

THE PROBLEM OF COMMITMENT

IN THE WORKS OF

GÜNTER GRASS

by

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ABSTRACT

The critical reception of Grass has changed drastically over the last decade. Up to the mid-sixties, judgments like 'immoral' and 'obscene' were the norm in assessments of Grass's work. Reviews after 1965, however, emphasised the ethical content of Grass's literary output. This volte-face retrospectively also changed attitudes to Die Blechtrommel and Hundejahre. The impulse to reinterpret Grass in this new light came from the writer's extra-literary activities. This study attempts to demonstrate that Grass's political commitment is rooted in the work itself. It explores by textual analysis how this ethical awareness is condensed in Grass's imagery. A close investigation of the choice and use of imagery reveals that commitment in his works is by no means static.

The theoretical framework of the study is Sartre's definition of littérature engagée, as far as it is applicable to the work of Grass. The first chapter concludes that it is necessary to distinguish between 'implicit' and 'explicit' commitment, between Engagement and Tendenz. The second chapter examines the relationship between politics and literature in Grass's extra-literary work, that is his political essays on the one hand and his essays on literature on the other,

contrasting Grass's practice of commitment with Sartre's theory. Chapter three focuses on the role of the drum in Die Blechtrommel, establishing its moral premises with particular reference to its relationship to politics, religion, love and art. The themes of politics and religion are followed up in chapter four, from which it emerges that Grass has intensified his commitment by limiting it to more tangible aspects of society. In chapter five Hundejahre is discussed as the last novel of a trilogy. The metamorphosis of the scarecrow and dog images is scrutinised, together with their cultural extensions in the figures of Weininger and Heidegger, and it is argued that the novel exhibits the first traces of Tendenz in its functional use of imagery. Die Plebejer proben den Aufstand is considered in chapter six as the turning point in Grass's oeuvre. The interpretation tries to show that, although deeply ambiguous, in the final analysis the tragedy is a literary equivalent of Grass's political position. This ambiguity and depth is lacking in örtlich betäubt and chapter seven posits that the novel is not so much an equivalent but more a literary version of Grass's election speeches. The final chapter reviews the political imagery in the whole of Grass's work, and interprets the titles as guidelines to Grass's evolution from Engagement to Tendenz.

PREFATORY NOTE

This study is based mainly on the following works:

Die Blechtrommel, Katz und Maus, Hundejahre, Die Plebejer proben den Aufstand and Örtlich betäubt.

It does not include Grass's most recent novel, Aus dem Tagebuch einer Schnecke, which was published in August 1972, just before the completion of this thesis.

Furthermore, I would like to express my appreciation to Mrs Dorothy Ketch of Bedford College, London, and to many other friends and helpers involved in the preparation of this thesis, and to Miss Lynn Sargent who typed the manuscript. My thanks are equally due to Mr V. J. Riley of the Institute of Germanic Studies and to Mr S. Arnold of the British Museum Reading Room.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Listed in order of appearance: Page  
 of Commitment 8 - 50  
 with special reference to  
 Chapter Three

QLL 75  
 Jean-Paul Sartre: Qu'est-ce que la littérature?

UDS 142  
Über das Selbstverständliche

BT 142 - 152  
Die Blechtrommel

KM 182 - 202  
Katz und Maus

HJ 222 - 230  
Hundejahre

PL 262  
Die Plebejer proben den Aufstand

Öb 362 - 372  
örtlich betäubt

BIBLIOGRAPHY: 374 - 420

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1) Jean-Paul Sartre, Qu'est-ce que la littérature?  
Paris, 1948 (to be subsequently referred to as  
265).



CHAPTER ONESARTRE'S THEORY OF COMMITMENT WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE  
TO GÜNTER GRASS

The commitment of literature to religious, political or other social purposes is by no means new. Indeed, the necessity for it was hardly questioned until the emergence of the cult of individuality and of individual genius about the mid-eighteenth century. Until then, the artist would, of course, leave the imprint of his personality on anything he produced, but he neither expected, nor was he expected to make his art a deliberate expression of his personality and views. It was not until recently that artistic freedom gave him the choice between l'art pour l'art on the one hand or a self-imposed decision to become involved in political action through art on the other. Only after the experience of World War II did a systematic enquiry into the nature of literature and its potential as a political tool come to be written, an analysis which was to influence all post-war literature.

The book in question is Qu'est-ce que la littérature?<sup>1</sup> It consists of a series of essays first published

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1) Jean-Paul Sartre: Qu'est-ce que la littérature? Paris, 1948 (to be subsequently referred to as QLL).

separately in 1945 in Les Temps Modernes and republished as a whole and slightly altered in Situations II two years later. The book was written under the immediate impact of the French Resistance. This accounts to a large extent for the strong emotional undercurrent, for its sense of urgency, and the uncompromising tone prevailing throughout the book. The other essential source of inspiration for the formulation of littérature engagée must be seen in the upsurge of Marxism.

Sartre's enquiry is not a purely academic one. It reads rather like a confession, a credo. Previously, a secret admirer of 'pure' literature, he is here campaigning with the fervour of a new convert to demonstrate the functional merits of his art. Always writing with a view to the vast political and social problems confronting post-war France, he balances the future of literature against that of politics. Not surprisingly, the fate of literature is constantly threatened. Only by attributing to it a social function, can Sartre save it from premature death.

According to Sartre, every writer today is faced with an inescapable choice: either to fight for or against mankind. If the writer consciously acknowledges his responsibility to mankind, his work will inevitably

bé engagée. If he opts for l'art pour l'art or remains silent, his choice is tantamount to a betrayal of mankind.

Although Sartre himself denies being a legislator of literature - 'je n'ai pas de goût...pour les manifestes d'écoles'<sup>2</sup> - some of his critics have hailed and condemned Qu'est-ce que la littérature? as precisely that, a manifesto ranging alongside Boileau's Art Poétique and the Manifeste of the French Surrealists. Our reasons for using Sartre's concept of commitment as a foil to this study are threefold: firstly, as has already been mentioned, there is the historical aspect, Sartre, more than most writers, epitomises the mood of a whole generation after World War II. In fact, his significance resides not so much in the originality of his thought, Aragon and Breton had already asked similar questions<sup>3</sup>, as in the way he has absorbed all the diverse and contradictory tendencies of his time and transformed them into a literary philosophy of his own, which in its turn influenced his contemporaries. Karl Kohut summarises his evaluation of Sartre, by quoting Picon:

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2) QLL p.355.

3) See Karl Kohut: Was ist Literatur? Die Theorie über littérature engagée bei Jean-Paul Sartre; Diss, Marburg 1965, p.86.

In diesem - wie Picon sagt -  
'phénomène de parfaite correspondance  
à l'époque' liegt vielleicht die  
größte Bedeutung Sartres.

The second reason is Sartre's relative applicability to the whole post-war German scene. It is relative, because some of his concepts seem outdated today. This is hardly surprising, considering that his theory of littérature engagée evolved some twenty-five years ago. Far more surprising is the fact that so much of it still accords with present day preoccupations.

The third point is a personal one, namely that Sartre's views coincide with what I also hold to be the essence of commitment: if one were to reduce Qu'est-ce que la littérature? to one central idea, it would be that of the creative partnership between writer and reader. The demand for close cooperation between author and reader has lost nothing of its urgency since it was first proclaimed in 1945, and gives Sartre's theory of commitment paradigmatic quality.

This introductory chapter is divided into three main parts: it will present an outline of Sartre's aesthetic views as they appear in Qu'est-ce que la littérature?<sup>5</sup>

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4) Ibid, p.4.

5) It must be stated from the outset that we are dealing

then, individual concepts will be more closely examined and their relevance to Grass's commitment will be established. Finally, a further distinction within the area of committed literature will be investigated.

Qu'est-ce que la littérature? revolves around four major problems, each representing one section in the book: 'What is writing?', 'Why write?', 'Who does one write for?' and 'The situation of the writer in 1947'. The first two sections define the activity of the writer on a purely theoretical level within the framework of existentialist philosophy. Section three deals historically with the relationship of the French writer to his reading public from the Middle Ages to the beginning of the twentieth century. The final section, by far the most substantial of the four, is a sociology of the French writer in 1947. It is, as Sartre puts it, 'la seule question qui nous presse'<sup>6</sup>, which relegates the three preceding chapters to a mere preamble.

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5) cont.

with the Sartre of the 1940s. This factor is of paramount importance, as Sartre is well known for his intellectual evolution. Since the publication of Les Mots there is conclusive evidence that Sartre has lost most of his literary illusions (see Yale French Studies, 1963, p.122).

6) QLL p.196.

'Qu'est-ce qu'écrire?' delineates the field and defines the terms. Sartre starts off by drawing a firm distinction between the various forms of artistic expression. He excludes painting and music from his analysis, because he considers these media to be incompatible with commitment. Commitment can only exist where there is language and only where there is language is there meaning. But, within the field of writing itself, there are, according to Sartre, fundamental differences:

L'empire des signes, c'est la prose;  
la poésie est du côté de la peinture,  
de la sculpture, de la musique.(7)

Like most critics I do not accept Sartre's categorical distinction between prose and poetry. Sartre himself reversed this rather arbitrary distinction only one year later,<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, if we include this juxtaposition, it is because it helps to define Sartre's concept of commitment. For when Sartre talks about poetry, he means l'art pour l'art, and his objections to l'art pour l'art suggest indirectly his reasons for advocating a littérature engagée.

Although both poet and prose writer work with language,

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7) QLL p.17.

8) Commitment in poetry: see Situations III, Paris 1949, p.233; commitment in music: see L'artiste et sa Conscience, Preface to Leibowitz, Paris 1950.

their respective approach to language separates them, in Sartre's view. The poet refuses to 'use' language as a means. To him, words are things which have no meaning outside themselves. The prose writer, on the other hand, does use language as a means of communication, for 'la prose est utilitaire par essence'<sup>9</sup>, and because of this functional quality, Sartre chooses it as the medium par excellence for commitment. Whether, when he is talking about prose, Sartre is referring to the theatre or the novel, is uncertain. He never actually states explicitly which genre he has in mind when developing his theory. But, judging by the majority of the examples he chooses for his illustrations, it is the novel that suggests itself most convincingly. This fact is of some interest in the present context, because we, too, are primarily concerned with this genre, and it will facilitate our task when we come to test the applicability of Sartre's criteria to Grass's work,

What exactly does Sartre mean by stating that prose is essentially utilitarian? This question can best be answered by pointing to further contrasts with poetry:

A mesure que le prosateur expose  
des sentiments, il les éclaire;  
pour le poète, au contraire, s'il

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9) QLL p.9.

coule ses passions dans son poème,  
il cesse de les reconnaître...l'émotion est devenue chose, elle, <sup>10</sup> maintenant l'opacité des choses.

For the prose writer, words are not primarily objects, but designations of objects. The poet has a right to look at language in a 'disinterested fashion'. The prose writer must ask himself why he is writing at all. The question that should, according to Sartre, always be in the forefront of his mind is: 'qu'arriverait-il si tout le monde lisait ce que j'écris?'. Pure contemplation might suffice the poet. The prose writer's only justification lies in communication, for 'la fin de la langue est de communiquer'. In contrast to the poet, who, by not transcending the boundaries of language, makes himself an advocate of the status quo, the prose writer reveals the world, and by revealing it, he changes it, and by changing it, he acts:

...En parlant, je dévoile la situation par mon projet même de la changer; je la dévoile à moi-même et aux autres pour la changer;...Ainsi le prosateur est un homme qui a choisi un certain mode d'action secondaire qu'on pourrait nommer l'action par dévoilement.<sup>11</sup>

This new militancy is the first indication of how Sartre tries to appease his social conscience. He

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10) QLL p.25.

11) QLL pp.29-30.



must make himself believe that he, too, as a writer is contributing to the liberation of mankind. Hence, 'l'écrivain engagé sait que la parole est action'. For Sartre, writing is not an activity separate from life, but a branch of life itself. The following exhortation to his contemporaries puts it even more strongly:

Nous estimons que l'écrivain doit s'engager tout entier dans ses ouvrages, et non pas comme une passivité abjecte,...mais comme cette totale entreprise de vivre que nous sommes chacun...<sup>12</sup>

Grass, on the other hand, is eager to compartmentalise his activities. If we were to believe him, there is little connection between Grass the writer and Grass the political activist.

One of Sartre's answers to 'Qu'est-ce qu'écrire?' was that writing was essentially a way of revealing the world and was thereby a form of secondary action. In 'Pourquoi écrire?' he asks himself, why choose writing at all as one's field of activity? The main driving force, Sartre argues, to all artistic creation, is a desire to feel indispensable to the world. But this dream is short-lived, for once the object has been created, the creator becomes superfluous again.

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12) QLL p.44.

Worse still, unlike the recipients of his art, he has no access to his own creation, in the sense that he cannot look at it again in a detached way, which is necessary to give it an objective existence.

This resuscitation can only be brought about by the reader; only he can recreate what has previously been created by the author:

...l'opération d'écrire implique celle de lire comme son corrélatif dialectique et ces deux actes connexes nécessitent deux agents distincts. C'est l'effort conjugué de l'auteur et du lecteur qui fera surgir cet objet concret et imaginaire qu'est l'ouvrage d'esprit. Il n'y a d'art que par et pour autrui.<sup>13</sup>

The act of reading is a 'discovery', a 'reinvention' as original as the writer's own invention:

Il faut que le lecteur invente tout dans un perpétuel dépassement de la chose écrite.<sup>14</sup>

But Sartre immediately qualifies this:

Sans doute l'auteur le guide; mais il ne fait que le guider...En un mot, la lecture est création dirigée.<sup>15</sup>

In Sartre's view the writer depends on the reader for his artistic survival; the result is that every book

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13) QLL p.55.

14) QLL p.57.

15) QLL p.57.

is an appeal, an appeal to the reader's 'freedom' to bring to life the author's creation. But Sartre's notion of freedom is rather like a categorical imperative, it is a freedom that implies responsibility:

...la liberté ne s'éprouve pas dans la jouissance du libre fonctionnement subjectif, mais dans un acte créateur requis par un impératif.<sup>16</sup>

The reader lends the author his 'freedom', the author will show his respect for the reader by not imposing his own point of view in his work:

De là ce caractère de pure présentation qui paraît essentiel à l'oeuvre d'art: le lecteur doit disposer d'un certain recul esthétique.<sup>17</sup>

But, Sartre adds, this is not to be confused with what Gautier took to be l'art pour l'art.

If the relationship of trust between the reader and the author is to work, it must be mutual. This reciprocity leads to a continual escalation of the moral and intellectual demands made on both reader and writer:

...la lecture est un pacte de générosité entre l'auteur et le lecteur; ...chacun compte sur l'autre, exige de l'autre autant qu'il exige de lui-même... Il s'établit alors un va-et-vient dialectique; quand je lis, j'exige; ce que je lis alors, si mes exigences sont remplies, m'incite à exiger davantage de l'auteur, ce qui signifie: à exiger de l'auteur qu'il exige davantage

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16) QLL p.61.

17) QLL pp.62-3.

de moi-même. Et réciproquement l'exigence de l'auteur c'est que je porte au plus haut degré mes exigences. Ainsi ma liberté en se manifestant dévoile la liberté de l'autre,<sup>18</sup>

The writer unveils the world, the reader rebuilds it, guided by the writer. Every work of art sets itself the 'freedom' of mankind as its goal. This freedom, however, is not an absolute value, nor is it given at any time. Its character changes with historical circumstances, it has to be perpetually reconquered. By revealing the obstacles to the realisation of freedom, literature and morality merge:

Bien que la littérature soit une chose et la morale une toute autre chose, au fond de l'impératif esthétique nous discernons l'impératif moral,<sup>19</sup>

The demand for philosophical freedom entails a demand for political freedom, the latter being a prerequisite of the former.

L'art de la prose est solidaire du seul régime où la prose garde un sens: la démocratie. Quand l'une est menacée, l'autre l'est aussi,<sup>20</sup>

And if democracy is threatened, writing alone will

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18) QLL p.70-71

19) QLL p.79

20) QLL p.82

not save it.

Un jour vient où la plume est  
contrainte de s'arrêter et il  
faut alors que l'écrivain prenne  
les armes.<sup>21</sup>

The next chapter 'Pour qui écrit-on?' is concerned exclusively with the reader-author relationship, a relationship that is historically determined. 'Pour qui écrit-on?' is the sociological counterpart to the philosophical 'Pourquoi écrire?'. The appeal to the reader's freedom has to be substantiated with a subject matter, and the subject matter is largely determined by the reading public. The writer, Sartre claims, should decide on his subject matter only when he knows exactly to whom he is addressing himself. As a matter of principle, he should always write for his contemporaries: their historical context is identical, hence they have similar problems to overcome. The task of the writer consists mainly in making the reader aware of his historicité, his historical context.

It is this approach which distinguishes the committed writer from the non-committed one. Both are products of their time, but only the committed writer acknowledges it:

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21) QLL p.82

Je dirai qu'un écrivain est engagé lorsqu'il tâche à prendre la conscience la plus lucide et la plus entière d'être embarqué, c'est à dire lorsqu'il fait passer pour lui et pour les autres l'engagement de la spontanéité immédiate au réfléchi. L'écrivain est médiateur par excellence et son engagement c'est la médiation.<sup>22</sup>

This is the clearest definition of engagement so far.

A writer is committed, not because, as is often believed, he simply reflects the problems of his time, but because he recognises them as problems and consciously contributes to overcoming them.

Sartre has chosen the black writer Richard Wright to illustrate his theory, for two interrelated reasons. The first is his race, a factor which is bound to influence his subject matter. The second concerns Wright's reading public. He will not be addressing himself to the white racists, nor to the illiterate black peasants. His actual readers will be the educated Blacks and the progressive white Americans. In Sartre's view, such a split in one's readership is not only artistically productive, it is even a prerequisite for his new type of literature.

Having first established the correlation between history and literature, then illustrated his theory with

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22) QLL p.98

the specific example of Richard Wright, Sartre now sets out to give an historical survey of the French writer's relationship to society. He prefaces his excursion with the statement that there is a natural antagonism between writer and society which he attributes to an inherent clash of interests: the writer wants change, whereas society resists change. By holding up a critical mirror to society, the writer becomes ~~the~~ society's bad conscience. This is a view with which Grass strongly disagrees. He cannot see why the writer should be better equipped to put the world right than an ordinary citizen, who has more direct contact with reality.

In the Middle Ages, for instance, this antagonism did not yet exist, because at this time, the writer identified himself with the Church. His reading public consisted of a small elite of fellow writers. Hence, Sartre concludes:

La bonne conscience du clerc  
médiéval fleurit sur la mort  
de la littérature.<sup>23</sup>

In the seventeenth century there is still identification with the ideology of the day. The radical breakthrough came with the eighteenth century.

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23) QLL p.110

It first manifested itself in the writer's dissociation from the ruling classes, a political phenomenon with literary repercussions. For the first time in history literature became conscious of its autonomy:

Du coup la littérature, qui n'était jusque-là qu'une fonction conservatrice et purificatrice d'une société intégrée, prend conscience...de son autonomie...elle ne reflétera plus les lieux communs de la collectivité, elle s'identifie à l'Esprit, c'est-à-dire au pouvoir permanent de former et de critiquer des idées.<sup>24</sup>

This autonomy, however, was not to be an end in itself; it meant that the writer contributed with his pen to the emancipation of man. He attacked institutions, superstitions and traditions as they restricted his contemporaries. He intervened in public life and incited his fellow men to revolt against history itself.

Grass joins Sartre in his admiration of the eighteenth century. Not only does he believe in the autonomy of literature, he is a passionate advocate of eighteenth century virtues. Sartre's phrase: 'la littérature s'identifie à l'esprit, c'est-à-dire au pouvoir permanent de former et de critiquer des idées' could not correspond more perfectly to Grass's idea of literature, when he writes:

Intellektuelle betreiben das Geschäft der Skepsis, des Zweifels...nicht

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24) QLL p.130



das Geschäft der fertigen Ergebnisse,  
and again Sartre:

Les idéologies sont liberté quand  
elles se font, oppression quand elles  
sont faites...<sup>25</sup>

Hatred of ideologies unites the two writers. The actual term is synonymous, to them, with rigidity, narrowness, dogmatism, mystification. There is even complete unanimity in the selection of the systems that need demystification: 'le nazisme...le catholicisme...le communisme'<sup>26</sup>

Compared with the eighteenth century, the nineteenth century was a complete disaster; all the innovations of its predecessors faded into the background again. With the Romantics contemporary subject matters disappear. According to Sartre, their whole universe is a system of timeless ideas, and this to him, is tantamount to the death of literature. With the advent of the Symbolists, literature becomes more and more introverted and turns more and more against life. For them, beauty and perfection can only be found in uselessness.

The nineteenth century also saw the emergence of

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25) QLL p.193

26) QLL p.26

Realism, a movement that also meets with Sartre's disapproval. Although Realists claim to be 'les témoins impartiaux de leur époque', in fact, 'ils ne témoignent aux yeux de personne: ils élèvent à l'absolu témoignage et témoins; ils présentent au ciel vide le tableau de la société qui les entoure'<sup>27</sup>

Sartre objects to their impartiality, which, in his view, can only be false. He is understandably even more critical of Naturalism. How could he reconcile his belief in freedom with their doctrine of determinism?

Le déterminisme du roman naturaliste écrase la vie, remplace l'action humaine par des mécanismes à sens unique.<sup>28</sup>

With Surrealism, all traces of social responsibility have vanished. Sartre attributes the Surrealists' alliance with Communism to mere selfishness; it gave them the illusion that they had rid themselves of their Bourgeois background. Thus, with the exception of the eighteenth century, writers of all centuries have failed mankind. By not accepting their contemporaneity as a challenge to be conveyed to their readers, they all have betrayed literature. It is for Sartre to suggest possibilities of how a writer can do full justice to the demands made on him by his time.

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27) QLL p.161

28) QLL p.163

'La situation de l'écrivain en 1947' is the culmination of Qu'est-ce que la littérature? It is here that Sartre puts his theory of literature to the test in a specific historical context. Consequently, this fourth section serves both as a summary and as a practical illustration of the three previous ones. At the same time, Sartre's theory applied to the post-war period bears the most direct relevance to our study. We will therefore attempt to draw possible analogies between his and Grass's views.

Such analogies can be fruitfully established, provided one is aware that there are fundamental differences. There is the generation gap. Sartre's book was published ten years before Grass's first publication. What they have in common is their first-hand experience of World War II, however different their respective experiences might have been. A further difficulty arises, because 'La situation de l'écrivain en 1947' is exclusively based on French conditions - this very specificness constitutes, after all, the value of Sartre's study. Finally there is an intellectual difference, undoubtedly the most far-reaching of all. Grass, unlike Sartre, is neither a philosopher, nor is he a theoretician. He abhors abstractions, Sartre thrives on them. Needless to say such a basic divergence in temperament is bound to reflect itself in

their respective approaches to politics and literature.

In Sartre's analysis of literature four main concepts emerge, all of which are closely interrelated. The author and the reader are at two opposite ends of a pole; the link between them is the work of art as a concretisation of their freedom. The term that needs clarification first is freedom, for it is the crux of the other concepts. Most of its aspects have already been dealt with, so that a brief recapitulation here will suffice.

David Cauter defines the Sartrean notion as the 'active side of freedom'<sup>29</sup>, as a 'process of becoming'. Sartre himself defines it in L'Être et le néant as 'liberté de choisir, mais non la liberté de ne pas choisir'<sup>30</sup>, or simply as 'autonomie du choix'. In 'Pourquoi écrire?' he proclaims that he writes because he has chosen to write, and he has chosen to write in order to 'use his ontological freedom in the service of social freedom', as Cauter puts it. It is nonsensical to talk about freedom without mentioning its negative correlative in the Sartrean frame of reference, the

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<sup>29</sup>) Introduction to What is Literature?, translated by B.Frechtman, London 1967, p.ix.

<sup>30</sup>) L'Être et le néant, Paris 1949, p.561

situation. Responsible use of one's freedom within a given situation constitutes the philosophical basis of Sartre's engagement. This is how Karl Kohut formulates the interdependence between the three terms:

Die Situation entsteht durch den Menschen, bestimmt aber umgekehrt seine Existenz. Der Mensch verleiht (oder soll verleihen) dieser Situation einen Sinn, in dem er sich in ihr wählt. Diese Wahl bestimmt sein Engagement. Der Mensch ist zwar bereits de facto in seiner Situation engagiert; er übernimmt jedoch (oder soll übernehmen) dieses Engagement und prägt es mit seinem Willen. In diesem freien Engagement übernimmt er seine Situation, verleiht ihr einen Sinn und überwindet sie damit auf die Zukunft hin. Durch die Art des Engagements bestimmt er rückwirkend wieder seine eigene Person.<sup>31</sup>

Nominally, the existential subtleties of Sartre's freedom have little bearing on Grass. Their practical implications, however, are all the more to the point. Sartre's anti-fatalist approach to history, his belief in self-determination, and in the responsibility of every individual are all major themes in Grass's work. In chapter two it will be shown how strongly the politician Grass believes in man's duty to shape his political future, and the subsequent chapters will demonstrate this attitude on an artistic level.

This takes us to the question of the author himself.

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31) Op. cit. pp.47-8

One of Sartre's fundamental pronouncements on this subject was

Je dirais qu'un écrivain est engagé lorsqu'il tâche à prendre la conscience la plus lucide et la plus entière d'être embarqué, c'est-à-dire lorsqu'il fait passer pour lui et pour les autres l'engagement de la spontanéité immédiate au réfléchi.<sup>32</sup>

Such a type of awareness is usually referred to by Sartre as 'historicité', a word which has been translated by Balz<sup>33</sup> as Geschichtlichkeit and defined as a coming together of Situation and Entscheidung. This means that the committed writer has to have a full knowledge of the forces determining him; at the same time, however, he must invent possibilities of transcending them. Ways and means of effecting this would form the essence of littérature engagée, so that the reader, too, can recognise his situation, and by recognising it, can change it.

If we look at Grass's work, there can be no doubt that all his writings spring from a desire to formulate his own 'historicity'. Whether we look at Die Blechtrommel, at Hundejahre, at Die Plebejer proben den Aufstand, all of them try to take stock of the historical situation, and in some cases suggest other courses of action.

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32) QLL p.98

33) Heinrich Balz: Aragon-Malraux-Camus. Korrektur am literarischen Engagement. Stuttgart 1970, p.14

Another statement of principle concerns the social position of the committed writer. Sartre maintains that in his capacity of a social critic, the writer is inevitably at loggerheads with the society in which he lives. Society resents him, because his critical views represent an attack on its established values.

Sartre concludes:

De ce fait [l'écrivain] est en perpétuel antagonisme avec les forces conservatrices qui maintiennent l'équilibre qu'il tend à rompre. Car le passage au médiat qui ne peut se faire que par négation de l'immédiat est une perpétuelle révolution.<sup>34</sup>

The bulk of Grass's work certainly constitutes a criticism of society. His disagreement with Sartre is not so much one of detail; he objects rather to Sartre's general presumption that there is an inherent antimony between authority and writer. Grass has had, in fact, first-hand experience of this conflict, yet he refuses to accept its inevitability. This difference of opinion is as much a literary as a political one: Sartre measures the present by the yardstick of a Marxist future, hence his insistence on the 'négation de l'immédiat' for the benefit of the future. With Grass the position is reversed: he builds on the present

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34) QLL p.104

as the only realistic framework, within which social change can be effected. The idea of utopia is as repulsive to Grass as Grass's pragmatism must be to Sartre. Because Grass insists on working within the established framework, he wishes to see a reconciliation between writer and authority, a reco<sup>n</sup>ciliation which Sartre can envisage only in a classless society.

Both Grass and Sartre would like to see the writer occupy an analogous position in the twentieth century to the one occupied in the eighteenth. Sartre wants the twentieth-century writer to act as a mediator between the bourgeoisie and the working classes. But, as a classless society is no concern of Grass's, and, more importantly, as Grass does not share Sartre's functional view of literature, the search for a collective readership is not one of his pre-occupations. When Grass talks about the writer-reader relationship, it is strictly on a personal level.

Much to Sartre's regret, this was the only type of relationship available to him in the late forties. His only possible means of access to the working class would have been the Communist Party. The question in the Forefront of his mind is:



Est-il souhaitable que l'écrivain s'y engage?...Peut-il devenir Communiste en restant écrivain?<sup>35</sup>

Sartre's answer is unequivocal:

...si l'on demande a présent si l'écrivain, pour atteindre les masses, doit offrir ses services au parti communiste, je réponds que non; la politique du communisme stalinien est incompatible avec l'exercice honnête du métier littéraire.<sup>36</sup>

He even goes so far as to suggest that identification with the Communist Party would destroy a writer, because the work of art is an end in itself and is thus opposed to any idea of utilitarianism. This objection flatly contradicts Sartre's initial claim that prose is in essence utilitarian. When we come to discuss Sartre's concept of the ideal work of art the paradoxical tension between aesthetic and political demands is particularly apparent. There is an inverted correlation between his views on politics and his hopes for literature. The more extreme his political ideals, the more puritan his aesthetic values. The following quotation demonstrates Sartre's determination to save art from propaganda:

Si j'en avais le pouvoir, j'enterrais la littérature de mes propres mains plutôt que de lui faire servir des fins auxquelles

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35) QLL p.304

36) QLL p.308

il<sup>37</sup> l'utilise.<sup>38</sup>

But at this stage, Sartre prefers not to act as a gravedigger - he explores other avenues in search of a new reading public.

With the exception of the political parties supported by the respective writers - a difference that is not to be underestimated - Grass's and Sartre's problems are comparable; furthermore, both writers come to the same conclusions. Grass like Sartre believes that collaboration with a party is desirable. In their view, the best course of action is to ally oneself with the party and criticise it from within, preferably as a sympathiser, rather than as a regular party member. Both the party and the author benefit more if their identification is not complete. As we know, neither Grass nor Sartre is a party member. When they do identify themselves, it is in their capacity as citizens rather than as writers. This is not surprising in the case of Grass, but it is surprising in the case of Sartre, who has taken such pains to express the unity of all man's undertakings. It is

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37) Sartre is referring to Garaudy, the ex-chairman of the French Communist Party (PCF).

