptism. His Tyll is the son of a miller, and gets in trouble with the farmhand Sepp, because Sepp is ordered by Tyll's mother to stop Tyll from developing an early artistic ability by trying to balance along a rope. The farmhand beats up Tyll, and Tyll takes revenge by adding pebbles to the farmhand's soup. Sepp – on losing a tooth through this mean joke – realises, to Tyll's surprise, who is behind this villainy and throws Tyll into a stream, where he nearly dies under the mill wheel. Twice baptised, says the farmgirl Agneta to the boy Tyll after his rescue. Although Tyll's father beats up the farmhand for this ferocity, everybody at the mill knows that he does it owing to a sense of obligation and not with passion and determination. He cannot act too violently, since he needs the service of Sepp in his mill (Kehlmann *Tyll* 42-48). Kehlmann creates a complex social milieu. In contrast to Kehlmann's version, Charles De Coster's *Ulenspiegel* is even baptised six times, but none of those events is presented as either dangerous or life-threatening. Instead, it can be read as a necessary preparation for his fight for freedom for the Flemish people (De Coster 10). Moreover, the baptism under the mill wheel proves further that Kehlmann's text is full of hidden intertextual allusions, because Dr. Kircher, a Jesuit scholar who figures prominently in the novel, writes in his autobiography that he nearly died as a boy under a similar circumstance. Caught by the current, he was swept towards the mill wheel and everybody expected to see him mangled by the mill wheel (Godwin 9). It is significant that Tyll almost suffers the same fate. That way Kehlmann creates a revealing hidden intertextual bond between Tyll and the historical figure of Dr. Kircher.

Kehlmann's Tyll grows up in a privileged position, and although he is not part of the lower nobility, as is the real-life character from the 14<sup>th</sup> century, he is surrounded by servants, and this certainly portrays him as different from the popular fictionalised folk hero. His intention to develop unusual skills sets him apart from the rest of the community, and causes trouble in his social environment.

Clearly, this marks him as the son of his father in Kehlmann's novel, because the miller is apparently also equipped with special abilities. In contrast to the popular folk song, where he never appears Tyll's father figures prominently in the first part of the novel. Kehlmann presents him as a wizard, full of superstition, but respected by the village community. The village people believe in his healing ability. The miller is a broody person, but so naïve that when two Jesuits, Dr. Kircher and Dr. Tesimond appear and question his faith (Kehlmann *Tyll* 103), he does not realise that they intend to condemn him as a wizard. Kirchner and Tesimond carry out a proper early modern times witch trial (Kehlmann *Tyll* 114-143), and after torturing the miller (Kehlmann *Tyll* 119), condemn Claus Ulenspiegel to be hanged as a warlock. A public trial that the young Tyll watches attentively, but, according to historical sources, neither Kirchner nor Tesimond ever took part as judges in tribunals carried out by the inquisition. Here, Kehlmann alters facts for the purpose of his narrative, as he did in the historical novel he published before *Measuring the World*

(Tippelskirch 194-206). Indeed, witchcraft trials were on the rise again in Germany during the Thirty Years' War in the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Heppe/Soldan 214-216), but apart from that, Kehlmann uses poetic licence, following his dictum that picturing the reality that lies behind the facts and then altering the facts accordingly to corroborate your picture in literature is indispensable (Kehlmann *Out of this World*).

Moreover, Kehlmann, in this essay from 2007, says that if you get too close to an original person in literature, then you end up writing a biography, but if you get too far away and can no longer feel the pull of the “magnetic field”, then you have renounced the artistic right to use that person's name (Kehlmann *Out of this World*). He referred in this case to the novel from 2005, *Measuring the World*, where he indeed alters the facts freely and presents his main figures, Humboldt and Gauss, based on so many literary inventions, that he received a sharp and critical response from Frans Oort. Oort condemns, with strong words, how and why Kehlmann allows himself to take so many liberties although so many accurate facts would have been available. Oort claims that Kehlmann's novel is not a historical novel, because he created his characters, Gauss and Humboldt, too freely, and Oort strongly advises his readers to check reliable sources before reading the novel (Oort 684), but Kehlmann does not seem to accept this kind of criticism, and certainly, he can claim artistic licence – a position as a writer of fictional works to which he is absolutely entitled. Today, he still calls his novel *Measuring the World* a historical novel, and claims the same for *Tyll* (Otte). Certainly, Kehlmann does not write accurate historical novels or biographies, when creating historical fiction but his intention of recreating the atmosphere of the time in question is evident. A process of rethinking the Thirty Years' War as a privatised, individualised story without aiming to explain the reasons for important historical events clearly affects the development of Kehlmann's novel plot.

