
Clio in the Midst of Patriarchy: Tony Buddenbrook and the Mediation of the Buddenbrook Family Past

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Thomas Mann's *Buddenbrooks* addresses the topic of history on a number of levels. First and foremost it is the chronicle of a patrician family between the years 1835 and 1877. Tracing four generations, with particular attention to the patriarchic lineage, the novel details both the rise and the eclipse—politically, economically, socially, spiritually—of the Buddenbrook family. This family chronicle has provided the basis for three main interpretations: autobiographical, socio-historical, and sociological. Hence, the novel can be read for its relationship to Thomas Mann's family and the city of Lübeck (Ridley 2), as a document of nineteenth-century political and social history (Ridley 81-84), and as a reflection on the Bourgeois/Bürger debate (Zeller 10-14).

Yet these interpretations by no means exhaust the historical dimensions of the novel. The term history encompasses not only raw information such as dates, events, accounts and characters but also includes the collecting, processing, and transmission (oral and written) of this information. More succinctly stated, one must be aware of both the historical material and the historiographical endeavor. The major interpretations listed above have concentrated primarily on the historical information provided in the novel at the expense of the historiographical aspects. The Buddenbrook family history does not exist simply for the reader; on the contrary, it is a vital and acknowledged aspect of the Buddenbrook family. The Buddenbrooks are aware of their own history and are constantly historicizing themselves. How this historiographical project is carried out is equally important to the historical material it attempts to synthesize.

Although the term historiography allows one to differentiate the broader concept of history, it is too formal for the purposes of this paper and requires a further delineation. Historiography evokes im-

ages of official writers, scribes, and historians applying a purported scientific methodology in order to write a codified document. The term places far too much weight on a work such as *Buddenbrooks* which offers a fictionalized account of a family history. A term which lends itself far better to the task at hand is historical mediation. Similar to historiography, historical mediation refers to the collecting, processing, and transmission of information. As the word mediation suggests, it is an intermediate position between two or more poles: in this case, reconciling the material of history with the transmission of history. Moreover, historical mediation intercedes in the past/present/future nexus, acknowledging and interpreting the past in a present and future time frame. The term, furthermore, is much more malleable than historiography. Historical mediation can be applied to situations which ideally would not fit the scientific framework of historiography. Beyond putative historical documents and accounts, beyond official historiographical publications lie animate and inanimate objects which collect and convey history. Hence, historical mediation allows one to move beyond the institutional idea of historiography and investigate areas otherwise left unexamined.

Where does one find the historical mediation of the Buddenbrook past in terms of these criteria? Two areas can be identified: 1) the family album and 2) the family members themselves. The family album provides a relatively detailed account of the Buddenbrook family history over the course of two centuries. Kept in the desk of the reigning Buddenbrook patriarch, it lists births, marriages, acquisitions, notable events, and provides both commentaries and small vignettes. The family album appears throughout the novel in a number of different situations with a variety of family members. Occasionally it is brought out for viewing, to be read by an individual, or to be read aloud in front of an intimate group. The family album is the material focal point of the Buddenbrook past; it is both the receptacle and the conveyor of the family history.

Undeniably, the family album represents a fundamental medium for the Buddenbrook family history and is worthy of study in its own right.¹ However, it is also interesting and significant to examine not the object, but the character who is most responsible for the mediation of this past. Obviously this character must have a profound involvement with the family album. Yet this criterion cannot serve as

the sole basis for the mediation of the Buddenbrook past. One must ask, which character actively intercedes and reconciles the family past? Surprisingly, in a novel which concentrates on the patriarchic lineage of a family, historical mediation is not the task of the Buddenbrook patriarchs, but rather the task of a Buddenbrook matriarch, Antonia (Tony) Buddenbrook.