38) QLL p.317

the first time in Qu'est-ce que la littérature? that Sartre makes such a strict distinction between citizen and writer:

Même si, comme citoyen, nous pouvons dans des circonstances rigoureusement déterminées, soutenir sa politique<sup>39</sup> de nos votes, cela ne signifie pas que nous devons lui asservir notre plume.<sup>40</sup>

He is even more definite in a remark made three years later:

Un artiste est à la fois artiste et citoyen, mais ce sont là deux éléments différents. La communauté sociale a le droit et le pouvoir de me commander, dans la mesure où je suis citoyen. Elle n'a ni le droit, ni le pouvoir de le faire dans la mesure où je suis artiste. Elle ne l'a pas, parce que l'art est solitaire et spirituel. Un artiste en tant qu'artiste est sujet d'un royaume qui n'est pas de ce monde.<sup>41</sup>

This last passage could have been written by Grass. Both reject submission to a party line for the same reason. If literature is to be governed by laws imposed on it from outside, it turns to propaganda. Thus both authors reserve themselves the right to revert to their individual status as writers.

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39) 'sa politique': i.e. the policies of the PCF.

40) QLL p.318

41) Débat sur l'art contemporain, Neuchâtel 1949, p.151

However, such an overlap should not blind us to the essential intellectual differences which separate Sartre from Grass. Grass is a Social Democrat of the most pragmatic kind. To him politics is a fighting out of conflicts on a day-to-day basis, in which literature has no part at all - this at least is his theory.

Sartre, on the other hand, may be an anti-ideologist, but he remains a Marxist still. He is too much of an aesthete to write for the Communist Party. At the same time, his social conscience is too restive to exempt literature from its social responsibility. He must find a compromise, whereby he contributes towards the realisation of a classless society, without, however, prostituting his art. This problem can only be solved by finding the right kind of readership. Thus Sartre discovers a sociological solution to an aesthetic problem, once again showing how closely interwoven literature and society are.

The vital importance of the reader's role in Sartre's theory of literature has already been indicated in the opening pages and discussed in the first half of this chapter. To Balz, this aspect of Sartre's theory constitutes its originality:

Die Hauptsache, das, was das Engagement von Sartre bezeichnen will, ist...der

Konnex zwischen dem Warum und  
Für Wen, der Publikumsfrage.<sup>42</sup>

There are two angles to Sartre's concept of the reader, both of which we have already encountered. In 'Pourquoi écrire?' Sartre described the reader's philosophical indispensability; his focus of attention there had been the abstract reader, or more precisely the philosophical and artistic implications of each individual act of reading. This aspect is also of some interest to Grass.

The sociological angle is of no relevance to Grass. Sartre introduced this problem in 'Pour qui écrit-on?', a section in which he investigates both the formation of homogeneous groups of readers and their political potential. In both instances, whether we consider the philosophical or the sociological aspect, the reader fulfils the same function:

Der Leser steht mit dem Autor auf  
gleicher Stufe, durch dessen Appell  
er zur Weltverantwortung aufgefor-  
dert wird, zur politischen Aktion,  
zur Praxis und zum Machen.<sup>43</sup>

In exchange, the author has to assume his 'historicity'. There is no such thing as a 'conscience privilégiée', Sartre argues, 'les belles lettres ne sont pas des lettres de noblesse.' Grass fully shares Sartre's debunking attitude to the cult of the artist. Both

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42) Heinrich Balz: op.cit. p.151

43) ibid, p.153

agree that it is high time for the writer to admit that he is just as much 'en situation' as the reader himself. Only then will a genuine reconciliation between writer and reader be possible.

To bring about this reconciliation is, according to Sartre, the writer's most pressing task in the post-war period. It is particularly difficult, because the notion of a unified reading public no longer applies: 'Nous avons des lecteurs, mais pas de public',<sup>44</sup> Sartre complains. It is only in the bourgeoisie that his readers can be found. But the bourgeois Sartre has nothing to say to his own class. His goal is to reach the working class, which is inaccessible, because the Communist Party bars the way. So, for the time being, he has to look for a 'public virtuel' elsewhere. Some of his potential readers would be teachers, intellectuals and non-Communist workers. In order to appeal to them, the writer will have to take recourse to the mass media. But, Sartre assures us, this is not tantamount to vulgarisation:

Il ne convient pas de s'abaisser pour plaire, mais, au contraire, de révéler au public ses exigences propres et de l'élever, petit à petit, jusqu'à ce qu'il ait besoin de lire.<sup>45</sup>

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44) QLL p,295

45) QLL p.323

The final stage of his campaign would be to weld together readers, listeners and viewers alike into one organic whole. This problem can be solved only by the nature of the work of art itself.

When Sartre develops his ideas on the individual reader, there are a number of points of contact with Grass. We have two references where Grass explicitly mentions the reader, both of which occur in his speech Über meinen Lehrer Döblin<sup>46</sup>. In the first one he quotes Döblin's emphasis on the reader's independence from the author:

Der Gegenstand des Romans ist die entfesselte Realität, der Leser in voller Unabhängigkeit einem gestalteten gewordenen Ablauf gegenübergestellt; er mag urteilen, nicht der Autor! 47

The second one acts as a conclusion to his eulogy on Döblin:

Er [Döblin] wird sie beunruhigen; er wird ihre Träume beschweren; sie werden zu schlucken haben; er wird ihnen nicht schmecken; unverdaulich ist er, auch unbekömmlich. Den Leser wird er ändern. Wer sich selbst genügt, sei vor Döblin gewarnt.<sup>48</sup>

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46) Günter Grass: Über meinen Lehrer Döblin und andere Vorträge, Berlin, 1968

47) Op. cit. p.11

48) Ibid, p.26

These remarks coincide so perfectly with the core of Sartre's elaborate theory that we are struck by the affinity between Sartre and Grass. Sartre's works do not wish to please either:

Elles irritent et inquiètent, elles se proposent comme des tâches à remplir, elles invitent à des quêtes sans conclusion, elles font assister à des expériences dont l'issue demeure incertaine. Fruits de tourments et de questions, elles ne sauraient être jouissance pour le lecteur, mais questions et tourments...Elles ne donneront pas le monde à voir, mais à changer.<sup>49</sup>

In a different essay, entitled Que peut la littérature?<sup>50</sup> Sartre approaches the question not from the writer's but from the reader's point of view. Although this essay was written some twenty years later, his position has hardly changed. The only change is one of perspective, a shift away from the socio-political to the purely private aspect, a point of departure which lends itself better to a comparison with Grass. Here he maintains that what makes people read is a search for a meaning which they cannot find in their own lives. But he immediately qualifies this statement:

[Le lecteur] aura maintenant une espèce de sens de sa vie, un sens obscur, pas un sens élucidé, pas

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49) QLLpp, 284-5

50) Que peut la littérature?, présentation par Yves Buim, Paris 1965, pp.125-6



un sens avec des concepts, car on ne lui parlera pas en concepts dans la littérature... on lui parlera de lui avec l'épaisseur d'un style, avec une manière d'être, de le mettre en situation qui doit elle-même être obscure. Il ne s'agit pas d'élucider, mais il s'agit simplement de lui donner une sorte de sens total de lui-même... Cela, je crois que la littérature le peut, ou du moins une certaine littérature.<sup>51</sup>

The 'certaine littérature' Sartre is referring to is, of course, littérature engagée. His notion of committed literature emerges from the confrontation between a literature of 'praxis' and a literature of 'exis', a literature of production and one of consumption, a concrete and an abstract literature. Once a synthesis of these opposites has been achieved, literature will have found its essence. Such a synthesis would result, to use Sartre's terminology, in a 'littérature totale'.

We remember from the above quotation that Sartre's literature is not one of concepts. In fact, it is a creation 'qui ne se laisse jamais tout à fait penser';<sup>52</sup> furthermore, 'l'artiste a besoin d'une matière inassimilable, parce que la beauté ne se résout

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51) Que peut la littérature?, pp.126-7

52) QLL p.144

pas en idées.'<sup>53</sup> We find the same view reiterated in Grass's essay Der Inhalt als Widerstand<sup>54</sup>. 'Opacité' and 'spontanéité' are essential attributes to Sartre. Grass postulates similar values in his essay Das Gelegenheitsgedicht<sup>55</sup>. Both arrive at a new definition of beauty. Sartre states:

Nous ne définirons plus, je crois,  
la beauté par la forme, ni même  
par la matière, mais par la densité  
d'être.<sup>56</sup>

And Grass praises Döblin's work for its 'entfesselte Realität', in other words its density. Sartre defines his notion of density further as

...la multiplicité des relations  
pratiques qu'elles entretiendront  
avec les personnages.<sup>57</sup>

Grass's definition aims in the same direction, when he writes:

Ihm Döblin liegt am wirren Hin  
und Her...; ihm liegt an labyrinthischen...Intrigen.<sup>58</sup>

Such a form of literary reality can only exist where

53) QLL p.144

54) Über meinen Lehrer Döblin, pp.56-63

55) Ibid, pp.63-67. The full title of the essay is as follows: Das Gelegenheitsgedicht oder - es ist immer noch, frei nach Picasso, verboten, mit dem Piloten zu sprechen,

56) QLL p.276

57) QLL p.287

58) Über meinen Lehrer Döblin, p.13

freedom of expression is safeguarded. Grass, and what is more surprising Sartre, categorically affirms the autonomy of literature<sup>59</sup>; they both refuse to make it subservient to any power or ideology.

The conflict between end and means seems firmly rooted in Sartre's philosophy. On the one hand, literature is to be a means in the class struggle; on the other, it is an end in itself. There is, however, a partial solution: whether literature be a means or an end, freedom is its subject as well as its aim. But, as this freedom can only be experienced in a socialist society, political and aesthetic demands merge in one common goal. It is this conviction which makes Sartre proclaim:

En un mot, nous devons dans nos écrits militer en faveur de la liberté de la personne et de la révolution socialiste. On a souvent prétendu qu'elles n'étaient pas conciliables: c'est notre affaire de montrer inlassablement qu'elles s'impliquent l'une l'autre.<sup>60</sup>

The last statement crystallises again the ideological differences between Grass and Sartre. Grass, too, believes in the freedom of the individual, the struggle for which is amply illustrated by Oskar in Die Blechtrommel and Amsel in Hundejahre. When it comes to the socialist revolution, Grass and Sartre part

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59) QLL p.181

60) QLL p.332

company, politically and aesthetically. Social democracy is Grass's political ideal; the mere idea of an overthrow is preposterous to him, and he finds it even more preposterous that this aim should be attempted by literary means.<sup>61</sup>

As to specifying the aims of literature in non-political terms, there is again a wide area of agreement. For instance, the written work - contrary to Sartre's previous claims - is to be a prerequisite to action, rather than action itself. It represents 'le moment de la conscience réflexive'. Grass would support this opinion. One of his motives for writing is to 'enlighten' the reader's consciousness, so that he may have a better understanding of his historical situation, an understanding that would prevent a repetition of disastrous events. When it comes to endorsing either l'art pour l'art or littérature engagée, Grass's practice and even his latest remarks on the subject, indicate full agreement with Sartre's postulate:

Il est à souhaiter que la littérature entière devienne morale et problématique...Morale - non pas moralisatrice.<sup>62</sup>

61) See: Die Plebejer proben den Aufstand, which dramatises this very problem: the legitimacy and effectiveness of art as a means to revolution.

62) QLL p.352

The practice of a littérature engagée extends to form as well as contents. The question arises of the narrative perspective. The 'engaged' writer is, as the term implies, 'engaged' in his time, he is like everybody else, en situation. Who is he to set himself up as omniscient? Such pretence of the narrators of nineteenth-century novels meets with Sartre's disapproval. Sartre's novelist must not show any signs of his control, 'because to do so reveals that he is "playing God"'.<sup>63</sup> Sartre's aim as a novelist is to create

une orchestration de consciences  
qui nous permette de rendre la  
pluridimensionalité à l'événement.<sup>64</sup>

Grass's position on this point is more ambivalent. His 'dramatised' narrators pay lip service to the idea of omniscience, and yet at the same time, their accounts negate its very possibility. Oskar in Die Blechtrommel and Amsel/Brauxel of Hundejahre claim to be omniscient. But their omniscience is constantly put into question, not least by the narrators themselves. Oskar, for instance, gives one version of an event and immediately supplements it by another. He wants the reader to believe that the second version

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63) W.C. Booth: The Rhetoric of Fiction, Chicago 1961, p.51

64) QLL p.371

is the 'true' one. But the reader knows from his own reading of the novel that Oskar does not know the truth himself. Thus Oskar's omniscience becomes a mockery and the reader is left with the impression that nothing is certain, and that absolute knowledge is unattainable. Grass and Sartre conclude that this is the only insight worthy of communication in their writings. 7

Notwithstanding this scepticism, there are ideas worth fighting for. Naturally, these ideas will be primarily based on the respective ideologies of the two writers. Grass will not support Sartre's plea to abolish the class structure or the workers' alienation. However, abolition of dictatorship, and the necessity for the constant renewal of society are also central themes in Grass's work. Whenever Sartre leaves his Marxist premises, their preoccupations are very similar. Many questions suggested by Sartre are also asked by Grass. What is the relationship between morals and politics? What is man in relation to history? And even more fundamental: What is man? 808

Est-on ce qu'on fait? Ce qu'on se fait?...Que faire, quelle fin choisir aujourd'hui? Et comment faire, par quels moyens?<sup>65</sup>

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65) QLL p.284

Both Sartre and Grass find these questions, at the heart of a littérature engagée, ultimately unanswerable. The writer is as much at a loss as the reader. The following passage shows once again how far removed Sartre is from the straightforward didactic prose he is usually associated with. In his Présentation des Temps Modernes he warns the reader:

Je rappelle, en effet, que dans la 'littérature engagée' l'engagement ne doit en aucun cas, faire oublier la littérature et que notre préoccupation doit être de servir la littérature en lui infusant un sang nouveau, tout autant que de servir la collectivité en essayant de lui donner la littérature qui lui convient.<sup>66</sup>

The difficulty in presenting Sartre's aesthetic theories is that he himself was torn between a desire to be politically effective and to preserve his independence in aesthetic matters. Only too often is Sartre's commitment seen as exclusively political. This misconception, arising from the essential ambiguity of Sartre's concept of commitment, can be corrected by examining its aesthetic aspects.

In fact, it is the contradictions which he so courageously allows to mark his writing which make a

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66) Présentation des Temps Modernes in Situations II, Paris 1948, p.30

comparison with Grass possible:

...il nous fallait...peupler nos livres de consciences à demi lucides et à demi obscures..., présenter des créations dont la réalité serait le tissu embrouillé et contradictoire...; il nous fallait enfin laisser partout des doutes, des attentes, de l'inachevé et réduire le lecteur à faire lui-même des conjectures...<sup>67</sup>

Twenty years later he reinforces this attitude to littérature engagée. In a comparison between two texts dealing with the nuclear threat, one explicitly, one implicitly, Sartre expresses his preference for the latter:

De ces deux manuscrits, celui qui parlait de la bombe atomique, en vérité n'en parlait pas, et celui qui n'en parlait pas, en parlait.<sup>68</sup>

And he concludes:

Donc, le vrai problème n'est pas, comme on l'a souvent dit, que la littérature engagée se mette à parler de tout ce qui est en question dans l'univers social; il s'agit simplement que l'homme dont on nous parle,...soit plongé dans cet univers et qu'il puisse effectuer librement cette saisie de significations, ce qu'il ne peut pas faire autrement.<sup>69</sup>

Sartre's preceding observations suggest that there

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67) QLL p.271

68) Que peut la littérature? pp.125-6

69) Ibid, p.126



are two distinct ways of formulating one's commitment, explicitly and implicitly. In his essay on Engagement<sup>70</sup> Adorno classifies them as Tendenz and Engagement. Both forms of commitment proceed from a different level of awareness in the author, and the outcome will often depend on the author's intentions.

With Tendenz the message takes precedence over the artistic creation; with Engagement the moral aspect evolves simultaneously with the creation of the work of art; it is totally embedded in an aesthetic framework. Both forms are politically motivated. In both cases the author considers himself to be a critic of his time. Provoked by a sense of moral outrage, he wishes to express disapproval, he reveals the inadequacies of existing social conditions, in order to show the necessity for change. The emphasis is on a specific socio-economic change in the case of Tendenz, a change of heart in the case of Engagement. Both believe in destroying false values. Their aim is to clarify and to enlighten. The reader is to be drawn into the work of art and the insights which he deduces from it are to shake him into greater self-awareness and action.

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70) Theodor W. Adorno: Noten zur Literatur III, Frankfurt, 1965, p.113

Despite their numerous points of contact, the differences between Tendenz and Engagement result from diametrically opposed philosophies of life. Tendentious writing has a particular purpose; it can plead for a concrete piece of legislation or long term social change. Its primary value is functional and depends, in theory at least, on the extent of its practical success. 'Engaged' literature does not confine itself to one standpoint only; its value rests within the work and is not primarily concerned with practical effect.

The tendentious writer destroys, but indicates a definite alternative; the 'engaged' writer has no alternative to offer. They both depart from a set of values, the tendentious writer's approach will be normative, the 'engaged' writer will be speculative. In the first example a collective group will form the basis for a moral code; in the second, the basis will be the individual. The aim of the tendentious writer is to find objective solutions, the 'engaged' writer can speak only for himself. Both believe that man needs to be helped; but in the final analysis man must be his own liberator.

Both Tendenz and Engagement establish links between individual destinies and politics, but their treatment

of characters differs. The characters in the tendentious work will be mere mouth-pieces for the author's intentions. The characters in the 'engaged' work will disentangle their problems in an individual way, they are unaware of their political function; the background is only political by implication.

As often happens in matters of literary classification, neither Grass nor Sartre can be neatly fitted into either category. Both writers contain elements of Engagement and Tendenz. From the writer, Sartre demands Engagement, from the reader, Tendenz. In other words, the reader is to turn the writer's question marks into exclamation marks. The writer reveals a certain aspect of the world; the reader responds to this revelation as a challenge to act. By such a distribution of roles, Sartre can fulfil both his aesthetic and political ambitions.

In the case of Grass, the respective roles of reader and writer are individualised within each novel. Die Blechtrommel is a clear example of Engagement; Hundejahre can be described as a work of transition; Die Plebejer proben den Aufstand marks the turning point and Örtlich Betäubt can serve as an example of Tendenz. Despite his protests of aesthetic independence, Grass moves from Engagement to Tendenz. The following chapters will trace this evolution.

CHAPTER TWOGRASS AND COMMITMENT

Sartre's essay Qu'est-ce que la littérature? is a systematic examination of commitment, analysing both the writer's relationship to commitment in his own work, and, in general, the French writer's relationship to his society. Grass does not present us with an equivalent theory of commitment. Far from it; whenever he comments on the subject, and his comments are few in number, he dismisses it as an artificial problem. In one of his lectures, for instance, he complains that students never weary of asking questions like

"Soll sich der Schriftsteller engagieren?" - "Wie weit darf sich der Schriftsteller engagieren?"<sup>1</sup>

His own attitude to the subject reveals intense irritation with such academic exercises. Grass claims that obsessive preoccupation with this topic is sheer self-indulgence, a cheap substitute for active participation in the political battle, a sop to the guilty consciences of those who find grassroot politics

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1) Vom mangelnden Selbstvertrauen der schreibenden Hofnarren unter Berücksichtigung nicht vorhandener Höfe, in Über das Selbstverständliche, Neuwied, 1968, p.111 (to be subsequently referred to as UDS)

intellectually distasteful.

Grass himself will only allow one definition of commitment: 'Sich engagieren, heißt...frei übersetzt, etwas tun.'<sup>2</sup> With Sartre, the notion of commitment preceded practical political action. Grass confines himself to practical action. The existence of his election speeches, essays, letters and commentaries on current German affairs is in itself concrete evidence of his commitment. Another difference with Sartre is that he speaks exclusively in his capacity as a writer, whereas Grass speaks primarily in his capacity as a citizen - the fact that he is a writer is supposed to be purely accidental.

Sartre's aim is to show how the post-war writer can use his influence on the reading public by committing himself politically in his prose. Grass's aim is far more tangible: his concern is to incite the German electorate to cast their votes for Willy Brandt. Whilst both writers endorse the same goal, namely to make their public participate in social issues affecting the society in which they live, they part company in their conception of what their medium of action should be; for the Sartre of the 1940s it is literature.

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2) Theater 1969, Velber bei Hannover, p.14

For Grass it can only be the political arena itself.

Grass's political beginnings can be traced back to 1961, when he contributed to a pre-election paperback entitled Die Alternative oder brauchen wir eine neue Regierung?<sup>3</sup> At that time many leftist writers from the Group 47 joined forces in their opposition to successive CDU governments, urgently pleading with the public to vote for the German Social Democratic Party, the SPD. In 1961 a process of polarisation set in, which reached its climax with the 1969 election. Whereas most of Grass's colleagues, notably Martin Walser, the editor of the above-mentioned paperback, expressed their disgust with the German political scene by opting out of the established parliamentary framework altogether, Grass's tentative support for the SPD in 1961 has been transformed into a positive identification with it by 1969. The reversal of the SPD's role from a party of opposition to a party of government has meant an equally drastic adjustment for Grass: the protester against government politics is now assuming the role of defender. X

The difference in tone is quite striking: in 1961 Grass's recommendation to support the SPD was lukewarm.

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3) Die Alternative oder brauchen wir eine neue Regierung, Reinbek, 1961

The party figured as 'Tante SPD', as his 'schlechtes Gewissen', and even its potential election to office would represent no more than a 'faint hope'<sup>4</sup> on his political horizon. It is in these terms that he addresses himself to the floating voter and to his readers. In that same essay he tells them:

nicht...daß Oskar Matzerath SPD wählt, aber sein Sohn und Halbbruder Kurt - ein blasses, in- zwischen wahlberechtigtes Bengelchen hat mir versprochen... SPD zu wählen,

and he comes to the sarcastic conclusion:

ein Beweis mehr, wie einflußreich Schriftsteller sein können.<sup>5</sup>

As if to defy this realistic insight into the limitations of a writer's political influence, he made a serious intervention, this time explicitly in his capacity as a writer, when he wrote to Anna Seghers, urging her to raise her voice in protest against the erection of the Berlin Wall in 1961. Although Grass professes

...es(hat) keinen Sinn...vom Verhalten der Schriftsteller in der Gesellschaft zu sprechen...<sup>6</sup>

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4) Günter Grass: Dokumente zur politischen Wirkung, herausgegeben von Heinz Ludwig Arnold und Franz Josef Görztz, München 1971, (to be subsequently referred to as Grass Dokumente), p.3

5) Grass Dokumente, p.4

6) UDS, p.111

his letter to Anna Seghers clearly reveals that the writer has a special part to play. In fact, Grass specifically refers to her moral role as a writer<sup>7</sup> and reminds her of the impact which her novel Das siebte Kreuz had made on him, how it 'formed' him and 'sharpened his eye'. Similarly, the motto of one of his election speeches, Bücher für die Bundeswehr<sup>8</sup>, also indicates that in Grass's view literature has an important educational function, to which purpose he will dedicate the financial returns of his election meetings.

But can Grass's emphasis in the political influence of other people's literature be applied to his own production? Does his own work also represent a symbiosis between art and politics? And does this symbiosis, which some critics see realised in his work, correspond to Grass's view of himself? On very rare occasions - for remarks to the contrary are the norm - Grass alludes to a kind of unity between the two activities, when he says, for instance, that his election speeches and his fiction are 'written with the same ink'<sup>9</sup>, or that it is the same impulse that drives him

*meaning?*

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7) 'Brief an Anna Seghers', Grass Dokumente, p.6

8) UDS, p.8

9) Grass Dokumente, p.34



into literature and politics.

Wer genau hinsieht, wird bemerken, daß meine literarische Arbeit, wie mein Versuch, in der Politik Bürgerrechte wahrzunehmen, den gleichen Ansatz haben.<sup>10</sup>

The 'Ansatz' referred to is the will to educate, to enlighten, to spread reason, the leitmotif of his 1965 election speeches. At that stage he set out as a private individual, as a 'citizen among citizens', as a 'Berliner', as a 'German', as a 'political adversary' who wants to give a 'praktisches Beispiel staatsbürgerlicher Initiative'<sup>11</sup>, but never does he address his audience as a writer tout court. As, in contrast to himself, most of his colleagues make their public stands in their capacity as writers, a good deal of Grass's energies are spent in denigrating them. The following indictment stands for many:

(ich) klage an unsere Hohepriester der knitterfreien Biographie, die sich das possierliche Vorrecht, Gewissen der Nation spielen zu dürfen, jeweils im Feuilleton irgendeiner halbliberalen Zeitung abverdienen. Wer kennt sie nicht ihre feinziselierten Entrüstungsschreie? Wer genösse nicht... ihre einerseits-andererseits-Springprozeßion? Dem einen fällt zu jeder Affäre ein manierlich Bonmot ein. Dem anderen versagt geistreich... die Sprache. "Peinlich, peinlich..." murmelt erschüttert der dritte. So klopfen sie ihre tollkühnen Sprüche und besingen in windstillen Reservaten, jeweils nach Anfrage:

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10) Der Spiegel, Nr.33 (1969), p.94

11) UDS, p.8

Die Freiheit des Geistes, die Unabhängigkeit der Intellektuellen und die Schwierigkeit beim Schreiben der Wahrheit. Gottähnlich tänzelnd über den Abgasen unserer Gesellschaft, ordnen sie ihren Seminar-Marxismus gleich Schäfchenwolken und sorgen sich um Indochina und Persien, also um weitentlegenes Elend, das sie, dank ihrer geistigen Hochstände, mühelos einsehen können. Eher gelänge ihrer Tinte ein hymnisch langes Heldenepos auf Fidel Castro und die Zuckerrohrinsel, als daß ihnen einfiele, mit einem schlichten Plädoyer für Willy Brandt der Lüge im eigenen Land die Beine zu verkürzen.<sup>12</sup>

As his speech gathers momentum, his polemics verge on vindictiveness. He summons his audience not to be taken in by this intellectual elite, these 'impersonators of Germany's conscience', because they have never descended to the people, but kept themselves in perfect purity, praising peace and condemning the atom bomb.

Grass projects himself as someone who does feel for the common man, as the down-to-earth political thinker who accepts the challenge of reality as his point of departure. The desire for absolutes he leaves to his utopian colleagues, whereas he himself chooses compromise as the essence of politically viable solutions. Pragmatism, a word of abuse to them, is a worthwhile

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12) UDS p.94-5

objective to him; it is not to be confounded with opportunism.

After reason, tolerance, this other eighteenth-century virtue, is held up as a desirable goal. In his Theodor-Heuß lecture, Toleranz ist unsere Stärke,<sup>13</sup> he speaks up for the re-introduction of the Communist Party (which was still illegal in 1969) and warns politicians against the banning of the NPD, the neo-Nazi party. He does this in the name of tolerance, because

tolerant sein heißt: Widersprüche aushalten können, heißt: den Kompromiß als Lösung respektieren, heißt: die Wahrheit der anderen gegen den ausschließlichen Anspruch der eigenen Wahrheit verteidigen.

And that is why the SPD was wrong to expel the SDS, the Socialist Student League. Grass is convinced that the SDS would not have veered towards utopianism and radicalism had it been allowed to argue out its views inside the party. At that time Grass still had some hopes of mediating between the extreme student Left and the power-minded SPD, hopes that were dwindling rapidly, as the following description of his position illustrates:

Natürlich ist es löblich, weiterhin der Vernunft das Wort zu reden. Natürlich bietet sich jeden Tag Anlaß, mit wenig Erfolg

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13) Die Zeit, 7. February 1969, p.3

zwischen verhärteten Fronten zu vermitteln. Natürlich ist es moralisch einträglich, zwischen Brandstiftern als rührender Feuerwehrmann herumzulaufen, und, wenn man will, kann man auch geraume Zeit lang mehr oder weniger unbequem - und ich habe Übung darin - zwischen den Stühlen sitzen, bis, ja, bis man zerrieben wird; als Liberaler, als nützlicher Idiot der einen oder der anderen Seite, als ein Naivling, der immer noch glaubt, man könne an der sozialen Demokratie auf evolutionäre Weise weiterbauen.<sup>14</sup>

In this speech delivered shortly after the attempted murder of the then leader of the SDS, Rudi Dutschke, by the neo-Nazi youth Bachmann, he despairs at the resurgence of right and left-wing extremism. As both resort more and more to violence, reason, tolerance and compromise are suffocated as possible reconciliators. All Grass's political endeavours are variations on one theme: beware of extremism, right or left, beware of ideologies, beware of dogmas, systems, religions and utopias. Man is self-made, and history is man-made. There is no room for fatalism or predestination of any kind. The question arises whether Grass's credo is not a utopia, just as much a utopia as that of his ideology-bound, 'red ivory tower', Marxist fellow writers. But there remains one difference: Grass's beliefs actually engender a concrete

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14) UDS München 1969. p.170

political programme; theirs do not.

In 1965, during his first election campaign, the conscious non-party member Grass was still considered an embarrassment by the officials of the Social Democrats, the SPD. Whereas the SPD tried to wean away the middle classes from the Christian Democrats, the CDU, by appearing as respectable and trustworthy as possible, Grass deliberately upset the balance by emphasising the real differences between the two parties: not only did he proudly remind the public of the SPD's working-class origins, but he put forward controversial policies, which the SPD would rather have left out during an election. Grass's demand for the recognition of the Oder-Neiße Line was the sorest point. But when he dealt with issues like Emergency Laws, the monopoly of the right-wing Springer press, university reform, the Health Service, abortion and illegitimacy, he was broadly expounding the official SPD line, as he was in fact doing much more explicitly in 1969. Although he is not a regular member, even now, his identification with Willy Brandt's party is almost complete by 1969.