Moreover, Kehlmann is fascinated by South American literature, where absolutely non-historical magical events always occur, and mystical figures appear (Kehlmann *Out of this world*). No wonder that the narrator writes about a Sea Monster appearing in *Measuring the World* and takes it for real, but the protagonist Humboldt ‘decided not to note anything down’ about it in his diary (Kehlmann *Measuring the World* 36). The lines between fiction and reality always blur in Kehlmann's historical novels. Furthermore, as a result of applying magic realism, the appearance, reality and significance of dragons can be discussed and thought about without any hesitation in *Tyll* (Kehlmann *Tyll* 365-367). Therefore, it is more than legitimate for Kehlmann to introduce Dr. Kircher (1602–1680) and Dr. Tesimond (1563–1636) as Jesuit witch hunters, although they were something completely different, and there is hardly any indication that they ever met in ‘real-life’, let alone became part of the inquisition (Godwin 9-15). Athanasius Kircher, born in Hesse, Germany, was a scholar and book writer, working in different fields such as Egyptology, Sinology, biblical studies and exegesis, writing his works in Latin (Godwin 9-66). Oswald Tesimond, born in York, was a Jesuit as well, but worked mainly as a father confessor. Through that way or another, he became involved in the gunpowder plot by being a confessor to some of the conspirators. The Catholic plot was to blow up the house of Lords on the fifth of November, 1605, and assassinate the Protestant King James I of England and VI of Scotland. Since Tesimond did not report his knowledge to the state, he was accused of treason, had to flee England, and lived in Italy for the rest of his life. So much about the historical facts, but neither Kircher nor Tesimond are known as witch hunters. The only way to connect them to the plot of Kehlmann's novel is the fact that in 1633, Kircher was appointed court mathematician to the Habsburg Emperor Ferdinand II, but never arrived, and ended up in Rome instead (Fletcher 27). In the novel, Tesimond and Kircher are also on their way to Vienna (Kehlmann *Tyll* 123), but it must be years earlier, because Kircher is only Tesimond's famulus.

Despite all seriousness in Tesimond and Kircher carrying out their witch hunt, and indeed torturing and hanging their victims, Kehlmann's artistic ability allows him to indeed create a scene in which Tesimond and Kircher discuss, in all seriousness, the reality of invisible dragons (Kehlmann *Tyll* 99-101). Kehlmann presents his Jesuits as sophisticated scholars brutally exploiting the superstitious simplicity of the uneducated people. This is especially true of the miller Claus Ulenspiegel. The Jesuits spy out miller Ulenspiegel's belief in his healing power to have him hanged. His poetic licence allows Kehlmann to present Kircher and Tesimond as a metaphor for the Catholic reaction against the Protestant uprising following the days of Martin Luther. The young boy Tyll is present at the witch trial when his father is condemned to death, and his perception of the trial, his father's suffering adds a tragic dimension to the plot of the novel and reveals individual facets of his character. Kehlmann's Tyll, watching the tribunal of his father, suffers from an unconscious childhood trauma that never leaves him throughout the story. In Kehlmann's novel the traumatized Tyll runs away from a destroyed home taking a local villager's daughter with him and gets lost in the whirlwind of the Thirty Years' War.

The reader will not find the sadness and loneliness attached to Tyll's character in the older versions from early modern times, because such biographical detail cannot be found in the popular folk song.

#### 4. Charles De Coster's influences

In Charles De Coster's version from 1867, De Coster invents a similar fate for Tyll's father: while his mother is tortured, his father is also killed by the Spanish oppressors. But in difference to Kehlmann's *Tyll* this tragic event has such an effect on Tyll that he turns from a particularly able trickster into a freedom fighter for the Flemings.

