



The Tunnel

By William H. Gass

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While writing the introduction to his magnum opus, a moral history of Hitler's Germany, a middle-aged historian finds himself writing instead a history of the historian himself and secretly digging a tunnel out of his own basement. 15,000 first printing.

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The Tunnel By William H. Gass Bibliography

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

A strange and monumental novel that took William Gass three decades to write. When a Midwestern historian sits down to write the introduction to his magnum opus study of the Third Reich, he instead writes a chaotic, obscure and labyrinthine exploration of his personal history. Then he begins digging a tunnel from the basement of his house. The writing, the digging, and the reader's reading blend into one profound meditation on history, evil, the living and the dead. PEN/Faulkner Award Finalist.

From Publishers Weekly

This long-awaited magnum opus by the dean of American prose modernists, 30 years in the making, is a terrible disappointment. In this endless ramble of a novel, Gass (*Omensetter's Luck*; *In the Heart of the Heart of the Country*), though here, as always, possessed of a bewitching and spectacularly fluid and allusive style, fails to find a suitable home for his narrator's wickedly dyspeptic views of history, marriage and culture. William Kohler is a Midwestern academic historian working on an introduction to his life's work—a massive study of "guilt and innocence in Hitler's Germany." This, however, and the fact that Kohler begins to secretly dig a tunnel out of his basement, are the only shards of plot in this otherwise formless book. Gass, as readers of his fiction and gorgeous literary essays will know (*On Being Blue*), can turn a phrase and render lyrical descriptions that have not only music to them, but also shape and weight. But in portraying the failed career and life of Kohler, these gifts are brought to bear on such a litany of sour rant-about his aging body, his wife's widening girth, the fatuous enthusiasms of his colleagues and mentors—that the reader will beg for a way out of this dark and airless space. Unfortunately, there is no light at the end of *The Tunnel*, and the promise of a new perspective on our century's most heinous crime—the Holocaust—is very much a forgotten vow.

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From Library Journal

Here, Gass presents William Kohler, a professor of history who sits in his basement study trying to write a preface to his monumental work, *Guilt and Innocence in Hitler's Germany*, but instead finds himself writing his autobiography. Historical objectivity eludes him, as old wounds and resentments obscure the facts. He broods over an unhappy childhood and a loveless marriage and regrets "a life spent in a chair." The result is a sort of *Mein Kampf* from this self-described Führer of the Party of Disappointed People. Between chapters, Kohler pauses to dig an escape tunnel through the basement wall as his wife waits patiently upstairs. Like Gass's best-known metafictional work, *Willie Master's Lonesome Wife* (LJ 12/1/71), this book is filled with puns, limericks, illustrations, and unusual typefaces. In marked contrast to the earlier work, this playful design seems completely at odds with the ponderous text. For larger fiction collections.

Edward B. St. John, Loyola Law Sch. Lib., Los Angeles

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Users Review

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Katherine Velasquez:

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