Unlike his private tour in 1965, Grass's 1969 election campaign was not only encouraged, but officially sponsored

by the SPD. The politician Grass is not without his contradictions: in 1966 he wrote an open letter to Willy Brandt, pleading with him not to enter the Great Coalition under the chancellorship of the ex-National Socialist Georg Kiesinger. If Brandt were 'to act as best man' at the 'ill-matched marriage' of the coalition, Grass forecasts that Brandt's decision

wird mich und viele meiner Freunde gegen ihren und meinen Willen, in eine linke Ecke drängen und zum bloßen und obendrein politisch machtlosen Widerpart der NPD degradieren. Wie sollen wir weiterhin die SPD als Alternative verteidigen, wenn das Profil eines Willy Brandt im Proporz-Einerlei der Großen Koalition nicht mehr zu erkennen sein wird?

Four years later, he not only congratulates the SPD on its successes as a coalition partner, but campaigns on its behalf more fervently than ever. In 1968, he said the SPD should look for its allies 'among the young protesters on the Left'; in 1969, he fought the extreme Left with even greater venom than the extreme Right. To critics accusing him of opportunism, Grass would reply that he simply practises what he preaches, that his changing attitudes were pragmatism in action.

Grass's political programme is a direct outcome of

his belief in civic responsibilities. They themselves constitute his commitment. Theories of commitment, whether in politics or in literature, he leaves to his misguided colleagues - the practice is his. We stressed civic responsibilities, and yet we know that despite, or precisely because of, his loud protestations, Grass does not do something self-evident<sup>16</sup> when he campaigns for the SPD, that he is both exploiting his fame and feeling self-conscious about his position as a writer. To bridge the gap between his electioneering and his writing, he pre-emptively possible ridicule by anticipating the public's misgivings:

Es kommt jemand daher und hat einen verdächtigen Beruf. Er erzählt Geschichten...Sollte er nicht bei seinen Geschichten bleiben und den Politikern die Politik...überlassen? - Politik ist keine Geheimwissenschaft.<sup>17</sup>

In the next quotation taken from the same speech there is a hint of a possible link-up between the writer's and the politician's trade:

Wer sprach hier und zu wem? Jemand, der über Hundejahre berichtet hat, der der Schuld den Magen umstülpte und auf Trümmer- und Schrottplätzen nach Spuren der Scham gestochert hat.<sup>18</sup>

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16) See the title of one of his speeches: UDS p.84

17) UDS p.15

18) UDS p.20; 'Hundejahre' is also a direct reference to his third novel.

But how much more unequivocally is this fusion between politics and literature recognised in other people's works: Anna Seghers was one example, Georg Büchner another:

Ich soll also...eine Preisrede halten, die einem deutschen Schriftsteller Reverenz erweisen soll, dessen schmales und immer noch feuergefährliches Werk, nicht zuletzt, meinen Entschluß, den Mund aufzumachen, gefördert und den Stil meiner Wahlreden beeinflußt hat.<sup>19</sup>

Alfred Döblin is a third example. If we want to ascertain Grass's views on the question of political commitment in literature, rather than learn about the impact of literature on man's political consciousness, we must consult Grass's lecture Über meinen Lehrer Döblin. Like Grass, Döblin was an SPD activist, a man of day-to-day politics, not afraid of direct participation. No wonder that such natural affinity between the two men produces a high degree of self-projection. Grass makes Döblin the paradigm of the writer-politician. As we know already from his exceptional admission that the same impulse drives him into politics and literature, we shall not be too surprised to find that Grass's ideas and preferences in politics also extend to literature. In his lecture, he quotes Döblin's definition of the novel as being

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19) UDS p.97



a 'manifesto' behind which the author hides, leaving the reader to judge independently, irrespective of the author's intentions. The ideology of that manifesto is that of anti-ideology. Both Grass and Döblin believe in an anti-theoretical, anti-dogmatic approach to artistic creation. The novel is to capture reality in all its breathlessness and versatility, without subjugating it to theories.

Döblin's novel Wallenstein exemplifies all the features which Grass admires in his teacher. The fact that Grass should pick on this novel, rather than on Döblin's masterpiece Berlin Alexanderplatz, is in itself remarkable. No doubt, the historical subject matter must have determined his choice; for Grass himself shows a certain predisposition for history, from Die Blechtrommel to his latest novel örtlich betäubt. Hence, Grass's analysis of Wallenstein concentrates on the treatment of history as a particular kind of reality.

The beginning of his lecture is confusingly provocative:

...Wallenstein (ist) kein historischer Roman. Döblin sieht Geschichte als absurden Prozeß.<sup>20</sup>

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20) Über meinen Lehrer Döblin, p.8

So does Grass. And yet, neither of them resigns himself to inactivity as a logical conclusion to this insight; they both involve themselves in party politics. In their art, identical techniques reflect their common concept of history. When Grass points out that Döblin relegates the most vital historical material to subsidiary clauses, he might as well be talking about his own novels.

Döblin's Wallenstein, far from being the powerful warrior we know from Schiller's tragedy, is above all a ruthless financial genius who only occasionally fights battles, using armies as a capital investment. Grass shudders at the accuracy of Döblin's retrospective vision, because in Grass's view, Döblin's rendering of the Thirty Years' War is in some measure an anticipation of the economic background of German militarism in both World Wars:

Die Armee als Kapitalanlage.  
 Döblins rückblickende Vision  
 läßt uns erschrecken: lange  
 bevor Krupp vor Verdun sein  
 großes Geschäft machte, inves-  
 tierte Wallenstein sein Ver-  
 mögen in Rüstungsgeschäfte.  
 Krupp wie Wallenstein kauften  
 sich je einen Kaiser. Und wir  
 wollen immer noch nicht erkennen,  
 daß Hitler sich nicht die Indus-  
 trie, daß vielmehr die Industrie -  
 Wallensteinsche Adepten - sich  
 ihren Hitler kaufte.<sup>21</sup>

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21) Über meinen Lehrer Döblin; p.17

Another political issue which Grass extracts from the novel concerns antisemitism:

Dieser Pakt Wallensteins mit den Juden, ein Motiv, das durch das gesamte...Werk Akzente setzt, verdient unsere Aufmerksamkeit, weil Döblich hier die Ursachen des mittelalterlichen Antisemitismus, der christlicher Natur war, mit der vorweggenommenen Emanzipation der Juden im 19. Jahrhundert konfrontiert und gleichzeitig den Beginn des Zionismus formuliert, seine kraftvolle Beharrlichkeit und seine ideologischen Gefahren.<sup>22</sup>

Finally, he offers an explanation for the failure of disarmament conferences, another issue which he extrapolates from Döblich's Wallenstein:

Seitdem Döblich uns lehrte, Wallenstein als Meister der Hochfinanz zu begreifen, wissen wir, daß Abrüstungsverhandlungen nicht immer am begrenzten Willen der Verhandlungspartner, wohl aber oft genug an den Interessen einer Industrie scheitern, die es verstanden hat, jedermanns wirtschaftliche Interessen zu vertreten: Abrüstung könnte uns in Schwierigkeiten bringen. Das System Wallenstein verlangt stehende Heere.<sup>23</sup>

Grass concludes his lecture by warmly recommending his master Döblich to the public, once again affirming his belief in the pedagogical function of literature.

(Döblich) wird Sie beunruhigen; er

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22) Über meinen Lehrer Döblich, p.26

23) Ibid, p.17

wird ihre Träume beschweren; sie  
 werden zu schlucken haben; er  
 wird ihnen nicht schmecken; unver-  
 daulich ist er, auch unbehaglich.  
 Den Leser wird er ändern. Wer sich  
 selbst genügt, sei vor Döblin  
 gewarnt.<sup>24</sup>

Über meinen Lehrer Döblin illustrated how an imagi-  
 native, anti-ideological approach to history can re-  
 present a comment and an explanation of contemporary  
 political issues, and thus reflect the writer's com-  
 mitment in his art. Grass's 'Shakespeare Speech'  
 with the deliberately presumptuous title Vor- und  
Nachgeschichte der Tragödie des Coriolanus von Livius  
und Plutarch über Shakespeare bis zu Brecht und mir,  
 also deals with the transformation of history in lite-  
 rature. It acts foremost as a preface to Grass's own  
 play Die Plebejer proben den Aufstand, thus anticipat-  
 ing an interpretation of his own as yet unwritten  
 play. But quite apart from the play, this 'Shakespeare  
 Speech' is an essential counterpart to Grass's 'Döblin  
 Speech': Döblin's Wallenstein served as an object of  
 demonstration for all the commendable things in lite-  
 rature. The phrasing of Grass's recommendation of  
 his master with the heavy stress on wanting to change  
 the reader reveals that Grass does believe in Engage-  
ment, as defined in the introductory chapter. Brecht's

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24) Über meinen Lehrer Döblin, p.26

Coriolan, on the other hand, is presented as the incarnation of ill-advised literary practice, which was defined as Tendenz.

In his address, Grass traces the relationship between Livy's and Plutarch's representation of the political theme of Coriolanus, and its literary appropriation by Shakespeare and Brecht. In fact, he uses Shakespeare's Coriolanus as a foil to show up the dramatic deficiencies of Brecht's Coriolan. Here, as in Döblin's Wallenstein, he deals with the question of history in literature as a reflection of current events. But in contrast to his approbatory attitude to Döblin's novel, he condemns Brecht's Marxist adaptation of Shakespeare's Coriolanus on the grounds that it involves a violation of Coriolanus's character:

Keine Partei kann ihn [Coriolanus]  
uminterpretieren, also für sich  
gewinnen, weil er nicht vieldeutig  
ist...<sup>25</sup>

by which Grass, paradoxically, means that Coriolanus 'steht zwischen beiden Klassen'<sup>26</sup>. This is Grass's reading of Shakespeare. But to Brecht, the self-

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25) Die Plebejer proben den Aufstand, Frankfurt 1968, pp.106-7

26) Ibid, p.107

declared enemy of the people, Coriolanus, is by definition a friend of its oppressors, the Patricians.

The whole line of Grass's argument comes down to the unforgivable reproach that Brecht falsifies Shakespeare. But even if one could accept Grass's view of Coriolanus, namely that Shakespeare concentrates exclusively on the psychology of the character and ignores political implications, why should Brecht be any less entitled to his Marxist interpretation of the play than Shakespeare was to his psychological one?

Grass tries to justify his criticism of Brecht's Coriolan as a failure on artistic grounds:

Seine Fassung hat der Tragödie das naive Gefälle genommen und an Stelle einen fleissigen Mechanismus gesetzt...<sup>27</sup>

He substantiates his verdict by illustrating how this mechanism is applied to the portrayal of the crowds and the tribunes. In Shakespeare, the plebeians are a despicable and selfish lot, only interested in the betterment of their material condition. In Brecht, they become class-conscious revolutionaries. Shakespeare's tragedy ends with the fall of a hero. Brecht's didactic play ends on a note of triumph for the plebeians. Grass's summary, contrasting the two versions,

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27) Die Plebejer proben den Aufstand, p.113

shows how Brecht manipulated the material to serve his own ideological purpose:

Dem Schema dieser Tendenz folgend, benehmen sich seine Tribunen: zeigt Shakespeare zwei verwechselbare Nullen,...gibt Brecht zwei listenreichen und fortschrittlichen Funktionären mehr und mehr die Macht. Wenn Shakespeare seinen Coriolanus einen hochverdienten Mann sein läßt, ...grenzt Brecht seinen Coriolanus als zwar tüchtigen und im Kriegsfall verwendbaren Spezialisten ein, der aber im Frieden seine Kompetenzen überschreitet und deshalb vom Volk und seinen gewählten Tribunen abgelöst wird.<sup>28</sup>

Grass takes violent exception to such tendentiousness.

He accuses Brecht of transforming the original

- und sei es unter Verzicht auf die blühendsten Dialogpassagen - zu einem Tendenzstück...<sup>29</sup>

For him, Brecht's Marxist adaptation simply exemplifies

wie der Wille zur Tendenz die Details verschleißt und Poesie allenfalls als kunstgewerbliches Putzmittel duldet.<sup>30</sup>

On the other hand, he is full of praise for Brecht's

adaptation of Marlowe's Edward II:

Brecht hat uns mit seinem Leben Eduards des Zweiten von England nach Marlowe bewiesen, wie kraftvolle Bearbeitung ein abgestandenes

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28) Die Plebejer proben den Aufstand, pp.107-8

29) Ibid, p.112

30) Ibid, p.113

Stück beleben, ja als Original der Bühne rückerstatten kann. Dem Coriolanus hat er diesen Dienst nicht erweisen können.<sup>31</sup>

Why defend this early adaptation of an Elizabethan play and rule out a later one? What have Döblin's Wallenstein and Brecht's Edward II in common? Grass may believe that his condemnation of Coriolan is based on purely aesthetic criteria, but we suspect that, underlying his aesthetic judgement, there lurks a political bias against Brecht's Marxism. This is also consistent with Grass's praise of Döblin's markedly non-ideological novel Wallenstein. The critic of art and the political activist get in each other's way.

*why not?*

Grass himself is convinced that he can successfully compartmentalise his writing and his political activities. And yet he made a speech which strangely reinforces our suspicions. In 1969 at a Writers' Congress in Belgrade, he delivered a lecture entitled Literatur und Revolution oder das schnaubende Steckpferd des Idyllikers<sup>32</sup> In this lecture, which reads like an appendix to his denunciation of Brecht's Coriolan, Grass mocks at the thesis that literature should be the maid of Revolution. He proclaims that the

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31) Die Plebejer proben den Aufstand, p.113

32) Grass Dokumente, pp.201-206



misinterpreted title of Trotsky's Literature and Revolution should give way to the less spectacular, but politically more mature motto of Literatur und die Republik. Grass's only hope for literature is that it should part from its cherished barricades and no longer escape into esoteric Romanticism. He declares that any self-respecting literature 'verlangt nach Wirklichkeit', by which he means, as we know from his Döblin speech, that a work of art should be an unfalsified verbal rendering of a complex reality, not subordinated to ideology.

Grass has come a long way. At the time of his famous Princeton Speech, he would never have made such an equation between literary and political practice. In this speech Vom mangelnden Selbstvertrauen der schreibenden Hofnarren unter Berücksichtigung nicht vorhandener Höfe (1966), the committed writer, for Grass invariably synonymous with the ideologically committed artist, is still held up to mockery. It is as if he deliberately drew a caricature, in order to ridicule it:

Da sitzt er also, der domestizierte Schriftsteller, und fürchtet sich bis zum Einschlafen vor Musen und Lorbeer. Seine Ängste sind Legion. Wiederholen wir: die Angst, Dichter genannt zu werden. Und die Angst, mißverstanden zu werden. Die Angst, nicht ernst genommen zu werden. Die Angst zu unterhalten, d.h. genossen

firmierter Literatur daneben,  
darunter und darüber nur noch  
nichtengagierte Literatur geben  
soll. Der nicht unerhebliche  
Rest wird als l'art pour l'art  
diffamiert,<sup>34</sup>

Grass's conception of the 'engagierter Schriftsteller' is so narrow that it can only apply to the ideologically committed writers. Engagement within Grass's terms of reference is the equivalent of Tendenz within ours, and Tendenz to him is, as we have seen in his treatment of Brecht, always ideological. But for Grass art cannot be the result of a conscious attitude. To him it is characterised by all the unpredictable, sensuous attributes sneered at by his hypothetical 'engaged' writer. His political activities, on the other hand, are the direct outcome of sober deliberations. Therefore, according to Grass himself, literature and politics are completely divorced from one another. Those writers who want to take part in politics, must be prepared to bolt from their desks and busy themselves with the 'trivia of democracy'. Armchair politicians are not for Grass.

Notwithstanding his implicit statements to the contrary, notwithstanding, above all, the evidence of his own literary practice, the only explicit statement

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34) UDS p.108

that Grass makes on the subject reads like an irreversible dictum that literature and politics are forever irreconcilable:

Seien wir uns dessen bewußt:  
das Gedicht kennt keine Kom-  
promisse; wir aber leben von  
Kompromissen.<sup>35</sup>

Nevertheless, the writer has a moral obligation to act. His political activities may seem foolish, but, paradoxically, they represent his only chance of being effective.

Wer diese Spannung tätig aushält,  
ist ein Narr und ändert die Welt.<sup>36</sup>

35) UDS p.112

36) UDS p.112

CHAPTER THREEDIE BLECHTROMMEL

If Grass was ever capable of sustaining this tension between writer and political activist, it is best evidenced in his first novel Die Blechtrommel. Before analysing the substance of Die Blechtrommel, the applicability of the previously defined criteria for commitment should be established. An essential question is whether Die Blechtrommel fits into the category of Engagement or Tendenz. Judging from Grass's essay on Döblin and Brecht, we should expect this novel to be an example of Engagement rather than Tendenz.

In chapter one the 'engaged' writer is considered a critic of his time. Accordingly, in his novel he would demonstrate disapproval of existing conditions by revealing the most unpleasant aspects of society, not for their own sake, but in order to show the necessity for change. Evidently Die Blechtrommel is a criticism of German society. It is an indictment against the people that made Hitler's rise possible, an indictment that extends to Germany's postwar development towards brute materialism. However adamant Die Blechtrommel is about the corruption of present-

day Germany, it does not contain a blueprint for reform. It calls for a reappraisal of moral values, without offering a clear alternative. This is, in fact, the most significant omission that marks Die Blechtrommel as an 'engaged' work, rather than a tendentious piece of writing.

Thus, Sartre's demand that the reader be drawn into the 'engaged' work of art as an accomplice - 'la lecture est un pacte de générosité entre l'auteur et le lecteur: chacun exige de l'autre autant qu'il exige de lui-même' - is fulfilled by Die Blechtrommel. The novel addresses itself directly to the reader, indeed urges him, to help Oskar in the reappraisal of his 'fragwürdige Existenz'. For, when at the end of the novel, Oskar evaluates the various modes of existence open to him after his dismissal from the institution, this is also an appeal to the reader to question his own way of life.

Oskar's search for a meaning in life leads to the question of morality as a basic concomitant of Engagement, if not its very essence<sup>1</sup>. For it is in this broad sense that the term of commitment will be used in this chapter. When examining Die Blechtrommel

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1) We remember Sartre's convincing distinction between 'moral' and 'moralising': see p. 43

from the point of view of Engagement, it is the question of morality, the ethical content of the novel, that is being investigated. At this early stage, Grass's work is not primarily concerned with specific political issues; here political awareness is synonymous with moral awareness. The kind of morality embodied in an 'engaged' work in contrast to a tendentious one, is characterised by its fluid, undoctinaire nature. One is not merely confronted with a single standpoint which sets out to win the reader over for a specific purpose, as in the case of polemic writing, but is instead presented with a whole string of contradictory points of view. So much so, that they seem to cancel each other out, until one realises that they can indeed coexist.

The ambivalent and paradoxical nature of morality inherent in Die Blechtrommel is perhaps the most fundamental characteristic of this novel. It is a determining factor both in Grass's style and in the choice of his symbols. Words, concepts, themes, even whole chapters in the novel generate their opposites. There are innumerable linguistic examples such as 'spannungsreiche(r) Frieden'<sup>2</sup> or 'getaufte Heiden'<sup>3</sup>. These are only two not very original

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2) Günter Grass: Die Blechtrommel, Frankfurt 1960 (Fischer edition): to be subsequently referred to as BT, p.44

3) BT p.64

instances, but the former one is sufficiently evocative to indicate how this dialectical wording conceals a potential explosive under the peaceful appearance of the Agnes-Jan-Matzerath triangle, and 'getaufte Heiden' instantly shows up the hollowness of baptism. Grass's language is itself a reflection of his commitment.

The linking of concepts in the novel expresses Grass's desire to join opposites normally held to be irreconcilable such as Jesus and Satan, Rasputin and Goethe, Dionysus and Apollo, Poland and Germany, Bronski and Matzerath. Here is an example:

Allein auf Rasputin wollte ich mich nicht verlassen, denn allzu bald wurde mir klar, daß auf dieser Welt jedem Rasputin ein Goethe gegenübersteht, daß Rasputin Goethe, oder der Goethe einen Rasputin nach sich zieht, sogar erschafft, wenn es sein muß, um ihn hinterher verurteilen zu können.<sup>4</sup>

An either-or type of thinking is alien to Grass. At the beginning of the novel he ridicules the policemen chasing the fugitive Koljaiczek with the following comment: 'Feldgendarmen kennen immer nur zwei Möglichkeiten'<sup>5</sup>. Only the resourceful person can conceive of other solutions, whether it be in concrete terms,

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4) BT p.74

5) BT p.16; see also one of his poems in Ausgefragt, p.14: 'Dieses Haus hat zwei Ausgänge/ich benutze den Dritten.'

like the grandmother's offer of refuge to Koljaiczek under her skirts, or through the medium of art. A very succinct example, where Oskar sets off the freedom of art against the inevitability of the laws of nature, is his remark on his holiday with Lankes in Brittany:

Oskar...war...den übertriebenen  
Geräuschen der Flut, des alten  
Kraftmeiers, ausgeliefert. Mit  
dem Fuß schob ich mir meine Trommel  
heran und begann trommelnd aus  
dieser Betonlandschaft, aus dieser  
Bunkerlandschaft...einen Ausweg  
zu suchen.<sup>6</sup>

The artist has a definite advantage in that his imagination will always know of a way out, inaccessible to the 'ordinary' person. (By the same token this last quotation could be construed as a wry comment on the impotence of art, for, although offering consolation, Oskar's drumming achieves nothing in practical terms. Oskar himself is not unaware of the limitation of his drumming: 'Wie ja auch Oskar gegen den Wind trommelte'<sup>7</sup>.)

Even the drum has its counterpart in Oskar's glass-shattering voice. Oskar, himself a split personality - he talks about his 'zwei Seelen' united in a single

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6) BT p.457

7) BT p.452



drum<sup>8</sup> - has a formidable antagonist in the 'Schwarze Köchin'. Omnipresent, although in varying degree, she too is evoked by one of her opposites, the white hospital bed, on the very first page of the novel.

The juxtaposition of contrasts can be followed right through the structure of Die Blechtrommel. The two chapters 'Kein Wunder' and 'Die Nachfolge Christi' are a case in point. The latter chapter, in which Jesus drums, seems to be a refutation of the former, where he refuses to drum. In fact, as will be shown later, rather than neutralising one another, the two chapters complement each other.

Grass's technique of proceeding by opposites could be interpreted as a reluctance to commit himself. This would be the case, if following thesis and anti-thesis, a synthesis were not always suggested. Explicitly, as in the case of Rasputin and Goethe<sup>9</sup> or Apollo and Dionysus<sup>10</sup>, or implicitly, as in the case of Oskar and the Black Witch<sup>11</sup> - the moral being that

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8) BT p.76

9) BT p.352: '...damit diese beiden Extreme endlich zu einer gültigen Verknotung kommen.'

10) BT p.267: 'Wenn Apollo die Harmonie, Dionysos Rausch und Chaos anstrebte, war Oskar ein kleiner, das Chaos harmonisierender, die Vernunft in Rauschzustände versetzender Halbgott...'

11) BT p.492

Oskar must come to terms with her. One key to the work could be seen in Oskar's vacillation between belief and disbelief. Viewed in this light, the novel itself becomes a discussion of commitment: on the one hand it parodies the limitations of commitment and exposes its meaninglessness when attached to the type of defunct morality pervading Die Blechtrommel; on the other, there is a strong suggestion that new moral guide-lines have to evolve; guide-lines that would resist all systematisation and thus might evade the danger of becoming stagnant. image

But the refusal to conform to the morality of the day - the Nazi regime in Oskar's case - entails intellectual and moral isolation. Oskar is painfully aware of his position of outsider, although he willed it himself. It is his individual solution to his particular dilemma, tentative and groping as it may be. Nor is this 'solution' valid for all times. Oskar's rejection of society during the Hitler regime is obviously approved of. But it is debatable whether his eventual withdrawal in the postwar years is not criticised by the author. Otherwise, why should Grass force Oskar to leave the asylum? Does the open end of the novel not conceal a secret plea for integration? Is Grass not implying that the outsider can no longer afford to remain outside,

because society depends on him? The value of the novel lies in its questioning character. In this, as in all the other respects, Die Blechtrommel corresponds perfectly to Sartre's expectations from 'engaged' works of art:

Elles irritent et inquiètent, elles se proposent comme des tâches à remplir, elles invitent à des quêtes sans conclusions, elles font assister à des expériences dont l'issue demeure incertaine...elles ne sauraient être jouissance pour le lecteur, mais questions et tourments...Elles ne donneraient pas le monde à voir, mais à changer.<sup>12</sup>

If Sartre and Grass believe in the necessity and the possibility of change, it is because they both adhere to the concept of free will. Sartre's rejection of determinism in favour of philosophical freedom is an integral part of his theory of littérature engagée. Die Blechtrommel dramatises man's struggle for self-determination through its main protagonist. Oskar believes in free will and in the power of the intellect, by which man imposes himself on matter, by which every man fights the 'Rasputin' inside himself. He convinces himself that nature is fully under his control, and considers it a personal insult whenever reality proves him wrong. The following apparently

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12) QLL p.284

insignificant observation is a standard reaction of his:

(ich) ließ mich leichtsinnigerweise mit einer Eule ein. Ich versuchte den Vogel zu fixieren, doch der fixierte mich; und Oskar schlich betroffen, mit heißen Ohren, im Zentrum verletzt davon...<sup>13</sup>

Defiance towards his own instincts overshadows with guilt feelings his whole attitude to sex:

Hatte der Herr da unten seinen eigenen Kopf, eigenen Willen? Zeugten Oskar, er oder ich?<sup>14</sup>

In his account, Oskar goes to great lengths to show that all his actions are self-willed. It is he who decides whether he wants to behave responsibly or irresponsibly<sup>15</sup>, it is he who assumes full responsibility for his interrupted growth<sup>16</sup>, he who resumes growth<sup>17</sup>. In fact, Oskar's self-assertion manifests itself in protest, so that protest is his form of commitment. The medium for his protest is art, his drum. Thus, the drum becomes a symbol of art and protest combined. If Die Blechtrommel is itself a

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13) BT p.91

14) BT p.229

15) BT p.195

16) BT p.491: '!...vorsätzlich das Wachstum unterbrochen!'

17) BT p.492: '!...zum Wachstum entschlossen, Trommel begraben...!'

debating ground for or against commitment, one way of examining it is to investigate the relationship between art and protest. In the final analysis, the novel demonstrates that both these forms of human expression are at their best when they merge. Die Blechtrommel has proved indubitably that artistic creation and moral protest are no longer mutually exclusive. It is Oskar's drumming that unites these two aspects. As Heinz Ide points out in his article 'Dialektisches Denken im Werk von Günter Grass'<sup>18</sup>, the fact that Grass called his novel Die Blechtrommel rather than Der Blechtrommler indicates clearly the central position of the drum. I am calling it a symbol, although its symbolic quality is constantly being disputed, both within the novel<sup>19</sup> and outside it by the author himself<sup>20</sup>.

Illuminating in this context, and a possible clue to the function of the drum, is Oskar's comment, concluding his speculations of what he should do with himself:

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18) Heinz Ide: 'Dialektisches Denken im Werk von Günter Grass', Studium Generale 21, 1968, pp.608-622.

19) BT p.311: 'Die Brüder Rennwand mußten die Hand auf meine Trommel legen, in der die Burschen, überspannt wie sie sein konnten, eine Art Symbol sahen...'

20) See: letter to Ann Woods dated 20 April 1965: 'Symbole habe ich nie herstellen wollen.'

Oder aber, ich gebe nach, lasse mich festnageln, gehe hinaus, nur weil ich dreißig bin, und mime ihnen den Messias, den sie in mir sehen, mache, gegen besseres Wissen, aus meiner Trommel mehr, als sie darzustellen vermag, laß die Trommel zum Symbol werden, gründe eine Sekte, Partei oder auch nur eine Loge.<sup>21</sup>

It will be shown that Oskar's drumming has already, in spite of himself, been used in a symbolic way. There is, however, a marked difference between the symbolic quality which he is, ironically, projecting into it at this juncture, and the role it has played throughout the novel up till then. Oskar's view of a possible future role for his drumming is tantamount to unambiguous moral protest, closely associated with redemptive capacities, a drumming that would tie him down, a drumming synonymous <sup>with</sup> to an organised form of protest. Hence Oskar's scathing attitude - acceptance of this kind would quite clearly be an act of resignation.

The use which Oskar has made of his drum up till now, however, is far more complex - the element of protest is all-powerful there, too, but it is anarchic rather than organised. Drumming for Oskar, up to this final stage, left him with several options open. On the

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21) BT p.490

one hand, the option to devote himself to the transformation of his experiences into art; on the other, the use of his drum for moral protest.

Protest and art are the two basic activities symbolised by his drumming. Initially, his artistic creation belongs to the private, his moral protest to the public sphere. Art and love represent the main factors of the drum complex in the private realm. The major components constituting the public realm are politics and religion - these being the spheres against which Oskar's protest is mainly directed. But the boundaries between the public and the private are often very fluid; sometimes they compete with each other, sometimes they merge (as in the case of the 'Glaube Hoffnung Liebe' chapter). On balance, however, Oskar's drumming becomes the symbol for a constructive, morally committed form of art; the destructive side of Oskar's art is his glass-shattering voice.

The moral premises of the drum are prepared by Oskar's grandfather Koljaiczek: firstly, by introducing the symbolic colour scheme of the Polish national colours, red and white; secondly, by anticipating the drum's function as a medium of protest. Koljaiczek's 'aufreizend weißrot gestrichene(r) Zaun'<sup>22</sup> was an action

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22) BT p.19

inspired by Polish patriotism. The design of the drum, 'weißrot gezackt'<sup>23</sup> is a direct replica of the fence. The grandfather's incendiary activities also have a parallel in the recurrent images of fire attributed to the drum. In view of its antecedents, it is not difficult to identify the drum as a symbol of protest.