De Coster's Tyll is no isolated character, like the German hero of the popular folksong dealing with his own personal socioeconomic situation; instead, Tyll becomes a psychologised character, laughing and suffering, holding monologues and reflecting on the political situation (Bollenbeck 278). Both writers, Kehlmann and De Coster, create complex, psychologically interesting characters, but they are clearly distinguishable from each other. Despite Tyll's father in Kehlmann's version suffering a similar fate from the Catholic reaction, Tyll never turns into a freedom fighter for the Protestants. Kehlmann does not create a novel in which one side fights with all their hearts against a brutal oppressor. The Thirty Years' War is presented as a far too complex phenomenon for such conclusions. The peace of Augsburg in 1555 far from ended the religious and political troubles caused by the Reformation within the Holy Roman Empire. Instead, it marked the beginning of a long period of sporadic conflicts leading to the violent crisis which we now call the Thirty Years' War, which occurred from 1618 to 1648 (Pagès 29). Kehlmann's Tyll is drawn into this conflict, but he never takes sides as he accompanies Ferdinand II as his fool, and meets historically important figures of the conflict, such as the Swedish Protestant leader and king Gustav Adolf. However, what Kehlmann's Tyll indeed has in common with De Coster's version is that he is a psychologised character. Not that Kehlmann would give him a real love interest, as De Coster's Tyll has with Nele, nor that he has a companion such as Lamme Goedzak, but Tyll is neither invincible nor emotionally invulnerable, and that certainly separates him from the hero of the popular folk song, and makes him comparable to De Coster's Tyll.

Kehlmann continues his postmodern deception and humorous intertextual teasing by calling Tyll's companion Nele, as De Coster does. Kehlmann's Nele is the daughter of the local village baker, and she escapes the dull village life with Tyll, after his father had been hanged as a warlock, to live a life of freedom and independence. But Kehlmann clarifies that this is an endangered life. Travelling people are free, but they do not have the usual protection ordinary citizens would receive. Kehlmann's narrator even goes so far as to maintain that travelling craftsmen – characters Tyll and Nele spent their time with as travelling showmen – do not have any protection; whoever robs them or kills them will not be prosecuted (Kehlmann *Tyll* 170-173). As an outcast, Kehlmann's Nele never gets too close to Tyll. Though Tyll was able to convince her to join the showman Gottfried, and in the beginning, they share the same bed near the fire, being still children, they only sleep under the same blanket to warm each other and are awakened early in the morning by the sound of the cannons of the Thirty Years' War (Kehlmann *Tyll* 172). The relationship between Tyll and Nele never turns into a real love story; instead, they seem to develop a silent partnership, a relationship as between outcast brother and sister, and at a later stage in Holland, Nele leaves Tyll altogether to marry and have children. Kehlmann's Tyll it seems, affected by personal tragedy - the death of his father - cannot build and cultivate personal relationships.

Before the tribunal of Tyll's father and his execution, the novel plot suggests that Tyll and Nele might be destined for each other, but the atrocities of the war, the trauma it causes destroyed these intentions. This constitutes a considerable difference from Charles De Coster's version, in which Nele and Tyll are lovers, and both fight against the oppression by the Catholic Spanish forces. For instance, when they meet again, it is apparent from the way they recognise each other that they are a couple. Nele leads Tyll to their friend Catherine, and reports about Catherine's experiences, in which, according to Nele, Catherine was unjustly tortured as a witch and then banned from her hometown by the reactionary Spanish forces. She has lost her wits, and both Nele and Tyll weep about her insanity and the cruelties she suffered (De Coster 93-94). Unbearable brutality and cruelty seem to be attached to religious wars, as Friedrich Schiller states, at the end of his almost canonical study in Germany on the fight for freedom by the Netherlands, noting that the ancient Romans and the Batavians at least fought in a 'humane' way, since they did not fight for their religious convictions (Schiller 33). In difference to De Coster, Kehlmann does not stretch the religious aspect of Tyll's individual biography, despite him joining the forces of the protestant king Frederick V, he never talks about the hanging of his father by a Catholic inquisition tribunal, neither has he dreams or expresses unconscious wishes about revenge. Tyll later even change sides and becomes part of the Catholic forces.

The religious aspect of the war does not bother him because belonging to the travelling people and not having any rights compared with a regular citizen, the fight for economic survival is at the forefront of his thinking. Kehlmann's Tyll does not intend to change his society to the better because he himself hardly experienced one.

### 5. Fact, Fiction and Intertextuality

Kehlmann's descriptions of the devastations and atrocities and cruelties of the Thirty Years' War are no less blunt than De Coster's narrative, but the proper distinction between good and bad is blurred. This war is a power struggle, a fight for territory, religious believes only linger in the background.