To illuminate the central role of Tony Buddenbrook in relation to her family's past, it is first of all necessary to differentiate her involvement with the family album from that of the other family members. In some way, all four generations of the Buddenbrook patriarchy—old Johann, Jean, Tom, and Hanno (because of his early death Hanno never becomes family patriarch, but if he had reached adulthood, he would have assumed this position)—come into contact with the family album. It is, of course, the unstated responsibility of the male head of the Buddenbrook household to maintain and update the family album. To list but a few examples: Jean records the birth of his daughter and reads passages of the album that his father wrote (53-58), Tom dutifully records Tony's second divorce (393-394), and even Hanno finds cause to write in the family album, drawing a double line under his name and explaining later to his irate father: "Ich glaubte . . . ich glaubte . . . es käme nichts mehr" (523).

Tony, in relation to the family album, is never granted the same status as the Buddenbrook men. The responsibility for guarding and updating the family album is never officially bestowed upon her. Yet no character in the novel is so strongly and consistently involved with the family album as Tony Buddenbrook. No one else is described as having, nor shows the ability, to memorize dates, events, and persons in the family album as does Tony Buddenbrook. This ability is demonstrated as Tom informs her of the impending sale of the family house: "Unser Haus! . . . Ich weiß noch, wie wir es einweihen . . . Wir waren nicht größer als so damals. Die ganze Familie war da. Und Onkel Hoffsted trug ein Gedicht vor . . . Es liegt in der Mappe . . . Ich weiß es auswendig . . . Venus Anadyomene . . . Das Landschaftszimmer! Der Eßsaal! Fremde Leute . . . !" (583-84). Not only does she read the family album or recite its details at family gatherings (160, 478), but she also at various times writes in it herself, thus being the only female in the entire history of the family to do so (160, 235).

Denied official recognition within the family, Tony is nevertheless the unofficial guardian of the family album. Compared to the Buddenbrook patriarchs, she has invested relatively little time writing in the album. However, she has devoted herself to the album and to the family history. Of all the family members, she is most aware of the family history and most involved in interpreting it. The various Buddenbrook patriarchs record the family history but are detached from what they write. Never do they show any deeper involvement with the album other than recording information in it. Into this vacuum steps Tony Buddenbrook and, imbued with her family history, serves as the real caretaker of the family album.

Her position is confirmed at the end of the novel. With the family withered away and Tom's widow Gerda leaving to go back to Holland, Tony gratefully accepts possession of the family album. With great reverence she announces: "Einmal in der Woche kommt ihr zu mir zum Essen . . . und dann lesen wir in den Familienpapieren" (757). Tony takes sole possession of the object that contains the entire history of her family. No longer is she only the spiritual guardian of the family album. She now has physical ownership of it.

Tony's role as mediator of her family's past, however, does not reside solely in her involvement with the family album. Throughout the novel she is actively engaged in attempts to rewrite the past. Since she has memorized the family album, she is well aware of the glory and the shame of the Buddenbrook past. The glory of the Buddenbrook past centers on their social climb over the past two centuries. Economical, political, and social success have accompanied the Buddenbrooks in their rise to one of the most powerful families of the town. Ambitious as any of the patriarchs in the family, Tony wants to enrich the family history through her own deeds.

She is limited in this endeavor by the constraints of nineteenth-century bourgeois reality. The depictions of the Buddenbrook family and the character Tony Buddenbrook are consistent with contemporary historical appraisals of the middle to late nineteenth century. The nineteenth-century bourgeois family was largely defined as the separation of the private from the public (Nipperdey 44). More specifically, the private realm was defined as fundamentally concerning the home and the family, with women being the primary representatives (Hausen 64), and the public realm as fundamentally concerning capi-

tal production and society, with men being the primary representatives (Nipperdey 47-48). Confined to the private realm, women were left with little chance to make a mark on society. The only actions which allowed them to push out of the private realm and into the public realm were that of marriage and childbirth (Nipperdey 52).

Through marriage Tony attempts to write herself into the family album. However, after the failure of her first marriage, the institution of marriage represents her one chance to *rewrite* the past. She is a social and financial burden to her family and this situation must be rectified. Tony does not seek to eradicate the past, but rather judiciously edit the mistakes while allowing the unbroken glory of the family to resonate in memory.