A moth is Oskar's first master. That the symbol of drumming should be introduced by this incident is important on two accounts: firstly, the description of this activity: 'der Falter trommelte...zuchtvoll und entfesselt zugleich'<sup>24</sup> - captures the dialectical thinking pervading the whole novel; it posits from the outset the ideal of combining opposites. 'Zuchtvoll' might stand for the purposeful moral, 'entfesselt' for the artistic and anarchic. Secondly, and highly revealing of the moral function of Oskar's drumming, is the link established here between drumming, light and knowledge. This association of ideas reinforces the hypothesis that Oskar's art is connected with the power of reason for which the light stands.

Drumming is conceived of as a medium of enlightenment,

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23) BT p.46

24) BT p.36



an activity that springs from greater insight and is inspired to spread insight. Oskar's respect for reason is fully borne out by his own characterisation. One must not forget that this is only one side of his nature, although the one to which he himself attributes most importance. Goethe and Rasputin personify his dichotomy of character. Goethe is the one he admires, Rasputin is his refuge.

Wenn ich mich zeitweilig mehr dem Rasputin zugehörig betrachtete und Goethes Unduldsamkeit fürchtete, lag das an dem leisen Verdacht: der Goethe hätte, hättest Du, Oskar, zu seiner Zeit getrommelt, in Dir nur Unnatur erkannt, dich als leibhaftige Unnatur verurteilt und seine Natur, die Du schließlich immer, selbst wenn sie sich noch so unnatürlich spreizte, bewundert und angestrebt hast...<sup>25</sup>

Similarly, in his first love experience, Oskar equates himself with the well-balanced 'Hauptmann' rather than with the impetuous Eduard in Goethe's Wahlverwandtschaften. Retrospectively, he introduces himself as a 'hellhöriger Säugling'<sup>26</sup> who listens critically to his parents' talk. Other adjectives like 'scharfsinnig' and 'hellsichtig' tend in the same direction. Scepticism and doubt are the predominant features

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25) BT p.72

26) BT p.35

tainting Oskar's outlook on life. Both are most manifest in the 'Glaube Hoffnung Liebe' chapter. Oskar would rather believe in the values he proclaims as being absolutes: 'Denn die Liebe kennt keine Tageszeiten, und die Hoffnung ist ohne Ende, und der Glaube kennt keine Grenzen'<sup>27</sup>. In her thesis, Ann Woods goes as far as to suggest that 'Oskar's whole medium is doubt' and, with reference to this chapter in the novel, she writes:

In stating the most positive of his beliefs in the limitlessness of faith, hope and love, he (Oskar) uses in the same paragraph the words 'weiß nicht' eighteen times.<sup>28</sup>

But belief in the precarious existence of reason is not sufficient to make Oskar want to live.

Einsam und unverstanden lag Oskar unter den Glühbirnen, folgerte, daß das so bleibe, bis...später ein endgültiger Kurzschluß aller Lichtquellen Strom unterbrechen werde, verlor deshalb die Lust, bevor dieses Leben unter den Glühbirnen anfang;<sup>29</sup>

Only the anticipation of being able to exploit his critical faculties through the medium of art - the drum - provides Oskar with a purpose in life:

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27) BT p.166

28) Ann Woods: 'A Study of Die Blechtrommel by Günter Grass', M.A. (Liverpool), 1966.

29) BT p.37

...nur die in Aussicht gestellte Blechtrommel hinderte mich damals, dem Wunsch nach Rückkehr in meine embryonale Kopflage stärkeren Ausdruck zu geben.<sup>30</sup>

The drum here has a distinctly life-affirming power. Absence of the drum makes Oskar want to seek refuge under his grandmother's skirts.

The two main aspects of the drum, protest and art, have been established. Protest against what? First and foremost against the world of adults and their moral bankruptcy in the spheres of politics and religion: Oskar's drumming is a 'Fähigkeit...zwischen mir und den Erwachsenen eine notwendige Distanz ertrommeln zu können'<sup>31</sup>. The drum starts off by being the demarcation line between good and bad. All resources have to be mobilised to assure its safety. Thus Oskar's glass-shattering voice is initially a purely defensive measure:

...(das) Lautwerden einer Stimme, die es mir ermöglichte, in derart hoher Lage...zu singen...daß niemand es wagte, mir meine Trommel ...wegzunehmen; denn wenn mir die Trommel genommen wurde, schrie ich...<sup>32</sup>

Now follows the vital distinction made by Oskar between

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30) BT p.37

31) BT p.50

32) BT p.50

'Spiel' and 'Arbeit' with respect to his artistic activities:

Nur wer spielt, zerstört mutwillig.  
Ich spielte nie, ich arbeitete auf  
meiner Trommel...<sup>33</sup>

Oskar adheres to this distinction throughout his account. It is essential, because not only does it show the seriousness of his intent, both in his moral protest and in the dedication to his art, but also because it provides an essential contrast to his glass shattering activity, which develops into an independent form of art:

Wenn (Oskar) in jener ersten Periode nur notfalls...zersang, machte er später, während der Blüte- und Verfallszeit seiner Kunst, Gebrauch von seinen Fähigkeiten, ohne äußeren Zwang zu verspüren. Aus bloßem Spieltrieb, dem Manierismus einer Spätepocher verfallend, dem l'art pour l'art ergeben, sang Oskar sich dem Glas ins Gefüge...<sup>34</sup>

If his voice does no more than satisfy his play instinct, finding its justification in aesthetic perfection and thus fulfilling the requirements of l'art pour l'art, Oskar's drumming is hard work; it is in fact the very opposite of his glass-shattering activities, it is Engagement. Oskar's drumming embodies his commitment. The physical qualities attributed

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33) BT p.51

34) BT p.57

to the drum support the view that the drum is a symbol of protest. Oskar refers to it as a 'gemartetes Trommelblech' with a 'weiß-rot geflammter Einfassung', exhibiting 'zackige scharfe Ränder' and a 'gezackter Kraterrand' - the whole description is aimed at showing the stringency of Oskar's attack. No wonder that the adult world tries to hinder Oskar in his drumming zeal:

...die Erwachsenen...wollten meiner Trommel ins Wort fallen, wollten meinem Blech im Wege sein, wollten meinen Trommelstöcken ein Bein stellen.<sup>35</sup>

The same sous-entendu is implicit when Oskar comments:

Man befürchtete, ich würde mich an den gefährlich scharfen Blechkanten reißen. Besonders Matzerath ...riet mir Vorsicht beim Trommeln an.<sup>36</sup>

Characteristically enough, Matzerath is the first to deprive Oskar of his drum:

Matzerath war es, der mit gemachter Strenge nach meinem invaliden Instrument griff.<sup>37</sup>

This is an example of the drum operating as a demarcation line between good and evil, in as far as the characters reveal themselves to be 'good' or 'bad' according to their attitude to the drum. Matzerath

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35) BT p.49

36) BT p.51

37) BT p.52

is the most Philistine of them and the one with the least moral backbone. It is, therefore, not accidental that he should prove the strongest opponent of Oskar's drumming. Markus is at the other end of the scale. Not only is he a character of moral integrity, he is also a victim of the Matzeraths of this world, and it is he who is Oskar's supplier.

The drum has proved to be an opposing force to the moral bankruptcy of the adult world. Where does this bankruptcy most clearly manifest itself? First of all, in politics. The 'Tribüne' chapter is entirely devoted to the political function of Oskar's drumming. In his disruption of Nazi meetings, Oskar disclaims any moral purpose. He would rather have us believe that it simply quenched his thirst for running the show: 'ich hatte die abgesetzt, das war jetzt meine Musik'<sup>38</sup>. His objections to the Nazis, he tells us, were based on aesthetic grounds only: the cut and the colour of their uniforms offended his sense of beauty.

...bis zum November achtunddreißig  
habe ich mit meiner Trommel...Kund-  
gebungen gesprengt...

Nichts liegt ferner, als in mir...  
nun einen Widerstandskämpfer zu  
sehen.

Ich...bitte...Sie...in mir nichts  
anderes als einen etwas eigenbröt-  
lerischen Menschen zu sehen, der

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38) BT p.97

aus privaten, dazu ästhetischen Gründen,..Farbe und Schnitt der Uniformen, Takt und Lautstärke der auf Tribünen üblichen Musik ablehnte und deshalb auf einem bloßen Kinderspielzeug einigen Protest zusammentrommelte.

Ich trommelte nicht nur gegen braune Versammlungen. Oskar saß den Roten und Schwarzen,..unter der Tribüne. Was sie auch zu singen, zu blasen, zu beten und zu verkünden hatten: meine Trommel wußte es besser.<sup>39</sup>

And he sums up his argument:

Mein Werk war also ein zerstörerisches. Und was ich mit der Trommel nicht klein bekam, das tötete ich mit meiner Stimme.<sup>40</sup>

On the surface, it all seems to fit together neatly. But if we examine it in the context of the whole novel, the pseudo-logic of his argument becomes apparent.

Oskar shies away from calling himself a resistance fighter, because he respects the term too much to abuse it, as has become common practice in Germany<sup>41</sup>. Yet, his actions reveal quite clearly that he sees through the monstrosities of the Nazis. Although Oskar always pretends not to be interested in politics, his involvement and indignation against the Nazis

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39) BT pp.100-101

40) BT p.101

41) BT p.100: 'Das Wort (Widerstandskämpfer) ist reichlich in Mode gekommen.'

reveals itself 'in the vehemence of his choice of words'<sup>42</sup>: '...Oskar stieß hervor: 'Jetzt mein Volk, paß auf, mein Volk!' '<sup>43</sup> The most blatant sign of his involvement is the deep affection he feels for the two Jews depicted in the novel: Markus and Fajngold. Oskar comes to the rescue of the toy merchant, first at Agnes's funeral, then during the Crystal Night. Fajngold, in contrast to Markus, survived the Nazi persecutions. In his account, Oskar relates Fajngold's hallucinations, evoking his exterminated family, with great sympathy<sup>44</sup>. Both Jews are essential to Oskar: Markus keeps Oskar alive with his drums. Fajngold saves his life by disinfecting him and nursing him in his illness. It is also Fajngold who prevents Oskar from going mad in his vision of the merry-go-round<sup>45</sup>. Ann Woods summarises Oskar's compassion for the Jews in the following terms:

(Fajngold) becomes for Oskar a symbol, as was Markus, of all that the Nazis tried to destroy. As long as he knows the Jews exist, that the Nazis failed to exterminate all which the drum stands for, Oskar is saved from madness. The Jews are a symbol for Oskar not because they are Jews, but because it was they

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42) Ann Woods, op.cit.

43) BT p.97

44) BT p.332

45) BT p.342: 'Herr Fajngold beugte sich und stoppte das Karusell.'



whom the Nazis tried to destroy, dehumanising themselves and a world in which such things could happen.<sup>46</sup>

The fact that Oskar directed his drumming equally against Communist and religious meetings does not necessarily invalidate his protest against National Socialism; it only emphasises Oskar's hatred of all ideological allegiances. His drumming represents everything that bursts these ideological boundaries. Its authenticity, which makes it venture into the realm of uncertainties, is juxtaposed to the phoney security provided by ideologies. For Grass all ideological thinking is equally bad; he makes no distinction between the diverging motivations and ideas that separate a National Socialist from a Communist, for instance. This categorical equation between extreme left and extreme right is a characteristic feature of Grass's political thinking. Klepp's sudden conversion from a Monarchist into a Communist is a harmless example. A more bitter comment on the dangers of ideological allegiances is represented by Meyn, a Communist who turns SA man. Whether they be Catholics, Communists or National Socialists, they all believe in a dogma, and that, according to Grass,

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46) Ann Woods, op.cit.

is sufficient to put them on the same level.<sup>47</sup>

So Oskar protests against all forms of systematised belief. In Die Blechtrommel, as one would expect from an individualist like Oskar, all forms of organised politics fare badly. Even the Social Democrats are held up to complete ridicule, not for their political principles, but for their utter failure to apply them under Hitler, when moral courage was needed. The parody of the SPD is best exemplified in the chapter 'Wachstum im Güterwagen':

In Gdynia hatte der Zug fünf Stunden Aufenthalt. Zwei Frauen mit sechs Kindern wurden noch in den Wagen eingewiesen. Der Sozialdemokrat soll dagegen protestiert haben, weil er krank war und als Sozialdemokrat von vor dem Kriege her Sonderbehandlung verlangte. Aber der polnische Offizier, der den Transport leitete, ohrfeigte ihn, als er nicht Platz machen wollte und gab in recht fließendem Deutsch zu verstehen, daß er nicht wisse, was das bedeute, Sozialdemokrat. Er habe sich während des Krieges an verschiedenen Orten Deutschlands aufhalten müssen, während der Zeit sei ihm das Wort Sozialdemokrat nie zu Gehör gekommen.<sup>48</sup>

Everything is despicable about this Social Democrat.

Grass vents his grievances against the SPD of the

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47) Compare Walter Matern of Hundejahre who is constantly wavering between Communism, National Socialism and Catholicism.

48) BT p.350

Weimar Republic, by making this Social Democrat a fastidious and selfish person, who is mainly concerned with his material possessions.

In spite of his disillusionment and distrust of politics, Grass is not completely devoid of political ideals. His ideal is embodied in the figure of the partisan. Very relevant is the fact that Grass's credo represents both a formulation of his artistic and of his political belief:

Denn hier wird behauptet: Partisane sind nie zeitweilig Partisane, sondern sind immer und andauernd Partisane, die gestürzte Regierungen in den Sattel heben, und gerade mit Hilfe der Partisane in den Sattel gehobene Regierungen stürzen. Unverbesserlich, sich selbst unterwandernde Partisane, sind...unter allen der Politik verschriebenen Menschen die künstlerisch begabtesten, weil sie sofort verwerfen, was sie gerade geschaffen haben.<sup>49</sup>

Involvement in politics is to be an artistic act of constant renewal. Restlessness, self-criticism verging on self-destruction matched with a disquieting vitality characterise Grass's conception of creative politics and creative art. No other symbol but the drum embodies both aspects so perfectly. The next passage, in which Klepp describes his artistic production, confirms the link between the partisan and

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49) BT p.352

the artist:

...ähnlich jenem Partisanen, den  
mir Herr Matzerath als Muster preist,  
bleibe ich rastlos und unzufrieden;  
was ich rechts knüpfe, löse ich  
links auf, was meine Linke bildet,  
zertrümmert meine geballte Rechte.<sup>50</sup>

This is the intellectual background to Oskar's drumming on the 'Maiwiese'. It shows up the discrepancy between the narrator's conclusions, and the conclusions which the reader can deduce from the objective data. Oskar is clearly trying to mislead us, by dismissing the whole subject of his anti-Nazi activities with: 'Mein Werk war also ein zerstörerisches'<sup>51</sup>

Oskar's subsequent equation between his drumming and his glass-shattering voice is just as misleading: 'Und was ich mit meiner Trommel nicht klein bekam, das tötete ich mit meiner Stimme'<sup>52</sup>. The distinction he makes between 'Arbeit' (drum) and 'Spiel' (voice), led us to the conclusion that his drumming (Engagement) and his voice (l'art pour l'art) were two diametrically opposed activities, the former being constructive, the latter destructive. The constructiveness of the drum

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50) BT p.352

51) BT p.101

52) BT p.101

was indicated in the 'Tribüne' chapter. The succeeding chapter in the novel is in fact the 'Schaufenster' chapter, which reinforces the point that these two functions are to be contrasted in quick succession. Common to both is that they are essential to Oskar's spiritual well-being:

Oskars Stimme über der Trommel  
 (war) ein ewig frischer Beweis  
 meiner Existenz, denn solange ich  
 Glas zersang, existierte ich.<sup>53</sup>

Furthermore, Oskar abandons both forms of artistic expression at the same time. His voice loses its power after the funeral of the drum.<sup>54</sup>

But, due to the ambivalence of the novel, the drum also has a negative aspect. The drum as a hiding place, for instance, as will be seen in the 'Polish Post Office' chapter. Its prevailing function, however, remains constructive. On the other hand, Oskar's glass-shattering voice, although in the main a destructive power, does not preclude beneficial side-effects. These manifest themselves in the targets at which Oskar's voice is aiming and the motivations underlying his attacks. During the defence of the

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53) BT p.300

54) BT p.354: After the burial of the drum, Oskar writes: 'meiner Stimme war jede glaszersingende Potenz abhanden gekommen.'

Polish Post Office, for instance, Oskar would have liked to have made his contribution by using his voice against the German invaders<sup>55</sup>. The first victim of his voice is the pretentiously ugly building of the local theatre, embodying an ossified concept of art<sup>56</sup>. Destruction of its windows is Oskar's way of voicing his disapproval of this stagnant form of art; it is contrasted with Bebra's views on the social relevance of art in the subsequent chapter 'Tribüne'. One of Oskar's aims motivating his attack is, as he puts it, 'das Innere aller Dinge freizulegen'<sup>57</sup>. In line with his efforts to unveil hypocrisy in art, are his attempts at unveiling the hypocrisy of people in the 'Schaufenster' chapter:

Oskar...du hast den Leuten vor  
den Schaufensterscheiben auch  
geholfen, sich selbst zu erkennen.<sup>58</sup>

The truth must be exposed at all costs.

The argument is not aimed at minimising the evilness of Oskar's exercises in temptation, its only purpose is to point

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55) BT p.181: 'Nun, wenn man von mir einen Beitrag zur Verteidigung der Polnischen Post forderte..., an meiner Stimme sollte es nicht fehlen.'

56) Heinz Ide: loc.cit. p.611

57) BT p.84

58) BT p.105. See: Hildegard Emmel: Das Gericht in der deutschen Literatur des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts, Bern, 1963, pp.105-119.

out the antithetical elements contained in Oskar's voice. This should not blind one to the fact that the main emphasis is on its destructiveness, just as the main emphasis in the drum complex is on its constructiveness, so that on balance both media of art represent opposite poles. Oskar's equation between his voice and his drum is, therefore, ill-considered.

The other outstanding chapter written around the political function of the drum is 'Die Polnische Post'. The outbreak of the Second World War, together with the defence of the Polish Post Office against the German invasion is seen exclusively from the point of view of whether or not Oskar's 'totkranke Trommel' can be cured. Later, his mind concentrates on how to gain possession of the identical Naczalnik instrument<sup>59</sup>; it is this perspective which determines the whole episode: links are constantly established between the exhaustion of the drum, its future scarcity, value and the outbreak of World War II. This is how Oskar expresses his fears:

Eines Tages könnten die Blechtrommel  
ausgehen, rar werden, unter Verbot  
stehen, der Vernichtung anheimfallen.  
Eines Tages könnte sich Oskar gezwun-  
gen sehen, einige nicht allzu arg zu-  
gerichtete Bleche einem Klempner in

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59) BT p.185

Reparatur geben zu müssen, damit der mir helfe, mit den geflickten Veteranen eine trommellose und schreckliche Zeit zu überstehen.

...Geburtstag meines Komplexes wurde...(der) 9. November achtunddreißig..., denn an jenem Tage verlor ich Sigismund Markus, den Verwalter meines Trommelmagazins.<sup>60</sup>

Oskar tries other utensils that might serve him as a drum, but nothing else will do if his drumming protest is to remain authentic:

Eine Konservendose ist eben keine Blechtrommel...So wie es heute keinen Ersatz gibt, gab es schon damals keinen; eine weißrot geflammte Blechtrommel spricht für sich, bedarf also keiner Fürsprache.<sup>61</sup>

The concrete presence of war has overpowered the often intangible possibilities inherent in Oskar's drumming, just as the drums could not withstand the brutality of the SA men when they destroyed Markus's shop:

Meine Trommeln gefielen denen nicht, Mein Blech hielt ihren Zorn nicht aus, mußte still halten und ins Knie brechen.<sup>62</sup>

A second aspect of this episode is the implicit analogy made by Oskar between the fight for the drum and the fight for Poland.

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60) BT p.169

61) BT p.171

62) BT p.164



Was hatte meine Trommel mit dem Blute Polens gemeinsam!...Schließlich ging es um Polen und nicht um meine Trommel! Wenn es ihnen schon darauf ankam, daß Polen, wenn verloren, dann weißbrot verlorengelange, mußte dann meine Trommel, verdächtig genug durch den frischen Anstrich, gleichfalls verlorengelangen? <sup>63</sup>

The next paragraph, in which Oskar turns the argument round, shows the interchangeability between Poland and the drum:

...es geht gar nicht um Polen, es geht um mein verbogenes Blech. Jan hatte mich in die Post gelockt, um den Beamten, denen Polen als Fanal nicht ausreichte, ein zündendes Feldzeichen zu bringen. Nachts... hatten es sich die wachenden Postbeamten wie eine Parole zugeflüstert: Eine sterbende Kindertrommel hat bei uns Zuflucht gesucht. Wir sind Polen, wir müssen sie schützen... <sup>64</sup>

Both Poland and the drum are exponents of humanity, threatened to be crushed by Hitler. To reinforce the connection between them, one need only recall that, contrary to the above reflection, it is in fact the 'dying' drum that made Oskar drag his uncle to the Post Office in the first place; in other words it is the moral urgency radiating from the drum that makes a reluctant martyr out of Jan.

Nachdem ich bemerken mußte, daß ihn...die Lust ankam, auszusteigen, daß ihm jedesmal erst im Augenblick

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63) BT p.183

64) BT p.183

des Aussteigenwollens meine Gegenwart bewußt wurde, daß ich und meine Trommel ihn veranlaßten, wieder Platz zu nehmen, wurde mir klar, daß der Polnischen Post wegen geschwitzt wurde, die Jan als Staatsbeamter zu verteidigen hatte.<sup>65</sup>

Realising that there is no hope of having his old drum repaired, and discovering a possible replacement, Oskar now directs his full attention to obtaining a new medium of protest. Oskar's ultimate possession of a new drum characteristically coincides with the first attack on the Post Office: although military defeat is near at hand, a moral victory, namely the survival of the drum, has been won.

...Oskar (war es) gelungen, aus der Polnischen Post ein neues... Instrument zu retten und somit der Verteidigung der Post einen Sinn zu geben...<sup>66</sup>

Other metaphors denoting the military superiority of the Germans and the moral superiority of the Poles are contained in the juxtaposition of the German 'Beton' and the fragile Polish 'Kartenhaus', or the German military expertise versus the hopelessly idealistic Polish cavalry.

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65) BT p.177; see also p.203: 'Ich, Oskar Matzerath, gebe zu...dem Jan Bronski...aufgelauert zu haben und ihn mittels einer reparaturbedürftigen Trommel in jene Polnische Post gelockt zu haben, die Jan Bronski verlassen hatte, weil er sie nicht verteidigen wollte.'

66) BT p.210

The Polish spirit and the drum are considered as defenders of human values. Thus, obtaining the drum has an immediately beneficial influence on Oskar:

Als ich von meinem frischgewonnenen  
...Besitz aufblickte, sah ich mich  
gezwungen, Jan Bronski zu helfen.<sup>67</sup>

Oskar's temporary moral awakening is stressed even more in a second example. During the 'Skatspiel', instigated at his own initiative, in order to distract his frightened uncle, Oskar talks about a 'zeitlich begrenzte(s) Fallenlassen aller Verkleidung', about 'ein bisher unbekanntes Gefühl für Verantwortung' and finally describes himself as 'ich,...der das Licht wieder auf die Welt brachte'<sup>68</sup>. It is this same spirit of moral awakening that gives rise to his sharp protest, when Jan mistakes his identity: 'Mit Matzerath wollte ich unter keinen Umständen verwechselt werden'<sup>69</sup> for Matzerath is, as has already been stated, a morally inferior character.

However, the termination of this episode is anything but noble. Oskar claims to be guilty of treason committed in the name of his drums; he has again assumed the proportions of the three-year-old. This return to irresponsibility reveals another side of the drum's

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67) BT p.190

68) BT p.195

69) BT p.196

function, to which Oskar periodically reverts, namely the drum as a hiding place (see p.101). Another instance of Oskar's misuse of his drum is when he exploits its hypnotic qualities in his solo performances, thus seducing people into the realm of hysteria.

But, and this is where Grass's insistence on its predominantly moral function breaks through, the drum, the only witness of Oskar's treacherous behaviour, will not let itself be abused in that way. Very significant in this context is the distinction which Oskar makes between 'Trommler' and 'Trommel':

Meine Trommel, nein, ich selbst,  
der Trommler Oskar, brachte...  
Jan Bronski, meinen Onkel und  
Vater ins Grab.<sup>70</sup>

The drum, now personifying Oskar's bad conscience, is incorruptible.

Oskar...setzte all seinen Fleiß  
in die Aufgabe, den letzten Zeugen  
seiner Schmach..., die Trommel  
zu vernichten.

Aber die hielt stand, gab mir  
Antwort, schlug, wenn ich drauf  
schlug, anklagend zurück.<sup>70</sup>

Not only is the drum a constant reminder of his cowardly behaviour towards Jan, it also reminds him of his refusal to help Viktor Weluhn. Oskar more than makes up for this lapse at a much later period<sup>71</sup>; here, too,

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70) BT p.211

71) BT p.481

the drum is his means of redemption. Oskar's naming of his drum, in connection with the Polish Post Office episode, as 'das mir anhängende lackierte und rotgeflamnte Gewissen'<sup>72</sup> suggests convincingly that the drum can here be equated with the powers of morality.

Oskar's protest is not only directed against dogmatic thinking in the political sphere, but also in the religious sphere, namely against the Catholic Church. The chapters 'Kein Wunder' and 'Nachfolge Christi' are devoted to this subject. The disquieting rhythms of the drum are diametrically opposed to the lulling effect of Catholic prayer. Thus the drum is conceived as an antidote to the ritual.

Ohne Blech vor dem Bauch hätte ich  
niemals, Stirn, Brust und Schultern  
berührend, das katholische Kreuz  
geschlagen...<sup>73</sup>

Parodying his own messianic mission, Oskar discovers his resemblance to the Jesus statue in the Herz-Jesu-Kirche, a Jesus crying out for a drum:

Beide Arme hob mein Abbild, schloß  
die Hände dergestalt zu Fäusten,  
daß man getrost etwas hätte hinein-  
stecken können, zum Beispiel meine  
Trommelsöcke; und hätte der Bild-  
hauer das getan, ihm dazu auf die  
rosa Oberschenkel meine weißrote  
Trommel gegipst, wäre ich es

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72) BT p.211

73) BT p.110

gewesen, der perfekte Oskar...<sup>74</sup>

Oskar is determined to fight it out with Jesus: he looks upon Jesus as a rival. He must find out, once and for all:

ob Oskar dafür oder dagegen trommeln sollte, damit laut wurde, wer von den beiden Blauäugigen, Eineiigen sich in Zukunft Jesus nennen durfte.<sup>75</sup>

Whether or not Jesus is going to drum will determine Oskar's decision. The moral significance of the drum, the drum as a symbol of protest, is unequivocal here<sup>76</sup>. Oskar wants to put Jesus to the test, to see whether at long last he will protest against the inhumanity in the world. If he refuses to do so, the inference is clear: God is ineffective, man has to be his own redeemer.

Wird er nun trommeln, oder kann er nicht trommeln, oder darf er nicht trommeln, entweder er trommelt, oder er ist kein echter Jesus, eher ist Oskar ein echter Jesus als der, falls er nicht doch noch trommelt.

But, as was to be expected:

Jesus trommelt nicht. Es fand kein Wunder statt...<sup>77</sup>

74) BT p.114

75) BT p.116

76) See: Karl Migner: 'Der getrommelte Protest gegen unsere Welt. Anmerkungen zu Günter Grass' Roman Die Blechtrommel. Welt und Wort, XV (1960), pp.205-207.

77) BT p.116

Yet, Oskar perseveres. He wants to give Jesus a chance, if only because he realises how much easier life would be for him, if he could believe, if he could transfer his own responsibility to a higher power. But his efforts are of no avail.

Es war ein Fehler, ihn unterrichten zu wollen. Was befahl mir, ihm zuerst die Stöcke abzunehmen, ihm das Blech zu lassen, mit den Stöcken erst leise, dann jedoch wie ein ungeduldiger Lehrer, dem falschen Jesus vortrommelnd etwas vorzutrommeln, ihm dann die Knüppel wieder in die Hände zu drücken, damit jener beweisen konnte, was er bei Oskar gelernt hatte.<sup>78</sup>

As it is, Jesus proves to be 'der verstockteste aller Schüler'. Oskar wants to take his revenge by shattering the stained-glass windows; this time, however, he overestimates his own powers, the windows resist his voice. Whether Oskar's 'Mißerfolge im sakralen Sektor'<sup>79</sup> are supposed to symbolise the indestructible fascination that Catholicism holds for him, is only a matter of speculation. As far as the drumming is concerned, at any rate, Jesus has failed miserably. There is only one conclusion that Oskar can draw from it: if God is powerless, it is all the more necessary for Oskar never to tire in his protest:

„,Karf Freitag ist Schluß mit ihm,

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78) BT p.117

79) BT p.118

der nicht einmal trommeln kann,  
 der mir keine Scherben gönnt,  
 der mir gleicht und doch falsch  
 ist, der ins Grab muß, während  
 ich weitertrommeln und weiter-  
 trommeln, aber nach keinem Wun-  
 der mehr Verlangen zeigen werde.<sup>80</sup>

When Oskar puts Jesus to the test a second time, the result is just as disappointing. Oskar's indignation can only be explained psychologically. In contrast to the previous time, Oskar does not really want Jesus's response, he would rather see his own strength and the meaninglessness of religion confirmed:

(ich)...wollte vielmehr die  
 Ohnmacht plastisch sehen;...  
 trommeln konnte(Jesus) nicht,  
 konnt nur so tun als ob, dachte  
 wohl: hätt' ich, so könnt' ich,  
 sagt' ich, du hast und kannst  
 doch nicht,...(Oskar) lacht  
 sich schief, weil der Jesus so  
 dasitzt, trommeln nicht kann,  
 vielleicht will...da schlug er,  
 da trommelte er!<sup>81</sup>

After the first fiasco, Oskar had accepted the fact that he would have to take his life in hand, and would have to assume full responsibility for his future actions. The fact that the drum was his preserve, and his alone, was - in spite of the burden - a source of comfort and strength to him:

Einerseits ärgerte ich mich

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80) BT p.118

81) BT p.295



Über jenen gipsernen Jesusknaben,  
der nicht trommeln wollte, ande-  
rerseits blieb so mir alleine die  
Trommel vorbehalten.<sup>82</sup>

Jesus's appropriation of the drum encroaches on Oskar's narrow basis of existence. The drum is Oskar's version of Jesus's cross:

Jesus...sofort gibst Du mir  
meine Trommel wieder. Du hast  
Dein Kreuz, das sollte Dir  
reichen.<sup>83</sup>

But Jesus's cross has proved a fraud; Oskar's drum still has all the makings of an authentic cross in the secular sphere, and if Jesus frivolously misuses the drum, he invalidates its integrity as a symbol of protest<sup>84</sup>. The way in which Jesus has paid lip service to Oskar's work of protest is a humiliation, an insult to Oskar, hence his violent outburst of hatred: 'Ich hasse Dich Bürschchen und Deinen ganzen Klimbim!'<sup>85</sup> He hates him, because he knows that Jesus does not share his premises. The timing of Jesus's drumming is indicative of the hollowness of his protest, coming as it does after the war, and not before, when Oskar's first attempt took place.