Historically well-informed readers realise that Kehlmann presents us with a riddle, where actual facts stand beside pure fabrications, and any presentation of chronological order of historical deeds has been given up. In the middle of the book, the character Martin von Wolkenstein, apparently a descendant of the famous medieval poet Oskar von Wolkenstein, sets out from the court in Vienna to catch the famous fool Tyll and bring him back to the Catholic emperor Ferdinand (Kehlmann *Tyll* 117). The narrator of the novel elucidates in the following passage how Martin von Wolkenstein tried to recount in his autobiography how he sets out to find Tyll, and while coming back after picking up Tyll from the Andechs monastery, accidentally experiences one of the horrific last battles of the Thirty Years' war between the Protestants and Catholics in Zusmarshausen, where the Catholics lost, and Emperor Ferdinand shortly thereafter had to accept the religious settlement and agreed to sign the peace (Wedgewood 499-501). Kehlmann's narrator depicts the senseless, brutal killing of the battle from the perspective of Martin von Wolkenstein, who suddenly sees his companion Karl von Doder sliced in half and another companion shot dead (Kehlmann *Tyll* 219-221). Kehlmann's narrator does not argue nor discuss who is in the right and who is wrong, nor does he reveals much about the background of the tragic events as the reader might expect from any other historical novel, nor does one of his characters or the protagonist Tyll himself hold long monologues about the war; instead, he shows the senselessness, devastation, hunger, and destruction that war causes without any moral judgement or comment.

The author Kehlmann continues his intertextual juggling and adds deconstructive strategies in this passage. Martin von Wolkenstein is unable to describe the horrors of the battle of Zusmarshausen, and therefore apparently uses Grimmelshausen's description of the battle of Wittstock to create a true picture in his history of the atrocities. Now, the narrator of the novel claims that Grimmelshausen might have experienced the battle of Wittstock himself, but unable to convey his unique wealth of experience, stole the passage from a translation of an English Novel by Martin Opitz (Kehlmann *Tyll* 224). As early as in his Frankfurt lectures, Kehlmann had stated that despite experiencing the battle of Wittstock, it seemed to be impossible for Grimmelshausen's narrator to describe the horrors he saw (Kehlmann *Tyll* 111). Kehlmann, in his novel, pictures the terror of the battle by creating brutal and nightmarish images; for instance, Tyll gets injured and Wolkenstein loses a finger, although not being part of the fighting forces at all, simply by being caught in the crossfire (Kehlmann *Tyll* 220).

Still, Kehlmann's intertextual allusions demonstrate that his narrator himself seems unable to find words for all the indescribable cruelties of the war. Kehlmann's knowledge of the history of the Thirty Years' War and the popular folk songs from the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries always allows him to modify the original events and to create a highly sophisticated intertextual narrative. In the popular folk tale, Till at one point becomes the painter of the Landgrave of Hesse, and betrays the gathered nobility by telling them that only people born legitimately would be able to see his picture. Never having painted anything, but collecting the money for his work from the landgrave, Till is able to make his escape by explaining in detail his non-existing picture. The nobility keeps silent, since they do not want anybody to believe they could be of illegitimate birth, and Till escapes unharmed (Ramberg 59-63). In the popular folksong, Till does not become a classical fool, because he only serves the Landgrave briefly and does not depend on him. Kehlmann's Tyll, instead, is indeed already the fool of the so-called Winter King Frederick V, when he tells the wife of his king, Elisabeth Stuart, a story similar to the one Till of the popular folk song told the Landgrave. Tyll gives Elisabeth, the queen in exile, a very special gift. Tyll explains to 'little Liz', as he used to call her – allowing himself to take the usual liberties of a fool while addressing her highness, the daughter of the English Stuart king – that he painted a magical painting for her. Only people of legitimate birth, and people who are not stupid, could see it, and her whole court falls for it also (Kehlmann *Tyll* 238). His personal attachment to the house of the Winterking, his supposed loyalty and dedication to his patron turns his doing into a painful betrayal and raises questions about his commitment. Questions the original farce underlines, because there Till betrays the silly citizens of the villages and towns he visits without turning a hair.

Tyll in Kehlmann's novel is more than a fool at Frederick V's court. He accompanies the king on his journeys and lives with him in exile in the Netherlands and takes a personal interest in the fate of his king. As mentioned before, the story shifts back and forward in time. So, the reader only learns later that the idea of joining the king as a fool was already instilled in Tyll's mind by his artistic master Pirmin when he still was a child, because Pirmin once travelled over to England and accompanied Frederick V on his journey to visit his future wife Elisabeth, and he still dreams and speaks of those days. Pirmin had a dependent, love-hate relationship with his protégés. He is shown as a man who hardly has enough food to feed himself, and who, in his desperation, used to beat up Tyll and Nele, after he convinced the children to join him after their escape from home. But he still speaks to the children about his dreams, if only to escape the loneliness of his own war-ravaged and mentally disturbed personality. Pirmin used their status as outlaws to control and treat his young companions badly but relied on them. Tyll's artistic ability and Nele's dancing skills attract a good crowd in the villages they travel through, and help to earn some money. Pirmin intended to become the old fool of a king without a country, Frederick V (Kehlmann *Tyll* 343), but died before he was able to turn this idea into reality, and Tyll takes up his plan.