Significantly, her project of historical revision through marriage is always discussed in reference to the family album. Hence, when Tony promises her father that she will not allow her first divorce to blight the family history, it is in reference to the family album. Pointing to the album she declares: "Vater, ich weiß wohl, daß dies Ereignis einen Flecken in unserer Familiengeschichte bildet. Ja, ich habe schon viel darüber nachgedacht. Es ist genau, als wäre hier ein Tintenklecks in diesem Buche. Aber sei ruhig . . . es ist meine Sache, ihn wieder fortzuradiieren! Ich bin noch jung . . ." (235) (referring to her ability to marry again). Later, on the eve of her second engagement, she is empowered by the thought that this marriage will extinguish the blemish of the previous one. It is such a consuming feeling that it infiltrates her dreams, and again the family album is present: "Diese Nacht hatte sie im Traum die Stelle in den Familienpapieren vor Augen gesehen, an der sie die Tatsache ihrer zweiten Verlobung zu vermerken gedachte . . . diese Tatsache, die jenen schwarzen Flecken, den die Blätter enthielten, tilgte und bedeutungslos machte, . . ." (343). Finally, before her daughter's wedding, Tony sees yet another chance to recover the past. Her ability to rewrite the past has been exhausted, but her daughter, Erika, can finally realize the project. Although Erika's name is recorded in the family album, Tony is the real bride (445) and she has just embarked on her third marriage (447).

Despite all her efforts, Tony is never able to rewrite the blemishes of her and her family's past. By the end of the novel she is left alone with only the remnants of a once distinguished family. Her one consolation is the family album which, for the first time, is under her sole

guardianship. Yet this outcome does not diminish Tony's role as the primary mediator of the Buddenbrook family history. In every aspect—caretaker, mediator, curator—she represents the character most involved with the family history. Moreover, she achieves this position in spite of difficult obstacles: she is not a member of the Buddenbrook patriarchy, she is a woman in stratified nineteenth century bourgeois society, and twice-divorced, she is a social outcast. Tony's role as historical mediator of the Buddenbrook patriarchy is also noteworthy because of the ironic detachment Thomas Mann displays toward her character. Who would look for the historical muse, the Clio, of the Buddenbrook family in a character who, for the most part, is depicted as a fool?

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Note

¹ A useful examination of the family album is to be found in Jochen Vogt, *Thomas Mann: Buddenbrooks* (München: Wilhelm Fink, 1983): 117-121. Vogt analyzes the family album and its relation to the Mann family Bible, providing examples where the similarity between the family album and the Mann family Bible can be clearly seen (118-120). Perhaps of most interest is Vogt's assertion that the family album functions as an epic motif in the history of the Buddenbrooks family (120-121).

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The German Exile Writer in New York City 1933-1945: A Case Study

Gerhard Reich

After the "Machtergreifung" by the Nazis and the ritual burning of books in German universities in 1933, many people left their homes and fled mostly to neighboring countries. Literary circles and journals were founded, especially in Prague and Paris. After the military occupation of these countries, there were few places left to go, and the prospect of escaping to the United States became more and more desirable as a last refuge. The Johnson Act of 1925, however, restricted the number of immigrants admitted to the United States to a small number, and it was increasingly difficult to obtain a visa. A written invitation and an affidavit, preferably from an influential American citizen, was necessary. For young and unknown writers this was hard to come by. But the famous representatives of anti-fascist culture also needed support. The American PEN Club, Dorothy Parker and the Algonquin Circle were very helpful in providing the necessary paperwork and support for those German writers in danger.

In the United States, there were two major centers: New York on the East Coast and Hollywood on the West Coast. In Hollywood, several poets attempted to write movie scripts and in general had major difficulties adapting to the American movie industry. The notoriously unsuccessful Bertold Brecht is only one example of a frustrated and disappointed European intellectual in exile, who felt disgust for the artificial world of Hollywood.¹ Carl Zuckmayer hated the movie industry so much that he gave up writing and lived the life of a recluse on a farm in the Green Mountains of Vermont.²

In New York the situation was different. There was a large, well-established German-American population living mostly in Yorkville on the Upper West Side, then called Little Germany. Up to the first World War there had been a very active German social life in various