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82) BT p.118

83) BT p.296

84) BT p.337: 'Jesus hatte auf dem Blech getrommelt... viel war nicht mehr mit ihr los.'

85) BT p.296

These were the moral implications of Oskar's drumming in the public sphere of politics and religion. Now the function of the drum in the private sphere will be scrutinised, namely that of emotions and art. Drumming as an expression of feeling is first occasioned by the death of Oskar's mother Agnes, the original supplier of Oskar's drums. In view of the close association that exists between Agnes and the drum, her sudden death arouses in Oskar an uncontrollable desire to sublimate his grief with the help of the instrument. These are the thoughts that cross his mind when he stands at the bedside of his dead mother:

Ich hätte gerne getrommelt.  
Schließlich verdankte ich  
meiner armen Mama die vielen  
weißbroten Bleche. Sie hatte  
mir, als Gegengewicht zu Matze-  
raths Wünschen, das mütterliche  
Versprechen einer Blechtrommel  
in die Wiege gelegt, auch hatte  
mir Mamas Schönheit...als Trom-  
melvorlage dienen können. Schließ-  
lich konnte ich mich nicht mehr  
beherrschen, ließ im Sterbezimmer  
...noch einmal das Idealbild  
ihrer...Schönheit auf dem Blech  
zur Gestalt werden...<sup>86</sup>

The love for his mother is the deepest and, because of its reciprocity, the most satisfactory attachment that Oskar has ever known. This is how Oskar captures their intimacy in images:

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86) BT pp.131-2

Als Mama starb, verblaßten die roten Flammen auf der Einfassung meiner Trommel etwas; der weiße Lack jedoch wurde weißer und so grell, daß selbst Oskar manchmal geblendet sein Auge schließen mußte.<sup>87</sup>

The state of the drum is a reflection of Oskar's state of mind. It is easy enough to associate the red flames with love<sup>88</sup>, but what Oskar means by 'der weiße Lack...wurde weißer' is less obvious. He is probably referring to the nurse motif which runs persistently through the novel. Furthermore, one could contrast white with red, by stressing its sterility: just as red is the colour of love, white is the colour of death. This interpretation would link up with the violent death-wish that seizes Oskar at his mother's funeral:

Mit Mama und dem Embryo wollte Oskar in die Grube. Unten bleiben, ...nicht hochkommen wollte Oskar, auf dem verjüngten Fußende wollte er sitzen, trommeln, wenn möglich, unter der Erde trommeln...<sup>89</sup>

Oskar's desire to drum underneath the earth is an illustration of his womb complex. This time, however, the drum fulfils just the opposite of its function

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87) BT p.132

88) See BT p.394 for another instance where the colour red evokes love: 'das rote Kreuz, welches die meisten Krankenschwestern, so auch Schwester Dorothea...tragen, leuchtete mir an Stelle der drei Blutstropfen.'

89) BT p.134

at Oskar's birth:

Nur die in Aussicht gestellte  
Blechtrommel hinderte mich  
damals, dem Wunsch nach Rück-  
kehr in meine embryonale Kopf-  
lage stärkeren Ausdruck zu geben.<sup>90</sup>

Whereas, then, the promise of a drum dragged him out into the world, the drum in the second instance has lost its life-affirming power, for Oskar wants to withdraw into the complete seclusion of death. In his mind, he is thus partly reversing the role of the drum which had hitherto been a means of communication with the outside world. Partly, only, because even underground, Oskar manages to stick to the educational aspect of the drum, when he says:

...Oskar (hätte) noch gerne den  
zarten Knorpeln des Embryos vor-  
getrommelt.<sup>91</sup>

Although the moral and the artistic aspects are here evoked at the same time, the emphasis is undoubtedly on the artistic transformation of Oskar's experience, irrespective of moral considerations.

Other instances, when the drumming proves a source of comfort are Herbert's death<sup>92</sup>, or after Oskar's humili-  
liation with Dorothea. When Oskar loses Bebra,

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90) BT p.37

91) BT p.134

92) BT p.159

however, his reaction differs from the general pattern:

...Bebras Tod (traf mich) schwer  
und auf längere Zeit. Meine Blech-  
trommel schloß ich ein...<sup>93</sup>

Why does he lock up his drum? Oskar's action at this point is motivated by grief and love. Bebra's death occurs at the height of his obsession with the nurse Dorothea, so that the locking up of the drum is indicative of the rivalry that exists between the drum and love. But before dwelling on the Dorothea episode, we must trace the connection between drum and nurses throughout the novel.

It is worth mentioning that Oskar's mother was an auxiliary nurse and that Oskar's obsession with nurses is certainly connected with his mother complex<sup>94</sup>. We must not forget that it is Agnes, too, who provided Oskar with a drum. Thus the love/drum theme is already struck at the beginning of the novel. The first direct remark about the drum/nurse relationship occurs after Oskar's dismissal from hospital:

...als mir Schwester Erni...meine  
zwei Trommeln reichte,...wurde  
mir bewußt, daß ich während Wochen  
nicht mehr an mein Blech gedacht

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93) BT p.467

94) BT p.55: 'Ich ließ mir...Untersuchungen gefallen, weil mir die weiße, dem Auge wohltuende Schwestertracht der Schwester Inge,...schon damals gefiel, an Mamas...Krankenschwesterzeit...erinnerte.'

hatte, daß es für mich auf dieser  
Welt außer Blechtrommeln noch  
etwas gab: Krankenschwestern!<sup>95</sup>

and he supplements this realisation with the following  
remark a few pages further on:

Gleich nach der Entlassung aus den  
städtischen Krankenanstalten begann  
ich, den Verlust meiner Kranken-  
schwestern beklagend, heftig wirbelnd  
zu arbeiten...<sup>96</sup>

Drums and nurses are such possessive passions with  
Oskar that they are often seen to be mutually exclu-  
sive, or, to be more precise, that Oskar's drumming  
is relegated to second place whenever he is involved  
with a nurse. Strangely enough this does not apply  
to his other love relationships, e.g. with Maria,  
where the drum proves to be an inducement to love  
rather than a hindrance. The rivalry between loving  
and drumming is most marked in his non-relationship  
with Dorothea. This tension cannot be rationally  
explained other than by general inferences, and Oskar  
himself calls it 'das Mysterium Krankenschwester'<sup>97</sup>.  
Oskar values life and love more highly than his art,  
which is, after all, a substitute existence. Several  
passages concerning Dorothea could be interpreted in  
this light<sup>98</sup>. Thus, after the fiasco on the coconut

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95) BT p.205

96) BT p.210

97) BT p.400

98) BT see p.425

matting, Oskar returns to his drum, not because he wants to, but because he has no choice in the matter.<sup>99</sup>

Diametrically opposed to the drum's role with the nurses, is the role the drum plays in Oskar's relationship with Maria. The drum encourages this relationship, rather than thwarting it. Maria, just as his mother had been, becomes Oskar's main supplier of drums. Oskar uses the instrument not only to express his love for her<sup>100</sup>, but also to inspire Maria with tenderness for him.

The drum functions as the upholder of the 'true' conception of love as opposed to Matzerath's demand for sexual gratification in the following scene:

Oskar trat...mit seiner Trommel im Wohnzimmer ein...und (Maria) schrie: geh weg, und er wollte auch weg, doch dann konnte er nicht mehr weg, weil Oskar drauf war auf den Beiden, bevor er weg war, weil ich ihm die Trommel ins Kreuz und die Stöcke aufs Blech schlug, weil ich das nicht mehr hören konnte: weg und geh weg, weil mein Blech lauter war als ihr weg, weil ich das nicht duldete, daß er wegging, genau wie Jan Bronski immer von Mama weggegangen war; denn Mama hatte auch immer weg gesagt, zu Jan, weg, zu Matzerath, weg. Und dann waren sie auseinandergefallen, und den Rotz ließen sie

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99) BT, see p.432

100) BT p.216: 'Oskar verfiel diesem Streicheln dergestalt, daß er oft stundenlang und schon bewußter die zum Streicheln verführenden Rhythmen aufs Blech legte, bis endlich Mamas Hand gehorchte und ihm gut tat.

irgendwohin klatschen, auf ein Tuch extra dafür...Ich aber konnte das nicht ansehen. Schließlich war ja auch ich nicht weggegangen. Und ich war der erste, der nicht wegging, deshalb bin ich der Vater und nicht jener Matzerath, der immer und bis zuletzt glaubte, er sei mein Vater. Dabei war das Jan Bronski. Und das hab' ich von Jan geerbt, daß ich vor dem Matzerath nicht wegging, daß ich drinnenblieb, und drinnenließ; und was 'rauskam, das war mein Sohn, nicht sein Sohn! Der hatte überhaupt keinen Sohn, Das war kein richtiger Vater!<sup>101</sup>

This passage was quoted to show how Grass establishes links between Oskar's spiritual creativity (the drum) and his physical creativity (Kurt), and how both imply commitment.

With Kurt's birth, the theme of moral uprightness - a quality which Oskar wants his son to share - is taken up again in the symbol of the drum. Oskar would like to see his non-conformist protest perpetuated in his offspring:

...es galt, eine zeugungsfähige Trommlerdynastie zu gründen; denn mein Werk sollte von Generation zu Generation blechern und weißrot gelackt übermittelt werden.<sup>102</sup>

Oskar's hopes to win his son over are crushed. On reflection, he offers the following explanation:

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101) BT pp.234-5

102) BT p.288



Oskar wollte nichts aus zweiter Hand übernehmen, wollte deshalb seinen Sohn zu ähnlichem Handeln bewegen, ihn - und hier lag mein Denkfehler - zum Blechtrommler einer permanenten Dreijährigkeit machen, als wäre die Übernahme einer Blechtrommel für einen jungen, hoffnungsvollen Menschen nicht gleich scheußlich wie die Übernahme eines Kolonialwarengeschäftes.<sup>103</sup>

'Oskar wollte nichts aus zweiter Hand übernehmen' - it was wrong of him to assume that his son would want to take over his father's scale of values. He cannot speak for his son, just as his own putative father could not speak for him. Rejection of the previous generation is undifferentiated, it is the law of nature.

The last section dealt with the relationship between the drum and emotions. Although, in the personal sphere, the drum had primarily acted as an 'agent of transformation', examples have shown that, even in this capacity, Oskar's channelling of his experiences often coincided with a postulate of moral values, especially in the sphere of love<sup>104</sup>. Art is the other component of the private sphere: if the drum is, at its basic level an 'agent of transformation' or a 'symbol of evocative memory'<sup>105</sup>, it

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103) BT p.288

104) See: the scene between Maria and Matzerath.

105) See: Idris Parry: 'Aspects of Günter Grass's narrative technique', Forum for Modern Language Studies, volume 3, 1967, pp.99-114.

is also a medium of art. But, as was suggested throughout this analysis of the novel, it is the artistic content which makes it, as a result, also a symbol of protest. Thus, the novel is as much a novel about art, as it is a novel about (and of) protest.

To put it differently: the overall function of the drum is memory transformed into art. The substance of this memory is made up of a series of experiences in which the drum functions as a symbol of protest. For Oskar's personal past coincides with the period leading up to National Socialism, the Hitler regime, and its aftermath in West Germany. Consequently, Oskar's drumming protest is, in the final analysis, an endeavour to communicate to the reader and to keep alive this specific period of German history. Oskar relates a story of protest in an artistic form; protest, because his art draws on his involvement in society. Viewed from this angle, all levels of the novel converge on an ethical plane, which makes the novel a committed work of art. It is important to remember that this moral aspect is omnipresent, due to the congruence between Oskar's memory and its evocation and criticism of an inhuman political past.

Whereas Oskar's glass-shattering voice is mainly an

aesthetic pastime, his relationship to his drumming is not that of a formalist. Sterile surroundings, for instance, are inimical to his creative faculties:

Die Aufnahme machte ich in  
schalldichten Studios, hatte  
zuerst Schwierigkeiten, wegen  
der äußerst sterilen Atmosphäre...<sup>106</sup>

His art draws exclusively on decisive personal experiences, ranging from the moth, <sup>via</sup> over his grandmother, to his political and religious involvement. The ecstatic return to the drum and its <sup>resuscitating</sup> effect on both Oskar and Klepp reflect its intrinsic life force.<sup>107</sup> In the course of a conversation, Klepp has cast some doubt on Oskar's musical knowledge:

Längere Zeit sah Oskar den Klepp an. Er hatte mich angesprochen, ohne zu wissen, was er in mir ansprach. Vom Kopf schoß es mir in den Buckel. Es war wie am Jüngsten Tag all meiner alten, zerschlagenen, erledigten Blechtrommeln. Die 1000 Bleche, die ich zum Schrott geworfen hatte, und das eine Blech, das auf dem Friedhof Saspe begraben lag, sie standen auf, erstanden aufs neue, feierten heil und ganz Auferstehung, ließen sich hören, füllten mich aus, trieben mich von der Bettkante hoch, zogen mich, ... aus dem Zimmer...peitschten mich in mein Zimmer, ließen mir jene Trommel entgegenkommen...; und ich ergriff die Trommel, hatte das Blech, dazu beide Stöcke im Griff, drehte mich oder wurde gedreht, ... betrat wie ein Überlebender, der

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106) BT p.466

107) See 'entfesselte Realität' in the speech on Döblin.

von langer Irrfahrt zurückkehrt,  
Klepps Spaghettiküche...<sup>108</sup>

Oskar's drumming is not only a reflection of life, it is also an incentive to live. Just as it proved a life-affirming power at Oskar's birth, it now makes Klepp 'rise from the dead', so that, even here, the art of drumming is connected with an ethical quality, a cathartic effect:

Mit dem letzten Ton...sprang Klepp aus seinem eingelegenen Bett...: wusch sich, er wusch sich, Klepp begann sich zu waschen, alles wagte er abzuwaschen, das war kein Waschen mehr, das war eine Waschung; und als der Gewaschene...vor mir stand,... da begriff ich, nicht nur Oskars Trommel war auferstanden, auch Klepp war ein Auferstandener.<sup>109</sup>

Drumming as a form of art leads to Oskar's views on art in general. His concept of art has already been stated in connection with the 'Partisanen'-passage, where he postulates as an ideal a constant process of renewal. Vitality and dynamism determine the value of a work of art. Formal criteria, even those relating to the message, are of secondary importance.

Grass reveals his likes and dislikes with regard to current artistic movements in the characters of

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108) BT pp.421-2

109) BT p.423

Professor Kuchen, on the one hand, and Maruhn on the other. The attitudes represented by these two art teachers are relevant to our subject of investigation: Professor Kuchen is a believer in Tendenz; Maruhn is a classicist. Grass rejects them both on the grounds that they distort truth: the former because of his exclusive emphasis on the social content of art, the latter, because he stylises chaos into harmony. Grass's attack is mainly directed against Kuchen's ideal of tendentious art. This is Kuchen's definition: 'Kunst ist Anklage, Ausdruck, Leidenschaft!'<sup>110</sup> But, if the message precedes artistic creation, the artist is blind to the true nature of things. Oskar complains:

Mein schönes Haar glänzt dunkelbraun.  
Die machten aus mir einen strähnigen  
Zigeuner. Keinem...fiel auf, daß  
Oskar blaue Augen hat.<sup>111</sup>

This criticism must not be misunderstood as a demand for exact representation of nature. The colour of Oskar's eyes is not important for the physical likeness, but indispensable to express one of Oskar's essential characteristics. Total disregard for truth stems from the misguided protest of Kuchen and his disciples which makes them use art as a vehicle for social propaganda:

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110) BT p.383

111) BT p.384

Die jungen Leute zeigten sich trotz der Währungsreform immer noch vom Krieg beeindruckt, bauten hinter mir Ruinen mit anklagend schwarzen Fensterlöchern auf, stellten mich als hoffnungslosen, unterernährten Flüchtling zwischen geborstene Baumstümpfe, inhaftierten mich sogar, wickelten mit fleißig schwarzer Kohle hinter mir einen übertrieben stacheligen Stacheldrahtzaun ab...; ein leeres Blechschüsselchen mußte ich halten, Kerkerfenster gaben hinter und über mir ihren graphischen Reiz her - man steckte Oskar in Sträflingskleidung - was alles des künstlerischen Ausdrucks wegen geschah.<sup>112</sup>

Grass's objections to this type of tendentious art, which was a direct product of World War II, are succinctly summarised in Oskar's remark: 'Ich wußte, daß man Stacheldraht nicht zeichnen kann'. The implications of this comment are reminiscent of Adorno's statement: 'nach Auschwitz noch Lyrik zu schreiben, sei barbarisch'<sup>113</sup>. Grass, just as Adorno<sup>kin</sup>, is against the 'Aesthetisierung des Leidens'. Die Plebejer proben den Aufstand dramatises this attitude in the figure of the 'Chef', to whom the concrete suffering

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112) BT p.384

113) T.W. Adorno: Noten zur Literatur III, Frankfurt 1965, p.125. See pp.126-7 on 'Ästhetisierung des Leidens': 'Die sogenannte künstlerische Gestaltung des nackten körperlichen Schmerzes,...enthält, sei's noch so entfernt, das Potential, Genuß herauszupressen...Durchs ästhetische Stilisationsprinzip..., erscheint das unausdenkliche Schicksal doch, als hätte es irgend Sinn gehabt; es wird verklärt, etwas von dem Grauen weggenommen; damit allein schon widerfährt den Opfern Unrecht...'

of the East Berlin workers is no more than a means of lending more credibility to his art. There are also isolated examples in Die Blechtrommel dealing with the same problem. To Lankes, as to the 'Chef', all human situations are material for art. This applies even when Lankes himself is the cause of suffering. For instance, he has driven a young novice to suicide, by raping her. After the rape, Oskar observes Sister Agneta venturing further and further into the sea. This is Lankes' reaction to the effect of his deed:

(Lankes) öffnete die Maleraugen  
und sagte: 'Das gibt ein dolles  
Bild: Flutende Nonnen. Oder:  
Nonnen bei Flut.'  
'Du Unmensch!' schrie ich. 'Und  
wenn sie nun ertrinkt?'  
Lankes schloß die Augen: 'Dann  
heißt das Bild: Ertrinkende Nonnen.'  
'Und wenn sie zurückkommt, dir vor  
die Füße fällt?'  
Mit offenen Augen sprach der Maler  
sein Urteil: 'Dann wird man sie und  
das Bild eine gefallene Nonne nennen.' 114

The representation of suffering in art can always be construed to give suffering a meaning. It turns into a misuse of suffering and becomes an insult to the victims.

Socialist Realism, as one form of tendentious art, and classicism as stylisation of reality, have nothing

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to recommend themselves to Grass. The author's dislike extends equally to abstract painting. His sarcasm here is very reminiscent of his condemnation of the so-called 'Labordichter'<sup>115</sup>, a near equivalent to the abstract painter in the literary world. Grass objects to the lifelessness and the predictability of both abstract art and poetry.

Man hob unsere Gegenständlichkeit auf, man resignierte, verleugnete uns, warf Linien, Vierecke, Spiralen, lauter auswendiges Zeug,...auf Leinwände..., denen es an nichts anderem ...als an geheimnisvoller Spannung fehlte...<sup>116</sup>

He mocks at the pretentious language used by abstract painters. This 'neue, ach so blinde Richtung' in art, in Grass's view, only serves to cover up their lack of talent. If anything, Grass prefers Kuchen's 'Kohlemergeln' to the 'dünnblütigen Linien' and 'blassen Kringeln' of this school. Grass's antipathy to l'art pour l'art (abstract painting) on the one hand, and to Tendenz (Kuchen) on the other, have been confirmed in Die Blechtrommel. His recommendation of Döblin in the previous chapter led to the speculation that Grass was likely to believe in Engagement.

The case for 'engaged' art is made by the wise Bebra,

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115) See: Über meinen Lehrer Döblin, 'Das Gelegenheitsgedicht...', p.65

116) BT p.404



Oskar's master. Before their first encounter, Oskar purports to consider his art a private occupation:

'Wissen Sie, Herr Bebra, ich rechne mich lieber zu den Zuschauern, laß meine...Kunst im Verborgenen blühen...'<sup>117</sup>

Bebra's views run counter to Oskar's as he believes in the public character of art and its political potentialities:

'Unsereins darf nie zu den Zuschauern gehören. Unsereins muß auf die Bühne, in die Arena.'<sup>118</sup>

As we know, Oskar takes Bebra's advice to heart; from an onlooker he turns into a participator. The plea for the social responsibility of the artist is also supported by other chance remarks, such as Lankes'<sup>119</sup> confidential admission to Bebra: 'Wassen echter Künstler is, der muß sich äußern'<sup>120</sup>, or Bebra's comment 'Was ist die Zeit und was sind wir,...wenn nicht unsere Werke...'<sup>121</sup>. The nature of art is one of the fundamental themes of the novel. Whether it is symbolised by the drum, or whether the problems relating to it are treated separately, Grass's views

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117) BT p.92

118) BT p.92

119) Lankes had been a much more humane character before the outbreak of the war.

120) BT p.277

121) BT p.278

on art and his practice are unequivocally 'engaged'.

A discussion of the 'Glaube Hoffnung Liebe' chapter will sum up the analysis of the drum and the themes related to it, because it is here that the religious, political and emotional strands combine. The central position of this chapter has been stressed by Ann Woods<sup>122</sup>, who treats it as the nucleus of the whole novel. While fully agreeing with her, one should stress that it is in fact the drum which holds these themes together. Just as the events in the 'Polnische Post'<sup>123</sup> are seen from the perspective of the drum, so are those of the 'Kristallnacht'. The political implications of this chapter are prepared for by the expulsion of Markus from the cemetery at Agnes's funeral. Unlike Markus, Oskar has grasped the situation. He and Schugger Leo, the other 'madman' in the novel, are the only ones to take pity on him. The complicity between them is that of outcasts. Oskar is the protester and Markus the supplier of the instruments of protest. Oskar even goes as far as to suggest that he is Markus's personal drummer: 'womöglich sein Trommler'. In other words, he admits that he is drumming in the service of all that Markus

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122) Ann Woods, op.cit., p.167

123) Chronologically speaking, the 'Glaube Hoffnung Liebe' chapter precedes the 'Polnische Post'.

stands for, and protesting against those political forces that are threatening to destroy Markus.

The persecution of the Jews and the drum are closely allied to one another, just as the drum had been closely allied to the Polish cause. A further parallel between the 'Polnische Post' and the 'Glaube Hoffnung Liebe' chapter is the poor state of Oskar's drum and the difficulty of replacing it. Oskar's situation is hopeless. His only friends, his mother and Herbert have died. Master Bebra has betrayed him by joining Goebbels's ministry of propaganda. Oskar alone remains steadfast and clings to his worn-out drum:

Ich hielt mich an meine Trommel  
und vereinsamte gänzlich auf dünn-  
getrommeltem...Blech...ich klagte  
auf meinem Instrument...

Wenn schon schuldig am Tod meiner  
armen Mama, klammerte ich mich  
dennoch umso fester an die ge-  
schmähte Trommel; denn die starb  
nicht, wie eine Mutter stirbt, die  
konnte man neu kaufen...<sup>124</sup>

Only the drum is beyond human transitoriness; art and protest are immortal. The protest against the misconception of religion and politics is fully developed in the 'Glaube Hoffnung Liebe' chapter. The protest is in Oskar's own words 'ein Thema, das nach

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124) BT p.141

einem brüllenden Orchester schreit'. Bruno admonishes his patient to control his drumming:

'Aber Herr Matzerath, ... wenn sie weiterhin so laut trommeln, wird man woanders hören, daß da viel zu laut getrommelt wird...'125

Protest is dangerous, it might actually make people realise how misguided they are. Matzerath is one of those utterly misguided individuals. Oskar expresses the abyss separating him from his putative father by contrasting their respective reactions to the events of the Crystal Night.

...der Kolonialwarenhändler benutzte die Gelegenheit und wärmte seine Finger und seine Gefühle über dem öffentlichen Feuer. Sein Sohn Oskar jedoch...,verdrückte sich...und eilte in Richtung Zeughauspassage davon, weil er um seine Trommeln...besorgt war.126

When a whole society fails, Oskar finds his responsibility. His deep and acknowledged commitment, as Ann Woods points out in her thesis, is reflected in the style of the chapter in question. Oskar's detached fairy-tale style makes room for intense compassion: he abandons the third person for the first. This applies to nearly all the paragraphs dealing with Markus<sup>127</sup>. Oskar's love for and dependence on

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125) BT p.159

126) BT p.164

127) BT e.g. p.164: 'Ich fand sie noch beim Spiel...',  
'Ich sorgte mich um meine Trommeln'

the toy merchant breaks through at the end of the chapter, where the only phrase eluding the fairytale formula concerns Markus. It conjures up the solidarity between drum, drummer and keeper of drums:

Mir aber nahmen sie den Spielzeughändler, wollten mit ihm das Spielzeug aus der Welt bringen.<sup>128</sup>

Markus, Oskar and the drum, all stand 'for the fight against evil'<sup>129</sup>, against Hitler's dictatorship.

The fact that Markus is the source of Oskar's drums stresses the moral role of the drumming. At the same time, his enforced suicide exemplifies the precariousness of Oskar's protest. Now that all the exponents of humaneness have been exterminated, Oskar's tenacious rhythms of protest will be suffocated by the brutal noise of military weapons.

So far the interpretation of the novel has revolved around the drum as a symbol of art and protest.

Oskar's drumming in the spheres of politics and religion, of art and love has been dealt with. One significant event in the novel still remains to be discussed: the 'funeral' of the drum. What are the circumstances which make Oskar bury it? How does the drumless Oskar differ from the drummer? What

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128) BT p.167

129) Ann Woods, op.cit., p.167

makes him resume his art? And finally, how does the thirty-year old compare with the three-year old drummer?

Oskar's decision must be seen in the context of what has preceded it. As on two previous occasions (at his mother's and Jan's funeral) the reappraisal of his life takes place in a cemetery, where the presence of death provides him with the necessary perspective.

Auf Friedhöfen kann man Mut und  
Entschlüsse fassen, auf Friedhöfen  
erst bekommt das Leben Umrisse -  
... - und wenn man will, einen Sinn.<sup>130</sup>

Matzerath, a representative of National Socialist Germany, dies, literally, of the party, just as the country itself almost dies of it. An analogy between his funeral and the 'funeral' of Nazi Germany (i.e., the capitulation) suggests itself. Retrospectively, Oskar justifies his alleged murder by giving it a symbolic meaning:

Oskar (gestand) sich ein, daß  
er Matzerath vorsätzlich getötet  
hatte...; weil er es satt hatte,  
sein Leben lang einen Vater mit  
sich herumschleppen zu müssen.<sup>131</sup>

Oskar becomes an orphan, both in actual fact, as well as politically and spiritually. Faced with a

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130) BT p. 362

131) BT p. 335

changed historical situation, Oskar has to adjust himself to a potentially new German society. Whereas his role hitherto had been that of a protester in the guise of a three-year old artist, the rebuilding of Germany demands close cooperation from every individual. Choosing art as his medium of protest under the Hitler regime was a legitimate form of secondary action; only the mask of a backward child guaranteed Oskar's survival. The transformed situation of 1945, however, calls for direct action. After endless hesitations of 'Soll ich oder soll ich nicht?' he is finally willing to make the sacrifice and accept the challenge of immediate involvement:

...nicht mehr 'Soll ich oder  
soll ich nicht?' sondern 'Es  
muß sein!'<sup>132</sup>

And somewhat later, he consolidates his decision with 'Ich soll, ich muß, ich will', thus making the resolution his own: it is no longer imposed on him from outside. Interestingly enough, Oskar specifies that he is burying his 'Trommel aus der Stäuberzeit'<sup>133</sup>, in other words, he is taking leave only from the destructive aspect of his drum.