However, living at the exiled King's court is no great pleasure for Tyll and Nele. In the first instance, Kehlmann seems to portray the King and his relationship to his wife Elisabeth Stuart in a way similar to Friedrich Schiller's almost canonical *History of the Thirty Years' War*. In this work, Elisabeth supposedly forces Frederick V to accept the Bohemian crown by asking him how he could marry the daughter of the English king as a wife and refuse the Bohemian crown (Schiller *Geschichte des Dreißigjährigen Krieges* 87). Schiller's position is more or less accepted by modern researchers, but usually they raise awareness that some of Frederick's advisers wanted him to refuse the offer (Münkler 197). Kehlmann pays tribute to this point of view. He uses the technique of inner monologue and stream of consciousness to present two historical options. So, while the reader seems to learn from an inner monologue, uttered by Elisabeth Stuart, that she indeed forced her husband Frederick V to accept the Bohemian crown (Kehlmann *Tyll* 260-262), not much later, he hears from Frederick V, in a stream of consciousness, that apparently the exiled king himself, in his castle in Heidelberg, had to convince his hesitating wife to accept the crown (Kehlmann *Tyll* 289-290). In historical terms, Frederick V's reign as a Protestant Bohemian King did not last long; he was quickly defeated by the Catholics' troops, and he hastily escaped Prague for Breslau in 1620 at the last minute – and not a second too soon, since the mob had already decided to sacrifice him (Wedgewood 185). Frederick tried to find refuge in Berlin but the electoral prince chased him away. The Dutch allowed him to stay in The Hague moving finally to Wassenaar, where Elisabeth lived for the next forty years in the Wassenaar Palace (Wilson 400-401). The reader could now expect that Tyll in the novel, having his father killed by Catholic witch hunters, would join the exiled King's pilgrimage to the already-devastated middle European countries, with the intention of seeking revenge against the forces of Catholic religious restoration. But Kehlmann's Tyll and De Coster's Till differ in quite a number of characteristics.

For one thing, the Thirty Years' War, being not just a religious war, was certainly not a Protestant freedom fight against foreign occupying forces, as was the fight of the unified Netherlands against the Spanish forces. Secondly, Kehlmann's Tyll sees through the political struggles of those in power, and this certainly adds the quality of infinite sadness and melancholy to his character; it does many other things to him, but does not turn him into a freedom fighter. What cause can he fight for anyhow? Kehlmann's novel does not present the war as a fight between good and evil. His prominent leading historical characters are self-obsessed, and their political decisions are based on gaining more territory or political influence and power.

Kehlmann portrays the former palatine and King, Frederick V – not having much support from the unified estates of the Netherlands – as living under very poor conditions while in exile in the Netherlands. The very few people attached to his court have different functions, and Elisabeth tells Nele, with sadness in her voice, about past greatness: that she used to have 43 servants in Prague just for herself (Kehlmann *Tyll* 217). When the Swedish king Gustav Adolf appears in Germany, it seems that the fortunes of the Protestant forces quickly improve. In the novel, Frederick V, with only a few more-or-less loyal companions and Tyll, travels by horse to one of Gustav Adolf's army camps, because the Swedish King had declared war on the Emperor Ferdinand, and therefore, Frederick – who had lost his electorship and was under the ban of the empire – hoped he could regain his old status with the help of the always-victorious Gustav Adolf. However, Kehlmann does not describe a joyous army camp and glorious battles, when Tyll and his King Frederick V appear there. Instead, he shows a camp hit by the plague, in which dying and dead children are stacked up in a heap. When Frederick V finally meets Gustav Adolf, the king offers him the chance to become a palatine again, but only as a fiefdom given to him by the Swedish king, and not the Bohemian kingdom.

Frederick, already suffering from dizziness and the first signs of the plague himself, refuses to accept, because he will not take from anybody as a fiefdom that which belongs to him (Kehlmann *Tyll* 306). In historical terms, this is only partly true. When Frederick visited Frankfort, Gustav gave him the precedence of a reigning monarch, and insisted on the perpetual use of all his titles without omission. However, it later became apparent that Gustav would indeed only restore him to the palatine as a vassal of the Swedish Crown. Moreover, historical scholars confirm that Gustav Adolf acted in a patronising manner in 1632 in Frankfort, by telling Frederick he would fight for the German out of pure generosity (Wedgewood 312-313). So, in the novel, and confirmed by historical sources (Wedgewood 313), Frederick V refuses to accept this 'honour' (Kehlmann *Tyll* 306), and leaves, happy to escape the smell of death and plague of the army camp, only to die himself on his way back to the Netherlands – accompanied solely by Tyll – suffering from the last stages of the plague, and finally dying alone (Kehlmann *Tyll* 309-321).

It is left unsaid, why Tyll accompanies his lord until the end. Certainly, Frederick V fought on the side of the Protestant forces against the Catholics who hanged Tyll's father. This might be the reason that he built such an unusual close relationship with Frederick but Tyll never considers himself a freedom fighter for the just cause of the Protestants. Kehlmann presents a war tormented society a world plagued by destructive and broken relationship. Victim and perpetrators can be found on both sides.

Kehlmann's work is a modern or even postmodern novel, because it combines the grand *histoire* where the storyline seems to be predetermined, with bringing together characters, sometimes only by coincidence, who had previously unforeseen and sometimes unwanted encounters. In many cases, chance – typical for postmodern fictional writing – determines the fate of the characters of this novel (Hassan 152). While running a circus in Holstein in the northern parts of Germany, Tyll accidentally meets with Athanasius Kircher again, one of his father's witch-hunting murderers. Kircher is searching for the last invisible dragon, to use his blood for a medicine that can cure the plague. Kircher, who, according to his own understanding as described in the novel, discovered how to decrypt the hieroglyphs, but had to deal with harsh criticism from his own Jesuit order (Kehlmann *Tyll* 396). Kircher was indeed involved in some long-lasting, more or less successful, deciphering attempts (Fletcher 76), but he is portrayed by Kehlmann as admitting to Tyll that he lies all the time in his books and everywhere else (Kehlmann *Tyll* 348) and as being a swindler and coward. In this chapter, Kircher is pictured as being as superstitious as the victims of his witch hunts; for instance, his long-dead teacher Tesimond had explained how to escape a dragon with the help of a magical square that would generate fog to escape, and Kircher accepted this without qualms (Kehlmann *Tyll* 366).

When Tyll later confronts Kircher in his carriage, the scholar uses this same magical trick to escape the unpleasant questioning by Tyll. Kircher, afraid and indeed admitting that he lies all the time, gets the better of Tyll and disappears (Kehlmann *Tyll* 384-385). Kehlmann, here again, borrows from South American writing style and applies magic realism in its purest form.

Godwin concludes that the historical Kircher was fascinated by the unexplained and the unseen (Godwin 72); perhaps the reason for Kehlmann's presentation of Kircher's fruitless search for the invisible dragon? It is possible to read, in Kehlmann's portrayal of Kircher, a postmodern scepticism towards any scientific research and success. Tyll does not succeed in questioning the man who destroyed his childhood and caused such unresolved trauma. Despite witnessing the tribunal that condemned his father to hanging, Tyll is not even able to confront Dr. Kircher directly and ask him about his father's fate. A fate he only heard of, relying on the minstrel Gottfried who witnessed the incident (Kehlmann *Tyll* 168-169). In fact, at this stage, Tyll is no longer presented as a character far ahead of his followers. He runs his circus without any obligation to its members; everyone can stay or leave if they so wish, and even Nele leaves Tyll for a civilized life with children, and his once-successful circus comes apart.

In that which follows, Kehlmann presents an aging, further declining Tyll. While in the popular folk song, Till simply gets ill and dies, survived by a dying mother, whom he left nothing (Ramberg 139), and never sees again after the initial chapters, Tyll's psychological profile is much better crafted and structured in Kehlmann's version. Tyll cannot fool the people anymore, as he used to do. Having slowly lost his artistic ability, one of the juggling balls slips from his fingers while performing in the city of Brno (Kehlmann *Tyll* 406), and the old noble city commander, feeling annoyed by his performance, recruits him as punishment to defend the city against the advancing Swedish forces under Torstensson. Tyll simply lists himself as a miner, without questioning the commander's decision, and fights on the side of the Catholics. Here, he continues to deteriorate. While attempting to dig a trench that would enable the defending forces to detonate the tunnel that the Swedish forces built to undermine the town wall, Tyll's shaft is destroyed, he is buried alive, and only miraculously escapes certain suffocation (Kehlmann *Tyll* 425).