Thus, Oskar will try to become a useful member of

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132) BT p.336

133) BT p.336

society without the intermediary of art. Linked with his attempted integration is his craving for fulfilment on a human as distinct from an artistic level. After Matzerath's death his new feelings of responsibility are centred on Maria and Kurt. Oskar's growth proves a more painful process than the interruption of his growth had ever been; the sacrifice is greater. His change of mind manifests itself in his efforts at self-education, and in his refusal to get entangled with his son's black-market traffic. The first active step towards integration occurs when he accepts a job as a stone mason. When Maria expresses concern about leaning too heavily on Oskar's financial support, he replies:

Oskar tue das gerne, nichts  
 sei ihm lieber als eine große  
 Verantwortung tragen zu müssen.<sup>134</sup>

Encouraged by this newly acquired harmony, Oskar ventures to propose to Maria: his second major step towards integration. Again the decision takes shape in a cemetery, formulated as a travesty of Hamlet: 'Heiraten oder Nichtheiraten, das ist hier die Frage'. Maria rejects his offer. Both Oskar's attempts to 'contribute' to Germany's rehabilitation have failed. He quits his job, and eventually leaves the family

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134) BT p.381



home. 'So wurde aus Yorick kein Bürger, sondern ein Hamlet, ein Narr' and he reflects sarcastically, though not without melancholy:

Dabei hätte ich einen guten Bürger abgegeben...Als Ehemann, Biedermann hätte ich mich am Wiederaufbau beteiligt,...<sup>135</sup> aber Maria gab mir einen Korb.

Oskar sees himself driven back into the position of an outsider. There is only one conclusion he can draw from this:

Da besann sich Oskar seines Buckels und fiel der Kunst anheim!<sup>136</sup>

Oskar's failure to conform does not altogether come as a surprise. In fact, he himself is the first to doubt the value of this experiment. But, under the impetus of the 'Nachkriegsrausch', he is convinced that it has to be made, as his long abstinence from drumming proves. No doubt he remembers Bebra's warning:

Human bleiben ohne äußeres Wachstum, welch eine Aufgabe, welch ein Beruf!<sup>137</sup>

After growth has already set in, Oskar concludes his account rather ambivalently: 'Oskar (fiel)...in wachsende, alles aufnehmende Ohnmacht'<sup>138</sup>. He is already

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135) BT pp.381-2

136) BT p.382

137) BT p.139

138) BT p.338

anticipating at this stage that adulthood can be a distinct liability. On his dismissal from hospital, he questions its value again: ' Oskar gewann, - wenn das ein Gewinn ist? - reichliche zwei cm Körpergröße.'<sup>139</sup>

The most blatant metaphor prefiguring his ambivalent growth is his hunchback. Even before having actively attempted integration, he longs for the relative security of the three-year old drummer:

Noch keine zwei Jahre war es her,  
da ich mich an Matzeraths Grab zum  
Wachstum entschlossen hatte, und  
schon war mir das Leben der Erwach-  
senen einerlei. Nach den verlorenen  
Proportionen des Dreijährigen  
sehnte ich mich...Oskar vermißte  
seine Trommel.<sup>140</sup>

Yet, he perseveres and, for a short period of time, finds his happiness, not in the art of drumming itself, but in 'drumming' on gravestones: 'Wie ein Vulkan brach das Glück aus und lagerte sich staubig ab und knirschte mir zwischen den Zähnen'<sup>141</sup>. Strengthened by this new sense of belonging, Oskar now reaffirms the rightness of his decision: 'Für mich Oskar Matzerath Bronski begann ein neues Zeitalter'<sup>142</sup>.

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139) BT p.356

140) BT p.361

141) BT p.367

142) BT p.380

How sincere his intentions had been about growing up is most manifest when he heroically resists Raskolnikoff's temptation. It is important to remember that Oskar's renewed contact with the actual instrument occurs very soon after the setback of Maria's refusal to marry him. Although Oskar's determination to refrain from drumming is extremely strong, his resistance is gradually breaking down:

...ihr alle, die ihr jemals  
einen Musenkuß empfindet, könnt  
sicher verstehen, daß Oskar  
sogleich nach dem stempelnden  
Kuß die Trommel, jenes Blech  
wieder an sich nahm, das er vor  
Jahren von sich gewiesen, im  
Sand des Friedhofes Saspes ver-  
graben hatte.  
Aber ich trommelte nicht.<sup>143</sup>

Before his final return to the drum, he tries again to find human fulfilment:

(es) war die Liebe zu Schwester  
Dorothea, die mir befahl, die  
Trommel unbetrommelt zurückzu-  
legen...<sup>144</sup>

His resolution is not long-lived, perhaps because he foresees that his love for the nurse is doomed from the beginning. The smell of vinegar pervading Dorothea's room, opposed to the sweet smell of cinnamon emanating from Raguna, announces all the disappointments to come.

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143) BT pp.392-3

144) BT p.415

As Oskar can find no happiness in human relationships, he will have to seek it in his art. The encounter with Klepp, immediately succeeding his depressing experience in Dorothea's room, drives him back to his drum. Alternatively, one could interpret Oskar's return in political terms: because the 'Nachkriegs-rausch' which had called for collaboration had only been a 'Rausch', because postwar Germany deteriorated into a 'Biedermeier' Germany, eager to bury its past, but reluctant to learn from it, Oskar had to resume his protest. The onion cellar orgies illustrate how little Germany has in fact progressed. People's adulation of Oskar's music as that of a 'Zauberer', a 'Gesundbeter und Messias' is only too reminiscent of their uncritical, ecstatic devotion to Hitler.

Most critics interpret Oskar's return to the drum<sup>145</sup> as a return to irresponsibility. Schwarz writes for instance:

Die Irrfahrt ins bürgerliche  
Leben mit seinen Pflichten und  
Verantwortungen ist zu Ende,  
Oskar wird wieder...zum Künstler.<sup>146</sup>

Idris Parry, too, interprets the drum's resuscitation in this way, for he looks upon it, exclusively as an expression of art and considers it as 'the source and

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145) For example, Idris Parry, W.J.Schwarz.

146) W.J. Schwarz: Der Erzähler Günter Grass, Bern 1969, p.41

symbol of his (Oskar's) anti-social nature.<sup>147</sup>  
 Hence, both critics posit a total break between the drumming and the drumless Oskar. Oskar, however, explicitly warns against such one-sided interpretations:

Man könnte jetzt ein Traktat über die verlorene Unschuld beginnen, könnte den trommelnden, permanent dreijährigen Oskar neben den buckligen, stimmlosen, tränen- und trommellosen Oskar stellen. Das jedoch entspräche nicht den Tatsachen: Oskar hat noch als trommelnder Oskar mehrmals die Unschuld verloren, gewann die wieder zurück...<sup>148</sup>

One is not so much dealing with a break in Oskar's character, as with a progression in ethical awareness. Even after having resumed drumming, Oskar continues to support Maria. He speaks up for the raped nun and accuses Lankes of inhuman behaviour. The most striking proof of moral maturity is his conscious defence of humanity in the Victor Weluhn case, where the drum, too, plays a considerable part. Heinz Ide's interpretation of this incident is very convincing:

...Oskar (gelangt) auf der Stufe des reflektierenden Bewußtseins zu der Haltung, welche seine Großmutter naturhaft-unreflektiert lebt. Sie verbirgt den Brandstifter, der gegen die vorfindliche gesellschaftliche Ordnung protestiert, unter ihren Röcken...Sie schützt ihn vor den Repräsentanten des Entweder-Oder-Denkens;...in

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147) Idris Parry, op.cit., p.105

148) BT p.415

neuer Gestalt tauchen [die Feldgendarmen] am Ende des Buches wieder auf als Verfolger des armen Victor Weluhn. Anna Koljaiczek wird aber nie auf den Gedanken kommen, die Verfolgung an und für sich bekämpfen zu wollen.<sup>149</sup>

Heinz Ide's analysis, although presented in slightly different terms, contains our own findings. He, too, considers Oskar's drumming as 'einen Akt der Bewußtseinmachung', and distinguishes between three progressive stages:

Den drei Schritten entsprechend, in die der Roman mit seinen drei Büchern gegliedert ist, entwickelt sich auch Oskars Trommeln im Dreischnitt. Zuerst trommelt er Protest, und zwar im ersten Buch am vehementesten. Aus diesem Protest entwickelt sich, aber wesentlich immer noch Protest bleibend, das nach Erlösung verlangende Trommeln Oskars, der die 'Nachfolge Christi' antritt. Dieses Trommeln ist die Voraussetzung für das zweite Stadium des Trommelns, jenes im Zwiebelkeller und für Bebras Konzertagentur 'West', das sein Publikum in die Kindheit zurücktrommelt und damit vor jene vergessene Wirklichkeit, gegen die die Trommel des dreijährig Gebliebenen protestiert hatte. Das dritte Stadium ist jenes, das im weißen Metallbett der Anstalt erreicht wurde und den Bericht von Oskars Lebensweg und Bildungsgang produziert. In ihm ist eine höhere Bewußtseinsstufe dem Protest wie der Erlösungssehnsucht überlegen. Oskars Trommeln entwickelt sich also dialektisch über Spruch und Widerspruch zu neuer Bewußtseinslage.<sup>150</sup>

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149) Heinz Ide: op.cit., p.614

150) ibid., p.609

CHAPTER FOUR

KATZ UND MAUS

By testing the applicability of Sartre's theory of littérature engagée to Die Blechtrommel, we came to the conclusion that this novel, too, could be described as an 'engaged' work. In apparent contradiction to this, however, Grass himself has made pronouncements about his concept of writing that seemed to belie his artistic practice. One need only recall his provocative Princeton Speech<sup>1</sup>, with its categorival distinction between politics and writing<sup>2</sup>, and if it were not for Grass's Shakespeare Speech<sup>3</sup>, the contradiction between theory and practice would seem insurmountable. But in this speech he reveals that his concept of Engagement corresponds to my definition of Tendenz. This explains his

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- 1) 'Vom mangelnden Selbstvertrauen des schreibenden Hofnarren unter Berücksichtigung nicht vorhandener Höfe', referred to as the 'Princeton Speech', because it was held in Princeton.
  - 2) 'Seien wir uns dessen bewußt: das Gedicht kennt keine Kompromisse; wir aber leben von Kompromissen.' in Über meinen Lehrer Döblin, p.72
  - 3) 'Vor- und Nachgeschichte der Tragödie des Coriolanus von Livius und Plutarch über Shakespeare bis zu Brecht und mir', referred to as the Shakespeare Speech, because it was held on Shakespeare's 400th anniversary.

derogatory attitude to the term Engagement. Yet, the substance of his Döblin Speech is sufficient evidence that he approves of Engagement in the specific Sartrean sense: 'que la littérature...devienne morale et problématique...Morale non pas moralisatrice.' Once these semantic misunderstandings have been resolved, the contradiction no longer exists, at least up to Hundejahre.

'Problématique et morale' also applied to Die Blechtrommel, and the interpretation of the drum symbol was based on this judgement. Katz und Maus is the next stage in Grass's development, thus illustrating our postulate that the gradual intensification of Grass's commitment coincides with the chronology of his works. Like Die Blechtrommel, Katz und Maus exists on two levels: the universal and the political. These two levels co-exist in all of Grass's works, but the proportion between them differs. Accordingly, the political aspect in Katz und Maus is more pronounced than it was in Die Blechtrommel and it undergoes a further accentuation in Hundejahre, because in the latter novel Grass complements the political issues with their cultural sources. If one looks at the overall relationship between the three novels from the point of view of commitment, Katz und Maus is both a continuation of Die Blechtrommel and an introduction to Hundejahre.



It is the universal level that makes it a continuation of Die Blechtrommel. Fundamentally, there is the same pattern in all three novels: Mahlke's cat is the archetypal persecutor; it corresponds to the Black Witch in Die Blechtrommel and to the dogs in Hundejahre. In all three cases the symbol stands for the evil elements in society in general, and for National Socialism in particular. All three symbols are immediately recognisable by the threatening colour of black, e.g. in Katz und Maus 'die schwarze Katze spannte sich zum Sprung'. In Mahlke's case, it is quite irrelevant who made the cat jump. The cat just exists and pounces on its victim of its own accord. It also has its human counterparts: Luzi Rennwand in Die Blechtrommel, Pilenz, Klohse, Mallebrandt, Tulla in Katz und Maus, and Tulla in Hundejahre. The numerical distribution, in itself, indicates that the novella concentrates on the destructive side of life. Pilenz's prevarications about who made the cat attack Mahlke are nothing but a trick designed to detract from the main issue, namely his unquestionable guilt towards Mahlke, irrespective of whether he was or was not the culprit in this particular instance. He is, after all, one of the main exponents of this 'cat mentality' which brings about Mahlke's downfall.

Apart from this fundamental link: 'Und die Katze und die Maus? Gibt es Geschichten, die aufhören können?'<sup>4</sup>, there is the response to the persecution which makes Mahlke a brother of Oskar. To forearm themselves against their persecution, Grass's protagonists develop external and internal defence mechanisms. The external ones consist in seeking out places of refuge, where they are cut off from the world and are as near to a state of oblivion as possible. Had Oskar had his way, he would have crept back to his mother's womb. This being impossible, he opts for his grandmother's skirts, of which his hospital bed is only a modernised version<sup>5</sup>.

Mahlke's flight from the hostility of his surroundings takes him to the bowels of the Polish minesweeper, Rybitwa. But his refuge, unlike Oskar's, is not a refuge in the full sense of the word, indeed, it plays a number of contradictory roles. For Mahlke, the minesweeper is not only a hiding place, it is just as much a hunting ground in which he performs the

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4) Günter Grass: Katz und Maus. Eine Novelle, 1961, (rororo edition), to be subsequently referred to as KM, p.105

5) J.B. Neveux lists a whole series of images in Grass's work which evoke feelings of security: '...les armoires, les caves et les abris, les tables, les couloirs, les bunker, la niche du chien, le bonhomme de neige, le wagon, le bric-à-brac des vieilles chambres, l'estrade...', in Etudes Germaniques, Oct.-Dec. 1966, pp.532-3.

most outstanding feats. Thus, unlike Oskar, he transfers his conflict to the Rybitwa, and the ship, far from being a haven of peace, is immediately transformed into the battlefield itself. Mahlke's retreat from the competitive world is at the same time a desperate rush towards it. In the end, the Rybitwa reverts to its original function as a place of refuge, this time for ever.

In Die Blechtrommel Oskar's external defence mechanism has its internal counterpart in his refusal to grow, a gesture symbolising his outright rejection of society. But Oskar's decision is subject to changing political circumstances; and if, towards the end of the novel, he considers a future within society, rather than outside it, it is because post-war Germany requires a more positive response from him. What could pass as an undercover act of resistance during the Third Reich, must be regarded as mere escapism after its collapse. At the end of the novel we leave Oskar preparing himself for a confrontation with the Black Witch.

Mahlke acts on Oskar's rational insight that a modus vivendi with the Black Witch, in Mahlke's case with the cat, has to be found. It is in this deeper sense that the protagonist of Katz und Maus is a

continuation of Oskar. On the other hand, he is also a reversal of Oskar. Whereas Oskar avoids the world, Mahlke's greatest ambition is to become part of it, the irony being that the 'world' will not grant him the recognition he seeks. Mahlke's entry into the world is reminiscent of Oskar's abortive attempt to become a 'useful' member of society, but again with one essential difference: Oskar's tentative commitment is to a relatively sane society, whereas Mahlke's desperate efforts at integration concern a perverse one. This is another gulf that separates Mahlke from Oskar.<sup>6</sup> Oskar undergoes three distinct stages in his moral development, each of which represents an advance on the previous one. Mahlke also undergoes a development, but his is retrogressive, in the sense that his moral awareness is sharpest at the beginning of the story. The highest point in Oskar's evolution is his coming to terms with the Black Witch, whilst Mahlke's story only unfolds after an aggressive confrontation with her equivalent, the cat.

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6) K.A. Horst, for instance, ignores the essential differences between Oskar and Mahlke: 'Wir wissen, daß Oskar...das Größerwerden nicht überlebte. Im Augenblick, als er zu wachsen aufhörte, streckte die schwarze Köchin die Hand nach ihm aus. Nicht anders ergeht es Mahlke, dem personifizierten Schauplatz jenes unentschiedenen Spiels zwischen 'Katz und Maus'...Ob schwarze Köchin oder Katz: ob Zwerg oder Maus - hier die drohend aufgehobene Tatze, dort das gewitzte Schlüpfen und Sichver-kriechen.' 'Ferne Trommelschläge' in Merkur, Dez. 1961, p. 1197

In his adolescence, Mahlke distinguishes himself as a person of exceptional integrity. Whereas his schoolmates amuse themselves by eating the droppings of seagulls, Mahlke alone abstains, or, when it comes to the public orgies of masturbation, '(war Mahlke) der einzige, der nicht mitmachte'. He also stands out as a pupil, both academically and as a person. His innate humaneness always makes him side with the underdog, even if it means actively dissociating himself from his class mates:

...kein Streber, büffelte mäßig,  
 ließ jeden abschreiben, petzte nie,  
 ...hatte auffallende Abscheu vor  
 den üblichen Sauereien der Terti-  
 aner und griff ein, als Hotten  
 Sonntag einen Überzieher...über  
 die Türklinke der Klassentür stülpte.  
 Studienrat Treuge, einem halbblinden  
 Pauker, sollte eins ausgewischt  
 werde...(Mahlke) drückte sich aus  
 seiner Bank, machte unbeeilte Schritte  
 und entfernte das Präservativ mit  
 einem Butterbrotpapier...<sup>7</sup>

Unfortunately, Mahlke's sensitivity in the private sphere does not extend to the political one. His rebellion against the cat degenerates into a senseless ambition to outdo his class mates at all costs. The personal suffering caused by an outsize Adam's apple makes him lose all feeling for the value of his objectives. This inferiority complex forces him to achieve things merely for the sake of achievement.

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7) KM p.23

Thus, far from being Mahlke's salvation, the shock of the cat's attack blunts Mahlke's perspicacity instead of sharpening it, and is therefore bound to bring about his destruction.

Had Mahlke been left to his own devices, had he been spared persecution, he would have remained the quiet outsider he was at the age of fourteen. Of course, it is futile to speculate in this way, because the whole story is precisely about the predominance of the feline element in this world. Such a hypothesis is only meaningful in so far as it helps to prove that Mahlke's failure is on no account due to his entering the fight, but only to the way he goes about it. His revolt is built on an unsound foundation, a foundation taken over unquestioningly from outside, rather than being a product of personal reflection.

This is yet another crucial difference between Oskar and Mahlke. Whereas Oskar knowingly steps outside society, Mahlke's greatest desire is to conform. Oskar chooses to be a dwarf as an act of protest, Mahlke is forced into the position of the outsider. It starts with his family background as an only child, deprived of his father, living with his mother and aunt. Even his old-fashioned clothes inherited from his father, are designed to mark him out, just

as much as his self-assumed responsibility for the two ailing women who have brought him up<sup>8</sup>. But more significant than his background are his physical idiosyncracies: his facial expression is 'leidend und sanft entschlossen', an 'Erlösermiene'. An abnormally large Adam's apple crowns his distinctiveness as the visible manifestation of all Mahlke's strength and weakness, his one and only driving force.

Thus Oskar's and Mahlke's physical abnormalities only correspond to each other in a superficial way: essentially they are of a very different order. The fact that Oskar's mutilation is self-inflicted and Mahlke's an involuntary one, has deep-seated psychological and political implications. Oskar's disguise as a three-year-old is a deliberate camouflage: when he resorts to irresponsibility, it is in order to behave all the more responsibly. Oskar therefore departs from a position of relative strength.

Not so Mahlke, whose protruding Adam's apple is merely a handicap and predetermines him to victimisation; either he accepts his state as a victim or fights against it. But, whereas Oskar fought his society by opposing it, with his own brand of morality,

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8) KM p.104: 'Mahlke zeigte Fürsorge, erkundigte sich nach den kleinen und großen Gebrechen seiner Mutter und seiner Tante...'

Mahlke abandons his scale of values, and adopts the Nationalist Socialist scale. By reaching out for the highest military honour that National Socialist society has to offer, the 'Ritterkreuz', Mahlke becomes a slave to its moral code.

Oskar seems to choose the line of least resistance, yet his achievements are more noteworthy than Mahlke's, who makes life as difficult for himself as possible. For Mahlke, it is as though the amount of effort invested was in itself a guarantee of its worth. This is the reason why he forces himself to do all those things for which he has the least aptitude. Swimming is a case in point. Pilenz tells us that, up to the age of fourteen, Mahlke was a non-swimmer; figuratively speaking, he was only half a human being, because he had not yet recognised his way to freedom, or, as Pilenz puts it: 'Bevor Du schwimmen konntest, warst Du ein Nichts.' What Pilenz does not say, however, is that Mahlke's swimming is not only a springboard to success, but also to complete failure. In other words, what starts off as a promising act of emancipation turns into an act of self-annihilation. Technical skill alone, such as Mahlke's swimming expertise, cannot solve human problems, particularly when it serves a perverse society.



One is here reminded of the temporary sterility of Amsel's scarecrows, which was also a result of his non-involvement. 'Bei aller ästhetischen Ausgewogenheit' his scarecrows suffer a 'Substanzschwund'. It is only after active participation in reality that his scarecrows become artistically viable again. But Mahlke, unlike Amsel, and Oskar, for that matter, never finds genuine access to reality. He may, by the end of the novel, be a champion swimmer and is, technically speaking, at the height of his glory, yet the awareness of the futility of all his efforts has never been as evident to him as at that very moment.

The same clash between outward success and personal loneliness was experienced by Oskar at the climax of his career, for similar reasons, namely that, at this stage, he exploited his drumming skills for the wrong ends (by reducing his audience to hysterical infants). But, whereas both Oskar's and Amsel's energies are mainly used to good effect - in spite of some notable exceptions - Mahlke's energies hardly ever are.

So far we have talked about what we called the universal level of the novella. We drew attention to the archetypal pattern of persecutor and persecuted and to possible ways of combatting such persecution.

Oskar and Amsel at least survive, however bruised they may be; Mahlke is the only character in Grass's work to commit suicide<sup>9</sup>. His unintelligent response to the 'cat's' attack is only part of the reason, the main source of Mahlke's misfortunes is his Adam's apple.

This is how the narrator Pilenz introduces the reader to it:

Mahlkes Adamsapfel fiel auf,  
weil er so groß war, immer in  
Bewegung und einen Schatten warf.<sup>10</sup>

It is the insistent awareness of its shadow, coupled with an ardent desire to dispel it, which drives Mahlke to his eccentricities. Pilenz reflects:

Er hätte seinen Adamsapfel  
reparieren lassen sollen. Wo-  
möglich lag alles nur an dem  
Knorpel.<sup>11</sup>

But Mahlke's Adam's apple is not simply a physical defect, it is primarily the externalisation of an acute vulnerability crying out for appeasement. The very first page is pregnant with such symbolic overtones:

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9) In the novella he simply 'disappears', but there is a strong suggestion of suicide. The only other character who commits suicide is the homosexual greengrocer Greff of BT.

10) KM p.5

11) KM p.30

Die schwarze Katze spannte sich  
 ,, zum Sprung...: denn Mahlkes  
 Adamsapfel wurde der Katze zur  
 Maus...'<sup>12</sup>

At a later stage, Pilenz describes the Adam's apple  
 as:

...jene lebendige Maus..., die  
 ich mit der Hand hätte fangen  
 können, so schutzlos war das  
 Tierchen unterwegs.<sup>13</sup>

When the aggression of the cat is imminent, Pilenz  
 actually helps it on its way:

...oder ich...packte die Katze,  
 zeigte ihr Mahlkes Maus: und  
 Joachim Mahlke schrie, trug aber  
 nur unbedeutende Kratzer davon.<sup>14</sup>

Mahlke's outcry is like a shudder of recognition that  
 the time has come for him to face up to the world;  
 the cry is followed by positive action. His campaign  
 proceeds in two distinct stages: at first his activi-  
 ties are centred around the school world, later he  
 turns to the adult world. He starts off by evolving  
 a whole series of appeasers, or what Pilenz calls  
 'Entsprechungen':

...hatte mal diese mal jenes  
 am Hals hängen, um die ewige  
 Katze von der ewigen Maus ab-  
 zulenken...<sup>15</sup>

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12) KM p. 5

13) KM p. 13

14) KM p. 6

15) KM p. 21

But none of his chosen devices seem to pacify his mouse, 'denn die Maus war unersättlich'<sup>16</sup>. His beloved screwdriver for instance 'verdeckte nie vollkommen jenen fatalen Knorpel'<sup>17</sup>. Only the Virgin Mary, his venerated protector, proves a source of strength to him.

Nur ihretwegen hat er alles, was sich am Hals tragen und zeigen ließ, in die Marienkirche geschleppt. Alles, vom Tauchen bis zu den späteren mehr militärischen Leistungen, hat er für sie getan oder aber - schon muß ich mir widersprechen - um von seinem Adamsapfel abzulenken. Schließlich kann noch, ohne daß Jungfrau und Maus überfällig werden, ein drittes Motiv genannt werden: Unser Gymnasium, dieser muffige, nicht zu lüftende Kasten, und besonders die Aula, bedeuteten Joachim Mahlke viel, und zwangen Dich später, letzte Anstrengungen zu machen.<sup>18</sup>

Pilenz states in this paragraph the three key motives of the novella: the Adam's apple as the mouse, the 'Gymnasium' as the cat, and the Virgin Mary as one who tries and fails to reconcile these two antagonistic forces; the significance of Mahlke's catholicism will be discussed later.

In practical terms this reconciliation can only be

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16) KM p.30

17) KM p.8

18) KM p.35

Daseinswille bricht, dann dient  
diese Novelle der Kunst, weil sie  
derjenigen Wahrheit dient, die wir  
beim heutigen Stand unseres jugend-  
kundlichen Wissens sehen können.<sup>19</sup>

The Adam's apple is not only the key to the novella, it is also the link between the universal and the political level, and therefore it becomes the bridge between Katz und Maus and Hundejahre. It is, as so many of Grass's symbols<sup>20</sup>, a 'private' symbol which assumes political dimensions because of its historical context. It is important to remember that, throughout the story, Mahlke has only one aim in mind: to alleviate his private grievance. He is uninterested in, if not unaware of the political implications of his acts. Mahlke's reaction to the first war speech illustrates this discrepancy between the private and the political. As Pilenz reports the general enthusiasm aroused by the speech, he singles out Mahlke's reserve:

Wir klatschten lange, grölten  
und trampelten. Erst als meine  
Hände brannten und hart waren,  
bemerkte ich, daß sich Mahlke  
zurückhielt, und keinen Beifall  
in Richtung Katheder spendete.<sup>21</sup>

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19) Quoted in Kurt Lothar Tank: Günter Grass, Berlin 1965, pp.75-6

20) cf. the drum, the scarecrow, the dogs.

21) KM p.51

Mahlke's response is one of disapproval, but one wonders whether it is based on deeper insight or sheer envy. His comment on the speech is equivocal:

'Jetzt müssen sie schon Vierzig  
'runterholen, wenn sie das Ding<sup>22</sup>  
haben wollen. Ganz zu Anfang und  
als sie in Frankreich und im Norden  
fertig waren, bekamen sie es schon,  
sobald sie Zwanzig - wenn das so  
weitergeht?'<sup>23</sup>

In his dissertation on Günter Grass, John Reddick<sup>24</sup> interprets this passage as evidence not only of Mahlke's humaneness, but of his unambiguous dissociation from National Socialism; in his view, Mahlke can see through the Nazi monstrosities. Subsequent events, however, prove that the opposite is in fact the case, namely that Mahlke's obsession with public recognition blinds him to the political implications of his ambition. Thus, when he bemoans the escalation from twenty to forty planes, he is more likely to refer to the escalation in effort and courage required to obtain the 'Ritterkreuz', than to the increase in human sacrifice. For the first time, Mahlke experiences the admiration with which a war hero can

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22) i.e. the 'Ritterkreuz'

23) KM p.52

24) John Reddick: 'The eccentric narrative world of Günter Grass', Ph.D. (Cambridge), 1970.

inspire an audience, this is exactly the kind of acclaim he aspires to himself. Only such approval would help him to come to terms with his Adam's apple. By the time of the second speech, his mind is made up, for Mahlke steals the medal and tries out its effect. At long last he has found a solution to the anguish caused by his Adam's apple. His friends' reaction encourages him in this belief:

Es hatte ein Adamsapfel, der, wie ich immer noch vermutete...Mahlkes Motor und Bremse war,...zum ersten Mal ein genaues Gegengewicht gefunden. Still schlief er...und mußte eine Zeitlang nicht rücken...<sup>25</sup>

Mahlke's next step is to volunteer for the army; he does so with a bad conscience:

'Hab mich übrigens freiwillig gemeldet. Schüttel über mich selber den Kopf. Weißt ja, wie wenig ich davon halte: Militär, Kriegsspielen und diese Überbetonung des Soldatischen.<sup>26</sup>

Certainly, Mahlke has intellectual reservations, but his emotional need to conform, or more precisely, to be more conformist than the conformists is infinitely stronger. Thus, Mahlke remains only a potential protester. His is a very ill-defined protest at that, more of a malaise than clearly formulated objections. Oskar's frontal attacks are conspicuous by their

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25) KM p.81

26) KM p.91

absence in Mahlke. In a letter to the two women, for instance, he writes: 'Manchmal will man nach dem Sinn fragen', but he is just as quick to allay his doubts: 'aber es muß wohl sein'. His dissatisfaction with the world springs mainly from his fervent belief in the Virgin Mary. It is for her sake that he has himself thrown out of the 'Jungvolk' (because the meetings clashed with Mass), not because he finds the Hitler Youth suspect. Any direct criticism of the Third Reich and its particular aspects are either articulated by the narrator, or, more directly still, are rooted within the language itself. Holthusen characterises Grass's language in Katz und Maus as a 'politisches Instrument'<sup>27</sup>.

The first example that springs to mind is the strict avoidance of the word 'Ritterkreuz' and the endless string of pejorative substitutes:

...er hatte den besonderen Artikel am Hals, das Dinglamdei, den Magneten, das Gegenteil einer Zwiebel, galvanisierten Vierklee, des guten alten Schinkel Ausgeburt, den Bonbon, Apparat, das Ding Ding Ding, das Ichsprechesnichts.<sup>28</sup>

By not mentioning the 'Unmentionable', Grass imitates

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27) Hans Egon Holthusen: 'Günter Grass als politischer Autor', Der Monat, Jg.18, 1966, pp.66-81

28) KM p.114



the uncritical admirers of the 'Ritterkreuz' as well as expressing his own contempt for it.