Again, Kehlmann – in historical terms – is quite accurate here. In 1645, Protestant Swedish forces besieged Brno for nearly five months before they had to withdraw to the borders (Wedgewood 484). In this novel Kehlmann shows the confusions and horror of war - the lostness and affliction of men - when the destructive forces of war take over, by placing his Tyll as a defender of the Catholic forces who killed his father and let his mother disappear. Tyll, in this novel, never emotionally takes sides, as the war is indeed too confusing, its forces too destructive, and the portrayals of the leading military figures too shabby. Although Tyll usually sees through the ambitious games of the powerful, here, he barely fights for survival, and only happenstance saves the struggling hero.

In the last chapter of Kehlmann's novel, Elisabeth Stuart, the widow of Frederick V, the former King of Bohemia, travels to Osnabrück, one of the two cities in Westphalia (Osnabrück and Münster) where the peace negotiations at the end of the Thirty Years' War between the Catholics and Protestants took place in the years 1644–1648 (Polišenský 234).

In the novel, Elisabeth, doubtful of her ability to turn her son's luck to the better (Kehlmann *Tyll* 467), still expects, when she arrives, to be treated as the queen of Bohemia by Lemberg, the ambassador of the empire, but is ready to renounce the royal title in case her son Charles I Louis is reinstalled as the eighth count palatine (Kehlmann *Tyll* 441-442). In the conversation with the Catholic's ambassador, Lemberg accuses Elisabeth Stuart of being involved in encouraging Frederick V to become the King of Bohemia, because of her upbringing as a daughter of the English King James I of England and VI of Scotland (Kehlmann *Tyll* 442). This again would support Schiller's historical position that she was behind the fatal plot that made her husband the Protestant King of Bohemia, and caused, at least to a certain extent, the dreadful development of the Thirty Years' War, but Kehlmann's Elisabeth answer with the wisdom of old age that Prague was a mistake, but the electoral power would belong to her son (Kehlmann *Tyll* 444). It can be attributed to Kehlmann's artistic competence that he is able to connect Dr. Tesimond's involvement in the gunpowder plot to kill Elisabeth's father in 1605 with Elisabeth's husband's attempt to become the Protestant King of Bohemia in 1619. By presenting Tesimond as Tyll's father's persecutor and eventual together with Dr. Kircher responsible for his murder, the power struggle between powerful Protestants and Catholics during the Thirty Years' War, where ordinary people became innocent victims, in all its senselessness and absurdity, is symbolised with the greatest possible caution and subtlety.

Neither Tesimond nor Kircher is ever brought to justice in the novel and Tyll's attachment to the house of the Protestant Winter King Frederick V, can be interpreted as a lost cause right from the start. Elisabeth is portrayed as a clever negotiator by Kehlmann. She was well aware that she travelled to Osnabrück without any rights, since her husband was stripped of his electorship when he lost the Bohemian kingdom. But the former Queen of Bohemia is able to negotiate successfully with both Catholics and Protestants, explaining to the Swedish Count Oxenstierna that an eighth electorship would be in the interests of both: the Catholics, since Bavaria would be able to hold on to the elector's power given to her by the emperor, and it would be in the interest of her own side, since the side of the Protestants would receive an additional palatine elector (Kehlmann *Tyll* 454). Indeed, this was one of the outcomes of the Thirty Years' War. Charles Lewis, Elisabeth Stuart's son, was granted a new Electorate that would allow him to participate in the election of a new emperor of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation, but he only received Heidelberg and the Rhenish Palatine as an Electorate, and his Electorate was thus diminished, since Bavaria kept the Electorate taken away from his father when Ferdinand put him under imperial ban (Wedgewood 491). More recent research, however, clarifies that it was mainly the English king Karl I, who interfered and used his diplomatic advisers to secure Charles Lewis a new electorate (Münkler 665 and 836). This proves again that Kehlmann handles historical facts according to the aesthetic necessities of his plot. He presents Elisabeth far more powerful than she actually was in the power struggle of her times. Thus, interpreters influenced by psychoanalytical theory might consider to either view Elisabeth Stuart as a failed replacement mother figure for Tyll or a secret love interest. Kehlmann's Tyll tries to establish a relationship with Elisabeth. Caused by the unresolved trauma of his childhood he fails because he cannot abandon his role.

Indeed, Tyll appears once more, and has his last encounter with Elisabeth Stuart, right at the end of the negotiation between Elisabeth and the leading Catholic and Protestant forces. Now in his new role as the fool of the Habsburg emperor Ferdinand, Tyll entertains the nobility during the peace negotiations in Osnabrück, as a juggler, but this time juggling with knives. The audience, including the former wife of the Winter King, Elisabeth Stuart, is fascinated at seeing Tyll juggling. In a last conversation, he explains to the widow that he wears a fool's cap with little bells since the emperor demanded it, and he explains that occasionally, while performing in front of great lords, he injures himself with juggling knives, because the noble gentlemen would pay more under these circumstances

(Kehlmann *Tyll* 472). It is of course possible to interpret this passage in different ways. It is possible to analyze Tyll's jugglery with the knives and injuring himself as a symbol for the 'ordinary' people hurting themselves, when they became playthings for the powerful during the Thirty Years' War – or actually, during any war. Additionally, referring to Tyll's individual biography the self-hurting aspects of his jugglery with the knives is of the greatest significance. Childhood trauma and disruption in mental caregiving as a cause for cutting oneself, is often referred to in psychological studies (Kolk/Perry/Herman 1966). Tyll as a victim of the atrocities of the Thirty Years' War, still suffering from his unresolved childhood trauma – before he could confront Dr. Kircher, the Jesuit vanished – as an adult can be viewed as a damaged individual. A trickster, and manipulator of the people's mind out of unconscious desperation.

## 6. Conclusion

In conclusion, on one hand, Kehlmann's Tyll stands above the struggle of the common man for his daily bread, as much as he sees through the power games of the nobility during the Thirty Years' War; but at the same time, this fate is the tragic curse he faces. Being able to intellectually set himself apart from the masses and the elites, during every minute of his life, creates an infinite loneliness and sadness around him. Kehlmann's Tyll is not a freedom fighter; he cannot be compared with Charles De Coster's Till Ulenspiegel, nor has he much to do with the hero of the popular folk song from the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries; his biography is not a collection of detached adventures. Certainly, Tyll's position as a fun maker for the poor and a trickster allows him to manipulate their emotions and to hurt their feelings, while at the same time, his occupation as a fool gives him the opportunity to use his intellectual sharpness and wit to successfully mirror the powerful. On the other hand, the fate of his family seems to loom over him like a dark shadow from the past. His personal tragedy – a very common tragedy during the times of the Thirty Years' War – dims his free gaze, impedes his progress, and destroys any attempts to develop personal relationships, but this fate did force him not to take sides. The opposing forces in the Thirty Years' War, as presented by Kehlmann, were too similar; it was a simple power struggle on both sides.

It was impossible for those affected to tell who was right or who was wrong, Catholics or Protestants. So, Tyll remains a trickster, a fool, who sees through the vanity of humanity, taking the blows of fate almost motionlessly, but is unable to engage in any meaningful relationship; life in the dark and deadly years of this war seems to exclude this option for Tyll.

Kehlmann paints the darkest picture of the hell of the Thirty Years' War. Although he uses and relies on historical facts of the war, the novel never shows one or the other side as gloriously or victoriously; instead, the devastating effects of war on any kind of human interaction and relationship are demonstrated. A historical document or source will be able to show the outcome of the action, how and why land has been reassigned and how new rulers take over one or the other region, etc. Kehlmann is not tied to the presumable historical truth; instead, he takes full advantage as a writer of historical fiction by mixing fact and fiction and employs even magic realism in a manner that places the individual in the centre of attention and clarifies that there are no winners in war. The fate of his leading figures emphasises that loneliness, detachment, isolation, and death are the only possible outcomes. There is no beauty in it when Kehlmann pictures the battle of Zusmarshausen; instead, he shows senseless killing, and he is not interested whatsoever in elucidating who won or lost the battle. Tyll disappears at the end, and with Elisabeth Stuart, the reader might ask, was he actually ever there or is he just an illusion, a signifier of death and destruction – a symbol for what a religiously violent conflict – any warlike conflict – will always cause to the individual and society as whole? Unable to develop any emotional bond to those around and accompanying him, suffering from unresolved childhood trauma from the beginning to the end, Tyll remains isolated. His extraordinary artistic abilities and skills as a talented trickster help him survive the Thirty Years' but he is unable to make any commitments. The deliberate act of self-harm, by cutting himself with his juggling knives, demonstrates that he never overcame his childhood trauma.

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