Klohse's flowery introduction of the Kapitänleutnant to the school also illustrates the use of language as a political instrument:

Klohse sprach von allen, die  
draußen stehn, von allen zu  
Lande, zu Wasser und in der  
Luft, sprach lange und mit Ge-  
falle von sich und den Studenten  
bei Langemarck, und auf der  
Insel Ösel fiel Walter Flex,  
Zitat: Reifwerdenreinbleiben:  
Mannestugend. Sogleich Fichte  
oder Arndt, Zitat: Vondirund-  
deinemtunallein. Erinnerung an  
einen vorbildlichen Schulauf-  
satz, den der Kapitänleutnant  
als Obersekundaner über Arndt  
und Fichte geschrieben hatte:  
'Einer von uns, aus unserer  
Mitte, aus dem Geist unseres  
Gymnasiums hervorgegangen, und  
in diesem Sinne wollen wir...'29

The main principles of this education are Spartan virtues, ideals of purity and blind subordination to the community, all of them conveyed in inarticulate clichés, such as 'Mannschaft ist eine eingeschworene Gemeinschaft'.<sup>30</sup>

When the Kapitänleutnant wallows in sentimental descriptions of sunsets, the speech becomes intolerable.

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29) KM p.64

30) KM p.66

The narrator takes it upon himself to give a resumé:

Er ließ also mit steifem Ding am Hals eine Farbenorgel dröhnen und säuseln, kam vom wäβrigen Blau über kaltglasiertes Zitronengelb zum bräunlichen Purpur...Dazwischen Wölkchen, zuerst silbrig, dann liefen sie an: 'So mögen Vögel und Engel verbluten!' sagte er wörtlich mit seinem Sprechmund, und ließ aus dem gewagt beschriebenen Naturereignis plötzlich und aus bukolischen Wölkchen ein Flugboot ...brummen.<sup>31</sup>

Holthusen's comment on the style of this passage is:

Daß diese Verlogenheit sich hier nicht ideologisch gibt, sondern kalligraphisch, in Form von schwülstigen Naturbeschreibungen, welche die bittere Sachlichkeit des Krieges mit einer süßlichen lyrischen Sauce übergießen...<sup>32</sup>

and he concludes that Grass's style:

gibt sich als ein Plädoyer gegen ein älteres und für ein neues Stilideal: gegen jene kalligraphisch eskapistische Sprachkultur, wie sie in den dreißiger Jahren in Deutschland weit verbreitet war, und für einen neuen grotesk-realistischen Stil, der die Dinge ...beim Namen nennt.<sup>33</sup>

This particular use of language is even more extensively developed in Hundejahre (strangely enough, Holthusen does not approve of it there), especially

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31) KM p.67

32) Holthusen: loc. cit., p.71

33) ibid., p.71

when it comes to the Heidegger and Weininger travesties.

Mahlke senses the insincerity of these speeches; he is perfectly capable of telling genuine from false heroism. This is why his father, as a model of altruism, and the Virgin Mary are his constant spiritual companions. In his projected speech to the school, Mahlke was going to pay tribute to all those forces that stood him in good stead during the fights:

Wollte über meinen Vater und  
Labuda. Hätte ganz kurz das  
Eisenbahnglück vor Dirschau.  
Und wie mein Vater durch per-  
sönlichen Einsatz. Und daß ich  
am Richtaufsatz immer an meinen  
Vater. War nicht mal versorgt,  
als er. Dank Dir auch für  
die Kerzen damals. O allzeit  
Reine. Die Du im unverletzlichen  
Glanze. Durch Fürsprache teil-  
haftig werde. Liebreiche, Gna-  
denreiche. Jawohl. Denn gleich  
mein erster Einsatz...hat be-  
wiesen...Und wie im August an  
der Vorskla die Jungfrau.<sup>34</sup>

What Mahlke, quite unlike Oskar, does not seem to be capable of grasping is the total incompatibility of the two mentalities: that of his father and Christianity on the one hand, and National Socialism on the other. We remember Oskar juggling about with the notions of Faith, Hope and Love of the Epistle to the

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34) KM p.132

Corinthians. This was a bitter accusation against the debasement of Christian values by the National Socialists. Mahlke, however, has no difficulties in making his catholicism coexist with his activities in the Nazi navy. He is, no doubt, the most pathetic of the Grass protagonists. No character in the entire oeuvre is as perfect a victim as Mahlke.

Oskar only pretends to be one, Amsel even knows how to be a successful victim. Only Matern is comparable to Mahlke, or to put it differently, Mahlke is Amsel and Matern in one. Mahlke is reminiscent of Amsel, because, as far as society is concerned, being a Jew is comparable to sporting a large Adam's apple. Both phenomena depart from the norm, both are inflicted on their bearers, and both are experienced as social 'handicaps'. This apparently superficial resemblance is so fundamental that it has far-reaching psychological consequences. What Amsel says about his father (a remark which is just as applicable to himself): 'der Schneiderssohn hatte sich 14 Jahre mit dem Vergessen seiner Herkunft...beschäftigt'<sup>35</sup>, could be easily modified to fit Mahlke's case, with the notable difference that, from the awareness of his Adam's apple onwards, Mahlke did not have 14 years to live.

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35) Günter Grass: Hundejahre (rororo 1968), p.31

Whilst combatting their respective obsessions, both protagonists compromise their integrity by cooperating with the system, in varying degrees and according to their possibilities. Amsel collects money for the 'Winterhilfswerk' and is happiest when donning an SA uniform. His origins preclude him from compromising himself any further. Mahlke, as we know, goes the whole way. He volunteers for the army and makes it his particular business to come out top. What Amsel and Mahlke have in common, is that their participation springs from the same source: a desire to shake off their otherness and merge with the masses<sup>36</sup>. But, whereas Amsel joins in with the full knowledge of his deviousness, Mahlke does so in relative innocence.

He has no inkling of just how much of a victim he is. Not only does the system exploit his physical courage and extraordinary will power (which Mahlke happily puts at its disposal), but in the end he even refuses to grant him the recognition for which he has fought so tenaciously. If anything, Mahlke is in the mistaken belief that he is the one who uses the system, in order to rectify what he considers to be a personal deficiency: his Adam's apple. In fact, as will be shown later, he is just like the gardener in Haseloff's ballet who turns to the National Socialist system to

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36) Such patterns of behaviour also reveal that Grass does not adhere to the Christian notion of betterment through suffering.

solve a personal dilemma and finds himself completely overruled by the system. In both instances, only the reader knows about Mahlke's double victimisation: Mahlke is firstly a victim of himself, that is of his compulsive urge to compensate for extreme insecurity by extreme self-assertion; secondly, he is a victim of a society which knows how to take advantage of his maladjustment.

Matern of Hundejahre is also a victim, although, in contrast to Mahlke, his handicaps are all psychological. Even more than Mahlke, Matern is a specimen of 'Germanness', well-intentioned, but too impulsive, too emotional, too violent to apply reason to his decisions and actions. He is more socially aware than Mahlke, but lacks, like him, all political judgement. Another trait that unites the two characters is their self-importance, their utter lack of humour. Brauksel's description of the Matern family as possessing 'Sinn für große, ja opernhafte Auftritte'<sup>37</sup> is just as applicable to Mahlke. Both flirt with the theatre, Matern as a professional actor, Mahlke as a potential clown.

Moderation is alien to both of them; whatever they do,

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37) Hundejahre, p.25

they take to extremes. They seem to have a built-in mechanism, which, once set in motion, will pursue its course relentlessly. In short, they are both fanatics. Whereas Amsel's and Oskar's aloofness, shrewdness and flexibility seem to verge on opportunism at times, but are in fact its very opposite, Matern's intransigence, suspiciously reminiscent of moral fibre, leads him to the worst type of opportunism. Vis-à-vis Amsel this opportunism takes the form of an attempted murder.

Treachery in friendship is also a theme in Katz und Maus. Mahlke prefigures only half of Matern, the other half is announced by the narrator Pilenz. Both Pilenz and Matern are treacherous friends, and yet, both are sensitive enough to suffer from an irradicable guilt feeling caused by their treachery. Their sense of having failed their friend persecutes them throughout their adult life. After their murderous attacks, they find themselves as incomplete as if they had lost their other halves. When Pilenz introduces himself as the narrator, he has this to say about his relationship to Mahlke:

Ich, Pilenz...diskutiere...mit Pater Alban..., erzähle ihm von Mahlke und Mahlkes Jungfrau, von Mahlkes Gurgel und Mahlkes Tante, von Mahlkes Mittelscheitel, Zuckerwasser, Grammophon, Schnee-Eule, Schraubenzieher, Wollpuscheln,...von Katz und Maus und mea culpa...; denn nur ich

war mit ihm so gut wie befreundet,  
wenn man mit Mahlke befreundet  
sein konnte.<sup>38</sup>

From the very beginning of his friendship with Amsel, Matern wants to assert his independence. In a symbolic gesture, the boy throws away the knife of blood-brotherhood, in the hope that it will never be retrieved. But, for reasons which will be discussed in the next chapter, the knife makes an equally symbolic reappearance, as does Amsel himself. Matern's whole Odyssey was motivated by the search for his friend, and yet when, after a final reunion, Amsel hands over the knife to him, Matern throws it away a second time. Amsel prophesies the eternal survival of the knife, and therewith of their association. The prophecy reinforces Matern's grudge, for it is precisely Amsel's effortless superiority which rekindles Matern's anger. But his fury leads nowhere, the two halves, the Jew and the German, belong together and must come to terms with each other. That is one of the political messages of Hundejahre.

Katz und Maus introduces the personal aspect of such an ambivalent love-hate relationship. The knife of the Amsel-Matern relationship is paralleled by

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38) KM pp.79-80



Mahlke's tin-opener. Half accidentally, half deliberately, this tin-opener is to remain with Pilenz. When Pilenz finally throws it after Mahlke, the tin-opener is swallowed up by the sea. In contrast to the knife, it does not re-emerge. Similarly, Mahlke, unlike Amsel, never surfaces again. Mahlke is not a Jew like Amsel, but he is an outsider; hence the political overtones of the friendship between Pilenz and Mahlke are not as explicit as in Hundejahre. Yet, Pilenz plays the role of German persecutor; this is why he often relates in the collective; 'Wir rätselten herum und konnten Dich nicht verstehen'. As a corollary to his role as persecutor, Pilenz also assumes the role of expiator: 'Ich aber, der ich Deine Maus einer und allen Katzen in den Blick brachte, muß nun schreiben'.<sup>39</sup>

Matern's attack on Amsel is an act of extreme violence; if it were not for Amsel's supernatural gift to survive, it would have cost him his life. Pilenz's attacks on Mahlke remain on a verbal level, but they are so well-aimed, that they drive Mahlke to suicide. The fact that Pilenz is to regret his treachery ever after, in no way diminishes his guilt.

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39) KM p.6

If Mahlke is an anticipation of the two characters Amsel and Matern combined, Pilenz too prefigures two Hundejahre characters in one. In his social role, Mahlke resembles Amsel, in his temperament, he announces Matern. Pilenz's part as a friend and betrayer parallels that of Matern. Temperamentally, however, he foreshadows one of the Hundejahre narrators, Harry Liebenau. With Harry he shares the ability and weakness to live vicariously. They both excel in chronic indecisiveness and lack of originality<sup>40</sup>, in absorbing and receiving, without ever creating or giving. Both are prototypes of German conformism. Both are atheists and both wish they were believers. Pilenz articulates their desire when he says:

...dürfte glauben, irgendetwas  
glauben, ganzgleichwas oder an  
die Auferstehung des Fleisches  
glauben.<sup>41</sup>

The final character linking all three novels is Tulla: she makes her first appearance in Die Blechtrommel as the ominous triangular-faced Luzi Rennwand, her mythical antecedent being the Black Witch. The ghost of Luzi Rennwand makes her reappearance in Katz und Maus as the full-blooded Tulla, a female creature, mainly

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40) Compare Pilenz's: 'ich, der große Zögerer', and Harry's 'angeborener Nachahmungsdrang'.

41) KM p.108

instrumental in challenging and admiring the virility of the pubescent Conradinum crowd. She even manages to break Mahlke's resistance to participating in these daily competitions. Apart from that, her role is peripheral; it comes nowhere near her status as the incarnation of evil in Hundejahre.

Such interaction between the characters in the three novels, and especially between Katz und Maus and Hundejahre, is to be expected, considering that Katz und Maus is an offspring of Hundejahre<sup>42</sup>. Pilenz himself announces the forthcoming novel in connection with Brunies' deportation:

...eine dunkle, verzweigte  
Geschichte, die an anderer  
Stelle, doch nicht von mir,  
und auf keinen Fall im Zu-  
sammenhang mit Mahlke, nieder-  
geschrieben werden soll.<sup>43</sup>

This remark alone testifies that Grass is reserving the more political aspects of Katz und Maus for Hundejahre.

In conclusion, we must return to our initial assertion that Katz und Maus is not only engagé, but more engagé than its predecessor, Die Blechtrommel. One can only

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42) Originally, Katz und Maus was part of the Hundejahre project, until it grew into a separate work.

43) KM p.39

substantiate this claim by re-stating what the author of Katz und Maus is in fact committed to, and how this commitment is conveyed within the novella.

Günter Grass gives us some clues when he says about Mahlke: 'Sein Fall **decouvriert** Kirche, Schule, Heldenwesen, - die ganze Gesellschaft.'<sup>44</sup> His particular choice of words shows two things: firstly, that, in line with the findings of this chapter, Grass thinks of Mahlke as a case, that is as a victim of society; secondly, by using 'decouvrieren' he indicates that he is still primarily concerned with uncovering, rather than attacking straight out. He prefers to let the events of the novella speak for themselves; he never steps outside the narrative, as he does occasionally in Hundejahre. The slant which Pilenz gives his narrative is sufficient to unmask all that needs unmasking. When Pilenz describes, for instance, that Mahlke 'stieg mit seinem Gehänge in die Badehose'<sup>45</sup>, he can be sure to shock a conservative German audience, to whom such a suggestion must and did seem preposterous. The trial that followed the publication and only narrowly averted the banning of Katz und Maus is mainly to be attributed to Grass's treatment of 'Heldenwesen'. Interestingly enough, the most militant opponents of

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44) In a letter to John Reddick, op.cit.

45) KM p.83

the novella purported to be disturbed by its so-called gratuitous obscenities; it needed Dr Ottinger's medical report to refute the view that these 'obscenities' were gratuitous.

The hero cult had already come under heavy fire twice during the course of the previously mentioned speeches. Pilenz himself never misses an opportunity to hold the war ethos up to ridicule. Here he quotes from the newspaper cutting proudly announcing Mahlke's meteoric rise:

Und es stand mit Buchstaben  
gedruckt: Ein Sohn unserer  
Stadt hat in pausenlosem Ein-  
satz, zuerst als einfacher  
Richtschütze, dann als Panzer-  
kommandant und so weiter und  
so weiter.<sup>46</sup>

There is hardly a more effective way of expressing one's hostility to well-cherished values than by glossing them over with the most banal conjunction 'and so on and so on'. John Reddick writes in his discussion of Katz und Maus: 'The medal is society's glorification of destruction'<sup>47</sup>. It is even more than that: not only does society glorify Mahlke by bestowing the medal on him, but ironically, the destroyer Mahlke is himself destroyed by that same society which previously

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46) KM p.112

47) John Reddick: op.cit., p.316

glorified him.

Unmasking the much admired courage of a 'Ritterkreuz-träger' for what it is, namely as a particularly expert exercise in human slaughter, is a more specialised line of attack than were the anti-war innuendoes in Die Blechtrommel. Of course, it is already clear from the first novel that Grass does not have much love for the military, let alone the SA ethos. But Oskar's protest is directed against vast areas of human behaviour. He tries to uncover the cause of so much human corruption, and finds that the wilful misinterpretation of the notions of the Epistle to the Corinthians go a long way to explain man's wickedness. Katz und Maus comes to grips with the symptoms of such a society: the 'Ritterkreuz' is one of them. By substituting for Oskar's general lament a specific attack on the medal, Grass may have delimited his protest, but by delimiting it, he has also intensified it.

The same process of specialisation applies to the other two aspects which Grass mentions, the Church and School. Oskar illustrated how human nature was capable of twisting and turning Christian principles in order to fit its own selfish ends. 'Liebe' becomes 'Radieschenliebe', 'Glaube' becomes 'Glaube an den Gasman' (i.e. Hitler), and 'Hoffnung' becomes 'Hoffnung auf Schluß, damit sie neu anfangen könnten oder fortfahren.' Within the wide

framework of Christianity, everybody picks and chooses according to need. The Corinthian principles, Oskar implies, have been debased to a mere cloak of respectability for the most ruthless egotism. His mother is a case in point: she finds her way of life perfectly compatible with the Catholic faith. Oskar's mocking tone reveals his disapproval:

Mama wurde fromm. Was machte sie fromm? Der Umgang mit Jan Bronski, das gestohlene Collier, die süße Mühsal eines ehebrecherischen Frauenlebens machten sie fromm und lüstern nach Sakramenten...<sup>48</sup>

and he concludes from this: 'wie gut sich die Sünde einrichten läßt.'<sup>49</sup>

This 'pick and choose' attitude, to which the Catholic dogma lays itself open, is best exemplified by Mahlke. His particular choice falls on the Virgin Mary; she appeals most to his imagination. Mahlke's indifference to the Christian faith could not have been put more bluntly than by this comment:

Natürlich glaube ich nicht an Gott. Der übliche Schwindel, das Volk zu verdummen. Die einzige, an die ich glaube, ist die Jungfrau Maria. Deshalb werde ich auch nicht heiraten.<sup>50</sup>

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48) BT p.109

49) BT p.109

50) KM p.122

Thus Oskar's criticism is fully borne out by Mahlke. The latter's statement shows that such a selective attitude, if taken to extremes, eventually leads to the total separation of Catholic symbols from their religious context. In Mahlke's case, the Virgin Mary represents the 'ideal woman'. He uses her as a vessel for all his fantasies, sexual and otherwise. His veneration for her is the outlet for his frustrations; she is the only one to help and understand.

In the beginning, her influence is a positive one. It is she who isolates Mahlke from his National Socialist surroundings, for instance. The fact that she bends to all Mahlke's desires makes her, initially, a genuine protector of Mahlke's 'mouse' and all its painful implications. But her strength also constitutes her weakness: thus her excessive flexibility prevents her from resisting the ever-growing pressures of National Socialist morality. Chosen (by Mahlke) to reconcile the mouse with the cat, she fails abysmally. Without any effort on her part, she slips from one camp to the other and finishes up by solidly identifying herself with the 'cat'. Mahlke's visions in his hour of trial on the battlefield are inspired by her<sup>51</sup>. As Heinz Ide points out, the novella Katz und Maus

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51) KM p.133



demonstrates 'Zugeordnetsein des Religiösen zum Kämpferischen'<sup>52</sup>, whereby National Socialism is not the cause but the consequence of Mahlke's religious aberrations. Mahlke's uncritical cult of the Virgin Mary deteriorates into another 'ism', another ideology, or to quote Ide:

Katholizismus steht überall bei Grass stellvertretend für jeden 'Ismus' überhaupt, d.h. für jede dogmatisch verfestigte Lehre, für jedes ausschließliche Gültigkeit beanspruchende Denken.<sup>53</sup>

The third and final aspect of society which Grass mentions is the school. We know about Oskar's first day at school which resulted in outright rejection of one of its representatives: Miss Spollenhauer seemed to him the epitome of a 'vorgeschriebene Existenzkarikatur'. After this experience he leaves the school world for ever. The school world of the Conradinum Gymnasium comes very much into its own - again the method of particularisation applies here - in Katz und Maus. Miss Spollenhauer has her male equivalents in Mallenbrandt and Klohse. Mallenbrandt, incidentally, is also a link between

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52) Heinz Ide: 'Dialektisches Denken im Werk von Günter Grass', Studium Generale (21), 1968, p.616

53) ibid., p.616

militarism (here physical education) and religion. He will not let Mahlke wear his screwdriver during the P.E. lessons, but does not object to him sporting the Virgin Mary:

weil er außer Leibesübung...auch Religion unterrichtete und bis ins zweite Kriegsjahr hinein die Reste eines katholischen Arbeiter-Turnvereins unters Reck und an den Barren zu führen verstand.<sup>54</sup>

This parallellism is reflected throughout the story. The interchangeability between the gymnasium and the chapel is a case in point:

(eine) Turnhalle, der jedoch, fremd genug, auf neurotem Dach ein geteertes Kreuz ritt, denn die Marienkapelle, eine ehemalige Turnhalle..., hatte man als Notkirche einrichten müssen.<sup>55</sup>

The traces of this unfortunate crossfertilisation can never be completely obliterated:

Da sich der Turnhallcharakter der Marienkapelle...nicht leugnen und verstellen ließ, haftete der Kapelle...die fanatische Nüchternheit eines Betsaales an.<sup>56</sup>

Next to Mallenbrandt, there is Klohse, the other representative of the school, by far the more vociferous of the two. His main ambition is to reflect at school

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54) KM p.116

55) KM p.16

56) KM p.16

the kind of respectability that characterised National Socialist society; anyone who is not prepared to toe the line with him is condemned from the start. One is already familiar with his patriotic fervour through his introduction to the speech of the 'Ritterkreuz-träger'. His reaction to Mahlke's confession (after having stolen the medal) only reinforces one's view of him as a believer in antiquated virtues. The abstract reputation of the school matters infinitely more to him than the fate of a contrite individual. In the end, the educator comes near to being a murderer.

In the whole novella Klohse is as perfect an impersonation of the 'cat' as possible. Pilenz, another upholder of this mentality, is the first to recognise it in others. When the decorated Mahlke returns to his old school to deliver his speech, Pilenz casts Klohse in the role of the cat. He even baptises him the 'Hauskatze'<sup>57</sup>. In his feline fashion, Klohse does not congratulate Mahlke on his new status. He can only suggest that Mahlke should give a talk, not at his own institution, the one and only aim of all Mahlke's endeavours, but at the Horst-Wessel-Schule, to which the pupil had been transferred after his theft. Simulating a democratic process, the whole school world comes to

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57) KM p.116

the unanimous decision:

daß ein ehemaliger Schüler, dessen Vorgeschichte, selbst wenn er, doch gerade in Anbetracht der schweren und ernsten Zeiten, ohne allerdings jener Affäre übertriebene Bedeutung beizumessen, zumal der Fall schon vor geraumer Zeit, dennoch und weil der Fall beispiellos, seien die Kollegien beider Anstalten übereingekommen, daß...<sup>58</sup>

This rambling officialese is self-explanatory; it disguises the type of inhumanity that makes for Mahlke's disappearance.

Klohse's advice to Mahlke is to renounce his lifelong ambition:

Und Mahlke nahm Klohses brieflichen Rat an, wählte...das heldische Schweigen und schlug wortlos, links rechts,...in des Oberstudienrates rasiertes Gesicht. Beide starr und mit Haltung.<sup>59</sup>

Nothing can move Klohse. He stands upright, unshaken as the living embodiment of the school:

die Anstalt, die Schule, die Conradische Stiftung, den Conradischen Geist, das Conradinum; so hieß unser Gymnasium.<sup>60</sup>

Not so Mahlke; this revenge brings about his final collapse. Mahlke's breakdown is in fact a proof that

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58) KM p.128

59) KM p.121

60) KM p.121

he himself considers his action as illegitimate, as a breach of the law, and his presumptive suicide is his form of self-punishment. He is plagued by the same guilt feelings over his desertion. 'Vielleicht hab' ich auch Angst,' he confesses to Pilenz. Only the reader welcomes Mahlke's act as a laudable act of rebellion. It is precisely Mahlke's tragedy that he himself is unaware of the justification of his active defiance. If he had been aware, he would not have paid for it with his life.

Therefore I cannot fully agree with Reddick's interpretation that 'by striking Klohse and by fleeing, Mahlke rejects the given society of his time.' Conscious rejection, so prominent in Oskar, is absent in Mahlke. Nevertheless, Grass has fully convinced the reader that 'der Fall Mahlke decouvriert Kirche, Schule, Heldenwesen - die ganze Gesellschaft.' By focussing on these three particular aspects of society, Grass's protest in Katz und Maus has become more tangible than in Die Blechtrommel, and the confrontation with the German reader leaves the latter less room for escape.

CHAPTER FIVE

HUNDEJAHRE

Although Katz und Maus was published two years before Hundejahre, it is in fact an intellectual offspring of the latter novel. In spite of the chronological sequence of Grass's work, one can only agree with Reich-Ranicki when he writes:

Die Blechtrommel und Hundejahre...  
gehören zueinander und stammen im  
Grunde aus derselben Periode.<sup>1</sup>

Reich-Ranicki, however, seems to underestimate the differences between the two works:

Nicht der Roman Hundejahre verweist indes auf die Richtung des Weges, den Grass in den nächsten Jahren eingeschlagen hat, sondern die zwar früher erschienene, aber offenbar später konzipierte Novelle Katz und Maus, ein auf jeden Fall ungleich reiferes und strengeres Werk. Die politischen Reden, das Drama Die Plebejer proben den Aufstand, die Gedichte der Sammlung Ausgefragt - das sind die Stationen, die diesen Weg markieren. Sie zeigen deutlich, wohin er führen soll: zur Synthese von künstlerischer Disziplin und moralischer Verantwortung.<sup>2</sup>

And he concludes:

So dokumentiert der Roman Hundejahre einen bereits überwundenen Abschnitt in der Entwicklung des Schriftstellers Günter Grass.<sup>3</sup>

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1) Marcel Reich-Ranicki: Literatur der kleinen Schritte - deutsche Schriftsteller heute, München, 1967, p.32

2) ibid., pp.32-3

3) ibid., p.33

Admittedly, unlike Katz und Maus, Hundejahre is not a model of artistic discipline, but more intensely than the novella, Hundejahre involves moral responsibility and that on a much wider scale. This factor alone makes it a 'wegweisendes Werk'. Die Blechtrommel had already meant acceptance of moral responsibility: the realistic framework of Hundejahre indicates an intensification of this acceptance. The narrator of Die Blechtrommel was an inmate of a mental hospital, the three narrators of Hundejahre are 'ordinary' people. In the centre of Die Blechtrommel there is the isolated figure of the gnome: Hundejahre deals essentially with the different stages of a friendship. As Reich-Ranicki says, Hundejahre is, in some ways, a variation on Die Blechtrommel, but from the point of view of commitment, Hundejahre represents a significant extension of the first novel.

An examination of the structural and thematic links between Die Blechtrommel and Hundejahre should clarify what is meant by extension. Like the first novel, Hundejahre has a tripartite structure. Die Blechtrommel is divided up into three books: the first book dealing with Oskar's childhood in Danzig during the period leading up to Hitler's rise to power, the second with Oskar's activities during the Third Reich, and the third with his life in West Germany after 1945.

The same allocation of time and place can be found in Hundejahre; its three books have titles of their own: 'Frühschichten' is an exposition of Amsel's and Matern's childhood on the banks of the Vistula with Brauxel/Amsel as the narrator. 'Liebesbriefe', the title of the second section, is Harry Liebenau's account of life under National Socialism, written in the form of letters to his cousin Tulla. The third book, 'Materniaden', is a diatribe against prevailing attitudes to the 'economic miracle', with Matern as its narrator. The external structure of the two novels is identical (time and place), but the narrative technique differs. Oskar, with some insignificant exceptions, was the acknowledged omniscient narrator of Die Blechtrommel. Hundejahre is recounted by three narrators (Brauksel alias Amsel, Liebenau and Matern), with a view to changing the perspective on each occasion. The introduction of three narrators, however, does not entail a real difference of narrative perspective, which makes the structural complications redundant. There is no doubt that Brauksel is in fact the omniscient narrator<sup>4</sup>, and that Grass, hiding

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4) Günter Grass: Hundejahre (rororo edition), 1968, to be subsequently referred to as HJ.  
 Regarding Brauksel's omniscience, see HJ p.13: 'was nur Brauxel wissen kann...';  
 p.27: 'Brauksel, der alles besser weiß...';  
 p.101: 'Sollte ein Schlußwort wünschenswert sein, wird Brauksel es schreiben...'



apparent, such as the frequent references to Oskar and his drum<sup>6</sup>, as well as constant allusions to minor characters in Die Blechtrommel, including Störtebecker, Dr Hollatz, the baker Scheffler, the trumpeter Meyn, the spinster schoolteacher Miss Spollenhauer, Schugger Leo and many others. This is hardly surprising, considering the identical nature of the milieu. As the two books deal with the same period of time, the major themes of religion, politics and art re-emerge in Hundejahre, but their treatment differs.

Matern, like Oskar (and even more so Mahlke), is irresistibly drawn towards the Virgin Mary, but his final rejection of her is more radical than Oskar's ever was. The attacks against the Catholic Church in Die Blechtrommel have lost nothing of their vehemence in Hundejahre. But instead of Oskar's general innuendoes against the hypocrisy of faith, Matern states explicitly the reasons for his indictment. His 'confession' to a priest may serve as an example:

Matern flüstert Namen Daten Zitate  
 ...'Und das warn Sie, genau Sie,  
 der gesagt hat, wieder 'rinn in  
 die SA. Immerzu Konkordatsgequatsche  
 ...Sogar heimlich 'ne Standarte  
 gesegnet und Gebete fürn Führer  
 geschналzt. Dominikaner! Schwarzer  
 Drecksack! - und zu mir, Matern,  
 gesagt: Mein Sohn, lege wieder an

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6) e.g. HJ p.103, p.119, p.121, p.157, p.208. p.234,  
 p.292

das braune Ehrenkleid. Jesus  
 Christus, der für uns am Kreuz  
 gestorben ist und all unseren  
 Werken zuschaut, hat uns den  
 Führer geschickt, damit er mit  
 Deiner und meiner Hilfe die Saat  
 der Gottlosen zertritt.<sup>7</sup>

The priest's reaction to the charges made against him  
 only confirms his previous behaviour:

Der hält sein Ohr hin nur beispiel-  
 haft. Der is nicht zu treffen. Dem  
 kannst Du alles jeden Tag doppelt  
 sagen, der hört immer nur den Wald  
 rauschen oder nicht mal den.<sup>8</sup>

Oskar's concern was of a more philosophical nature,  
 as symbolised by his drumming matches with Jesus, by  
 which he wanted to test God's power. Matern's grudge  
 is far more tangible: he actually accuses the Church  
 of collaboration with Hitler. It is in the directness  
 of the attack that the increased commitment expresses  
 itself.

Historical awareness is generally more pronounced in  
Hundejahre: the very title of the book suggests it.  
 The treatment of the Stauffenberg plot in the two  
 novels illustrates this point: Oskar claims to be  
 totally indifferent to the conspiracy of the 20 July  
 1944; he refers to it as 'die uns im Grunde gleich-  
 gültige Offiziersgeschichte' and leaves it at that.

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7) HJ pp.362-3

8) HJ p.363

In Hundejahre, Stauffenberg's attempt is dealt with at some length. It is first mentioned on page 291:

Es war einmal ein Attentäter, der verpackte eine Bombe, probeweise, in seiner Aktentasche.

The derogatory slant is already indicated by the adverb 'probeweise'. Two pages later, the plot is elaborated:

Dem Attentäter jedoch, der schon vor Monaten seine Proben mit Bombe und Aktentasche abgeschlossen hatte, gelang es nicht, in ein Kriegsgefangenenlager für Antifaschisten zu kommen. Auch mißglückte sein Attentat, weil er kein Attentäter von Beruf war, ungelernt nicht aufs Ganze ging, sich verdrückte, bevor die Bombe deutlich Ja gesagt hatte, und sich aufsparen wollte für große Aufgaben nach geglücktem Attentat.

One page later, the theme is taken up again:

Mit einem Wort: der Attentäter versagte; die Bombe jedoch versagte nicht, detonierte pünktlich, beendete einige Offizierskarrieren, nahm aber weder den Führer, noch des Führers Lieblingshund aus der Welt.

The blame for the failure is plainly attributed to Stauffenberg:

...denn als die Bombe Jetzt! sagte,... als die Bombe in der Aktentasche des inzwischen schon flüchtigen Attentäters Amen sagte, traf es... kein einziges Mal den Führer und dessen Lieblingshund.<sup>9</sup>

The story is taken to its conclusion a few pages

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9) HJ p.294

further on:

Der ungeschickte Attentäter jedoch  
wurde g~~eb~~henkt.<sup>10</sup>

At first glance the casual remark on the 20 July plot in Die Blechtrommel seems to contradict the elaborations in Hundejahre. This impression is deceptive; in the context of Die Blechtrommel Oskar's allusion can only be understood as a gross understatement, and his alleged indifference must be interpreted as a posture. ✓

On the other hand, one can already deduce, from the coolness of Oskar's remark, that the author of Die Blechtrommel is not prepared to join the present cult of the Stauffenberg plot, as the one redeeming feature of German history during the Hitler regime. The line of argument taken in Hundejahre can leave no doubt that Grass is determined to expose the plot for what it was, namely a Conservative and aristocratic movement, a desperate attempt to save Germany's 'honour' before total collapse. Had Stauffenberg seriously planned to assassinate Hitler, Grass argues, he should have been prepared to sacrifice his own life. Whether in the light of historical research, Grass does not underestimate Stauffenberg's personal integrity, is a question one need not resolve in this

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10) HJ p.295

context. A mere look at the oath which Stauffenberg had prepared for all the conspirators, in case the attempt had been successful, reveals the mentality inspiring the plot, and explains Grass's critical attitude:

Wir wollen eine neue Ordnung, die alle Deutschen zu Trägern des Staates macht und ihnen Recht und Gerechtigkeit verbürgt, verachten aber die Gleichheitslüge und beugen uns vor den naturgegebenen Rängen. Wir wollen ein Volk, das in der Erde der Heimat verwurzelt, den natürlichen Mächten nahe bleibt, das im Wirken in den gegebenen Lebenskreisen sein Glück und sein Genüge findet und in freierem Stolz die niederen Triebe des Neides und der Mißgunst überwindet. Wir wollen Führende, die aus allen Schichten des Volkes wachsend, verbunden den göttlichen Mächten, durch großen Sinn, Zucht und Opfer den anderen vorangehen.<sup>11</sup>

As the previous examples have shown, the space allotted to Stauffenberg in Hundejahre as compared to Die Blechtrommel is another example of the intensification of Grass's commitment, resulting in the discussion of controversial historical events.

When dealing with the persecution of the Jews, Grass is just as explicit. In Die Blechtrommel the brutality of the SA provoked Markus's suicide; Fajngold's hallucinations were evidence of the horrors of

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11) See Eberhard Zeller: Geist der Freiheit. Der zwanzigste Juli, München, 1952

concentration camps. In Hundejahre the facts themselves and their associations are incorporated in the text:

und zwischen neunzehnhundertneun-  
unddreißig und neunzehnhundert-  
fünfundvierzig starben im Konzen-  
trationslager Stutthof... Menschen,  
ich weiß nicht wieviele.<sup>12</sup>

The atrocities of the extermination camps are represented in a mountain of bones, first mentioned on page 265, and then recurrently until reaching a climax of horror on page 279. Through fourteen pages the tension is sustained by constant reference to those bones, either by the ominous repetition of 'Es war einmal ein Knochenberg', or by allusions to the smell and smoke emanating from them. Whether this abstraction of the concentration camp crimes in Hundejahre is more effective than were the individual, but symbolic examples of Markus's and Fajngold's experiences is debatable. There is a danger of aestheticising the victims' sufferings by means of such an allegory<sup>13</sup>, even if the original intention was to

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12) HJ p.243

13) The distinction between 'symbol' and 'allegory' is based on the following definition of allegories: 'Rational klar faßbare und scharf abgegrenzte Vorstellungsinhalte werden bildlich eingekleidet, daher oft Gefahr des Abgleitens ins bloß Rationale. Im Gegensatz zum Symbol 'bedeutet' die Allegorie nicht das Gemeinte, sondern 'ist' es selbst, sinnlich sichtbar in die Körperwelt versetzt...', Gero von Wilpert: Sachwörterbuch der Literatur, Stuttgart, 1964, p.3. The mountain of bones 'is'  
../cont.

sharpen the impact rather than to weaken it. That this must have been the intention is borne out by the confrontation of the pile of bones with the Heidegger disciples<sup>14</sup>, who are completely blinded to reality by Heidegger's jargon. In this instance the 'Knochenberg' becomes subsidiary to the attack on Heidegger's philosophy and its political implications.

There is a further instance of a symbol in Die Blechtrommel reappearing as an allegory in Hundejahre.

We remember the omnipresent shadow of the Black Witch in Die Blechtrommel, the arch symbol of evil. Although present from the beginning, the Black Witch becomes tangible only towards the end of the novel. The process in Hundejahre is reversed. Harras is very much a normal family dog in the beginning, and turns more and more into an allegory as one approaches the scarecrow inferno of the end. In both instances, the pile of bones and the dog, there is a move towards greater didacticism at the expense of poetic density.

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13)cont.

exactly what it represents, just as Hitler's dog 'is'. On this basis both are allegories. The Black Witch, however, is not a 'klar faßbare(r)...Vorstellungsinhalt', she 'signifies' evil, and is therefore a symbol. In both cases, previous symbols of Die Blechtrommel reappear as allegories in Hundejahre. The main symbol of art in Hundejahre, the scarecrow, finishes up as an allegory of ideology in the scarecrow inferno.

14)See HJ pp.274ff.

The more pronounced didacticism in Hundejahre is achieved by a higher degree of rationality. Grass has introduced cultural material from German philosophy which gives the novel an intellectual dimension not present in Die Blechtrommel. It is true that Oskar, too, equipped himself with two mentors, Rasputin and Goethe; they personified his own psychological dilemma, but the two figures were mere extensions of Oskar, they had no function outside him.

In Hundejahre there are also two intellectual figures in the background: Weininger<sup>15</sup> and Heidegger. But far from being subsidiary to the main characters, Amsel and Matern, they shape the lives and personalities of the two protagonists. Amsel endeavours to be a living refutation of Weininger's theories about the Jews, Matern is a victim of Heidegger's philosophy. In parodying Heidegger, Grass wants to lay bare the intrinsic dangers of all German idealist philosophy as a fertile breeding ground for National Socialism and other authoritarian modes of thinking.

All the parallels and divergences between Die Blechtrommel and Hundejahre are contained in the basic conception of both novels: the artist and the role

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15) See Wesley V. Blomster: 'The Documentation of a Novel: Otto Weininger and Hundejahre by Günter Grass', Monatshefte LXI no.2, 1969, pp.122-138



of his art in a totalitarian society. Oskar has his equivalent in Amsel, and Amsel's building of scarecrows corresponds to Oskar's drumming. In Die Blechtrommel Oskar's artistic freedom alone is threatened. In Hundejahre the situation is exacerbated by making the artist Amsel half Jewish, so that his very survival is at stake. Grass pays tribute to their affinity, by making them appear together, yet apart from the crowd in one passage of Hundejahre:

...wir [Harry and Tulla] überraschten Eddi Amsel und den Sohn des Kolonialwarenhändlers im Schneegestöber auf der Fröbelwiese...Amsel und der Gnom hoben sich als Schattenbilder vom Gestöber ab.<sup>16</sup>

Both Amsel and Oskar share an irreverence towards society and its institutions which is peculiar to the creative mind. Oskar's dictum 'Es gibt Dinge auf dieser Welt, die man - so heilig sie sein mögen - nicht auf sich beruhen lassen darf' applies also to Amsel. His friend Matern hates Amsel for his disrespect of authority; it threatens the foundation of Matern's existence:

[Matern about Amsel:]

Das redet schon wieder so zynisch daher und raucht auf recht zynische Art alles in Frage stellende Zigaretten. Was im Feuerofen als Credo eindeutig jubilierte, zerfällt,... in mißtönend(e)...Wenn und Aber.

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16) HJ p.178

Nichts ist ihm rein. Und immer  
alle Werte auf den Kopf gestellt.<sup>17</sup>

Amsel, like Oskar, conceives of the artist as a partisan<sup>18</sup>. Both are reacting against a world of narrowness and immobility.

Die Blechtrommel reveals in its title the central position of art in this novel. The title of Hundejahre seems to imply that 'dogs' dominate the story. If one thinks of 'dog years' as a time of political disaster, the title does justice to the novel. The fact that scarecrows, that is art, are not mentioned in the title indicates that the political aspect is more stressed in Hundejahre than it is in Die Blechtrommel. Yet, within the novel, the scarecrows are the most significant symbol. They may not be continually in the foreground as the drum in Die Blechtrommel, but they provide Hundejahre with a framework. Brauksel is therefore justified in referring to the novel as 'dieses Handbuch über den Bau wirksamer Vogelscheuchen'<sup>19</sup>. Amsel's relationship to his art reflects

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17) HJ p.477

18) Die Blechtrommel: '...ähnlich jenem Partisanen... bleibe ich rastlos und unzufrieden; was ich rechts knüpfe, löse ich links auf, was meine Linke bildet, zertrümmert meine geballte Rechte...' p.352  
Hundejahre: 'Was [Amsel] gestern gebaut hatte, riß er am folgenden Morgen nieder...' p.33

19) HJ p.33

his relationship to society. The scarecrow as the embodiment of Amsel's commitment is therefore of the utmost importance to this study. With the growing persecution of the Jews, his artistic products become a measure of his alienation from the very society which provides him with the material for his art.

Tracing the various stages in Amsel's artistic development will illustrate this process. There are common features which apply to all stages, such as this fundamental pronouncement:

Die Vogelscheuche wird nach dem  
Bild des Menschen geschaffen.<sup>20</sup>

which is, according to Th. Wieser, another way of saying:

Die Grotteske ist nach dem Ebenbild  
des Menschen geschaffen.<sup>21</sup>

The theory works both ways: when applied in reverse, the tone becomes more ominous:

...aus jedem Menschen läßt sich  
eine Vogelscheuche entwickeln;  
denn schließlich wird...die Vogel-  
scheuche nach dem Bild des Men-  
schen erschaffen.<sup>22</sup>

'Vogelscheuche' in German has distinctly pejorative

20) HJ p.32 and p.35

21) Theodor Wieser: Günter Grass. Porträt und Poesie. Neuwied, 1968, p.31

22) HJ pp.477-8

connotations<sup>23</sup>, exploited to the full in this final definition:

Aber unter allen Völkern, die als Vogelscheuchenarsenale dahinleben, ist es mit Vorzug das deutsche Volk, das, mehr noch als das jüdische, alles Zeug in sich hat, der Welt eines Tages die Urvogelscheuche zu schenken.<sup>24</sup>

If the German people is the producer of the archetypal scarecrow, the scarecrow must be the incarnation of an ideology, in this context, of National Socialist ideology. In Hundejahre, the scarecrow develops from an ambiguous symbol of art into an allegory of political ideology<sup>25</sup>. But before reaching this degree of explicitness, Amsel is eager to drive home its initial multilayeredness<sup>26</sup>. One must always remember that the scarecrow starts off as a visual expression of Amsel's imagination, and that it is only with the advent of National Socialism that the scarecrows become politicised. The same development applies to Müller Matern's worms, a private fantasy before the war, which assumes

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23) e.g. Grimm Wörterbuch: 'Vogelscheuche oft die Nachahmung einer menschlichen Figur', one example given from Georg Büchner: 'Danton ist die Vogelscheuche der Revolution'.

24) HJ p.478

25) See footnote 13, pp.192-3

26) '...mit vielerlei Buntstiften...die aber nie mit reinem Strich ihre Farbkraft zeigen, sondern schichtweise übereinander...' HJ p.46; compare in the Döblin essay: 'Im Roman heißt es schichten, häufen...' in Über meinen Lehrer Döblin, p.11

public importance after the war. This is what Paul Kurz means, when he summarises the scarecrows as follows:

Private Welt weitet sich zu öffentlicher Welt. Die öffentliche Welt konkretisiert sich an den Gestalten. Aus des Autors Verbindung von nachtrauernder Verklärung privat kindlicher Welt mit der Demonstration einer total verabscheuungswerten und dämonisierten öffentlichen Welt erwachsen ungefähr alle formalen und inhaltlichen Probleme des Romans.<sup>27</sup>

In the development of the scarecrow symbol one can distinguish three separate phases which coincide with the divisions of the novel. The first phase, the most complex one, starts at the beginning with Amsel's birth.

Sein Beruf lag von Anfang an im Erfinden von Vogelscheuchen. Dennoch hatte er nichts gegen Vögel; wohl aber hatten die Vögel...etwas gegen ihn und seinen vogelscheuchen-erfindenden Geist. Gleich nach der Taufe...erkannten sie ihn.<sup>28</sup>

His power, of which he is as yet unaware, creates havoc in the natural world. The birds feel threatened by Amsel, although it is stressed throughout that Amsel has nothing against the birds<sup>29</sup>. This does not prevent him, however, from exploiting in his art the

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27) Paul K.Kurz: 'Hundejahre. Beobachtungen zu einem zeitkritischen Roman.', Stimmen der Zeit, Oktober 1963, p.109

28) HJ p.28

29) It is one of the ironies in the novel that Amsel, the scarecrow builder, is himself named after a bird.

terror he inspires:

Ursache und Wirkung: keinen Schrecken  
gibt es, der von Amsels Produktion  
gefördert, nicht Ausdruck fände.

In the same way, all Amsel's sufferings are transcended into art:

Zwei drei Tage nach solch einer  
Prügelei-...- fand sich...dieselbe  
Prügelsszene in einer einzigen  
vielarmigen Vogelscheuche abgebildet.<sup>30</sup>

Amsel's creations claim to be non-functional, claim to be 'pure art'. That may be true from Amsel's point of view, but is belied by the violent reaction the scarecrows provoke, both in the animal and in the human world. These so-called formalist scarecrows are, after all, capable of arousing murderous instincts in SA man Walter Matern and his gang<sup>31</sup>. Thus Grass is demonstrating, via Amsel, that non-committed art is a delusion. He is in fact suggesting that great

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30) HJ p.35

31) Kurt Batt: 'Grotteske und Parabel. Anmerkungen zu Hundejahre von Günter Grass und Herr Meister von Walter Jens', Neue Deutsche Literatur, XII, 7, pp.57-66. Batt sees Amsel's ambivalence to his artistic craft as a reflection of Grass's own ambivalence, i.e. his wavering between l'art pour l'art and Engagement: 'Selbstidentifikation und Selbstparodie in einem. Denn die 'formalen' Scheuchen mobilisieren ein SA-Rollkommando und kosteten ihrem Schöpfer fast das Leben. Günter Grass weiß also um die Vertracktheit rein artistischen Vogelscheuchenbaus, dem auch er in Vers und Prosa huldigt, und indem er ihn ad absurdum führt, schafft er sich die Voraussetzung, ihn zu überwinden.' op.cit.p.64

art, whatever the artist's intention, always changes reality in some ways, because it captures the living essence of reality, which to Amsel reveals itself in grotesque forms. This is surely what the narrator means when he prefaces Amsel's building of scarecrows by praising

Eduard Amsels wache(n) Sinn für  
die vielgestalte Realität,...  
(Seine vogelscheuchenden Produkten)  
unterschieden sich von den land-  
läufigen Vogelscheuchen,...nicht  
nur formal, sondern auch im Effekt:  
wenn die xbeliebigen Scheuchen der  
Vogelwelt gegenüber nur geringe,  
kaum Achtungserfolge buchen konnten,  
wohnte seinen Geschöpfen, die ja  
zwecklos und gegen nichts gebaut  
waren, die Möglichkeit inne, Panik  
unter den Vögeln zu bewirken.<sup>32</sup>

The effectiveness of Amsel's art, that is its morality, is shown by the terror it inspires among the birds. Nature resents the confrontation with its caricatured image. This resentment culminates in hatred when man is forced to face his moral ugliness in Amsel's scarecrows.

The principles underlying Amsel's process of creation accord with our present speculations: 'Es sollen die Modelle mit Vorzug der Natur entnommen werden'. In order to exclude any suspicion of Amsel's pleading for photographic representation of nature (see chapter 3), he supplements this remark with a rather

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32) HJ pp.33-4

mystifying comment: 'Alles, was sich ausstopfen läßt, gehört der Natur an: die Puppe etwa.'<sup>33</sup> One can only guess what this means; dolls and scarecrows have one thing in common: they both belong to the world of childhood and have, therefore, emotional associations. In this context, the 'ausstopfen' may well refer to the artist's appropriation of his model, in other words it describes the subjective transformation of inanimate objects<sup>34</sup>. Amsel's dictum is only another way of saying that all great art must result from emotional involvement. 'Natur' as already suggested, applies both to the human and the natural world. One such scarecrow creation which gloriously combined both elements: 'halb Weide, halb Großmutter', led Amsel to his first artistic insight:

Es hatte also ein Künstler zum  
 erstmalig begreifen müssen, daß  
 seine Werke, wenn sie nur intensiv  
 genug der Natur entnommen waren,  
 nicht nur Macht über die Vögel  
 unter dem Himmel hatten, sondern  
 auch...dem Menschen, die ländlich  
 ruhige Gangart stören konnten.  
 Dieser Erkenntnis opferte Amsel  
 eine seiner gelungensten Scheuchen.<sup>35</sup>

This point might be considered as the end of the first stage: the unconscious artist, unaware of the power emanating from his creations, yields to the pressures

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33) HJ p.42

34) See the 'filling' of the willow tree, HJ p.43

35) HJ p.48



of society by destroying the object that has created offence. Amsel's artistic and political awakening, which will make him capitalise on the potential of his art rather than destroy it, is still to come. He decides from now on to avoid

Mensch und Baum zu kuppeln, und wertete, in freiwilliger Selbstkontrolle, nur noch die vierkantigen und harmlosen, als Scheuchen aber ausreichend effektvollen Werderbauern als Modelle. Als des Preußenkönigs Grenadiere, Füsiliere, Gefreitenkorporale, Standartenjunker und Officiers, ließ er das Landvolk über Gemüsegarten und Weizen wie Roggen schweben.<sup>36</sup>

Amsel's obsession with Prussian militarism and mythology, which determines the second stage in the scarecrow history, is rooted in his early encounter with the ideas of Otto Weininger. We can deduce this enthusiasm by negative inference. Geschlecht und Charakter<sup>37</sup>, Weininger's most important work, is a psycho-philosophical attempt to attribute to the human race male or female characteristics. The book includes a chapter on the Jews, who are, according to Weininger, a particularly effeminate race, in Weininger's terms of reference the strongest possible insult, for woman in his scheme is utterly devoid of

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36) HJ p.49

37) Dr. Otto Weininger: Geschlecht und Charakter. Eine prinzipielle Untersuchung, Wien, 1903.(XIII Kapitel: Das Judentum, pp.403-441)

moral values. The Aryans, on the other hand, are a morally distinguished race: Prussian nationalism and militarism are manifestations of their superiority. This type of morality, Weininger argues, is forever inaccessible to the effeminate Jew, hence the hankering of Amsel's father after Prussian 'virtues'. Their misplaced admiration for Germanic superiority, however, does not change the Amsels' position as outsiders. Amsel junior, reacting to the exacerbated political situation, even exceeds his father's deviousness.

Weininger is thus an example of extreme Jewish self-hate, and so are the Amsels, father and son. At the same time, Weininger's theories serve them as an escape mechanism: if Judaism is primarily a mental state (according to Weininger), and not an unalterable racial one, there may be some hope of overcoming it, by exhibiting those very virtues which it is allegedly barred from. This is how the philosopher, himself a Jew, defines Judaism,

als eine Geistesrichtung,...eine psychische Konstitution..., welche für alle Menschen eine Möglichkeit bildet, und im historischen Judentum bloß die grandioseste Verwirklichung gefunden hat.<sup>38</sup>

In his self-hate, Weininger goes so far that he can only be looked upon as a clinical case of mental

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38) Otto Weininger: Geschlecht und Charakter, p.406

illness. His suicide was the logical conclusion of a life-long destruction:

...es ist...vielleicht die welt-historische Bedeutung und der ungeheure Verdienst des Judentums kein anderes, als den Arier immerfort zum Bewußtsein seines Selbst zu bringen, ihn an sich zu mahnen. Dies ist es, was der Arier dem Juden zu danken hat; durch ihn weiß er, wovor er sich hüte: vor dem Judentum als Möglichkeit in ihm selber.<sup>39</sup>

And to add insult to injury, Weininger assures his reader, quite sincerely no doubt:

Ich betone nochmals, obwohl es selbstverständlich sein sollte: trotz der abträglichen Wertung des echten Juden kann nichts mir weniger in den Sinn kommen, als durch diese...Bemerkungen einer theoretischen oder gar einer praktischen Judenverfolgung in die Hände arbeiten zu wollen.<sup>40</sup>

This alibi rings particularly false, when one recalls the many editions into which Weininger's highly influential book ran.<sup>41</sup>

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39) Otto Weininger: Geschlecht und Charakter, p.409

40) ibid, pp.417-8

41) See Wesley V. Blomster: loc.cit. p.124: 'The first elaborate edition,...underwent twenty-six printings between May 1903 and January 1925. In 1926 the 'Volksausgabe' appeared, the copyright page of which mentions authorised translations...Grass refers to a polemic battle fought over the book, in which Sigmund Freud becomes involved. This involvement helped keep the book among the best-sellers. The sensational appeal of the work was enhanced by Weininger's suicide less than six months after its appearance.'

It is worthwhile sketching in this background material, because Hundejahre itself contains whole paragraphs directly quoted from Geschlecht und Charakter, and this helps one to understand the quotations in their proper context. Amsel did not actually read the book until the death of his mother, when he inherited his father's library (containing history books on Prussian militarism), but he must have sensed his 'Jewishness' from a very early age, though his father had so conspicuously tried to conceal his origin.

Albrecht Amsel...las bei Weininger...:  
 Der Jude hat keine Seele. Der Jude  
 singt nicht. Der Jude treibt keinen  
 Sport. Der Jude muß das Judentum in  
 sich überwinden...Und Albrecht Amsel  
 überwand, indem er den Turnverein...  
 begründete.<sup>42</sup>

The same behaviour is characteristic of Amsel junior. He, too, joins the choir and forces himself to play games. Above all, he has inherited his father's perverse passion for all things Prussian. Even before one knows of Weininger's existence, the narrator of 'Frühschichten' relates with pride his father's career as a decorated reserve lieutenant, and his patriotic death on the battlefield of Verdun. With Weininger looming in the background, Amsel's stress on his father's Germanic virtues is understandable. The son compromises himself even more than his father did.

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42) HJ pp.31-2

He joins in the singing at a National Socialist gathering, 'denn Amsel liebte es...Preußens Glorie zu schmettern.' Worse still, he even manages to don an SA uniform and collects money for the 'Winterhilfswerk'. This ambivalence is indeed puzzling and difficult to reconcile with Amsel's role as a committed artist. But at this stage, we are merely concerned with pointing out the fascination that Weininger's morbid ideas hold for Amsel. No wonder that his Prussian nationalism finds an outlet in Amsel's art, since Weininger proves to be one of his major sources of inspiration. There is, in fact, a preamble to the Prussian obsession: the dream about the twelve headless knights and nuns. This dream runs through the novel like a 'Leitmotif' and is elaborated with meticulous care in one of Amsel's visions over no less than four pages<sup>43</sup>. Matern, the born Aryan and Christian, does not partake in this extraordinary flight of fantasy. The half-Jew Eduard Amsel's sensibilities are far more alert under any count, but disproportionately so with regard to all things German. Thus, the headless Knights and nuns turn out to be Amsel's models for his first mechanical scarecrows<sup>44</sup>. That Amsel should choose them

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43) HJ pp.60-64

44) HJ p.59

for experimenting with his built-in mechanism is in itself a comment on their political significance, for one cannot but associate the perfection of the mechanical scarecrows with the perfection of the dehumanised SA men in Hundejahre.

Unadulterated mythology comes into its own, after Amsel has been introduced to it at school by the teacher and potential National Socialist fellow traveller Olschewski<sup>45</sup>. 'Nicht sattwerden konnte Amsel an preußisch-brandenburgischer Geschichte', the reader is told. His addiction to Germanic myths coincides with Liebenau's purchase of the dog Harras. However unobtrusively these cross-references may be established, the narrator never misses an opportunity to point to the correlation between historical reality and the intellectual background that paved the way for this reality. Thus Amsel's celebration of the old Prussian Gods Perkunos, Pikollos and Potrimpos is misunderstood as a profession of a political

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45) 'Up to this time the models for the scarecrows had been found in real-life figures known to Amsel...Grass no doubt intends that his readers should see in Olschewski a seemingly harmless and perhaps unknowing disciple of National Socialism. The mythological mixture which he brews...is an interesting one, but at the same time it expresses apparently hopeless confusion'. W.V. Blomster: 'Demonic in History: Thomas Mann and Günter Grass' Contemporary Literature X,I, 1969, University of Wisconsin Press, p.82

faith. The personification of these legendary figures into scarecrows puts Amsel in a very ambivalent position indeed. From being symbols of art, the scarecrows gradually come to represent National Socialist ideology.

Like the drum, the scarecrows are dialectical: they represent ideology from the outside, as well as exposing it from the inside. This conflict will be even more polarised when the scarecrows are paralleled by their SA counterparts. The 'mythological' scarecrows are also an expression of National Socialist mentality, a mentality that could either be denounced or glorified by them. But Amsel's time being what it is, the Prussian scarecrow gods are predictably hailed as an embodiment of 'naiver und dennoch formsicherer Volkskunst'<sup>46</sup>, as an east German symbiosis of 'Wikingergeist und christlicher Einfalt'<sup>47</sup>. The question is how long Amsel is prepared to lay himself open to such misunderstandings, how long he will let artistic considerations overrule possible moral scruples.

In the third stage of his scarecrow production, Amsel reverts to the universe of Nature, which also inspired the first stage. He dedicates to it his most grandiose

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46) HJ p.56

47) HJ p.57

and ambitious creation, that is to be a monument to the paradoxical nature of his art:

er, Amsel, habe vor, etwas Widersprichvolles zu tun: einen Riesenvogel werde er als Vogelscheuche erstehen lassen...

als Schlußstück ist sie unter dem wohl ironisch gemeinten Titel 'Großer Vogel Piepmatz'...überliefert...<sup>48</sup>

'Ironisch', because far from being a gentle copy of a natural bird, it is intended to be a savage artefact that presents the world ruthlessly with its own grotesque image. The effect is one of terror:

Schwer fand sich ein Käufer...  
Einsam und gegen den Himmel  
stand er...auf dem Deich.<sup>49</sup>

Significantly enough, it is Olschewski - 'er nannte sich einen aufgeklärten Menschen' - who buys it, and it is also Olschewski who makes sure that it is destroyed later. The teacher is sufficiently 'enlightened' to see the revelatory capacities of 'Vogel Piepmatz', and hence to sense its political significance. However, he is also sufficiently prone to National Socialism to have the danger and criticism stamped out when it gets out of control:

Er sagte, es gehe nicht mehr,  
gewisse Eltern hätten sich beschwert,...

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48) HJ p.76

49) HJ p.76



aber niemand,...könne gegen den Strom, es sei wohl so: so schön die Scheuche aussehe, stelle sie dennoch an die Bewohner eines Dorfes...zu hohe Ansprüche.<sup>50</sup>

Consequently, he advises Amsel to leave the village:

Das Dorf wird Dir fortan zu eng sein. Mag sich...das Künstlerische in Dir,...draußen neu bewähren.<sup>51</sup>

Amsel has learnt his lesson. The following day he proceeds to the burning of his arsenal of scarecrows, an analogy to book-burnings by the National Socialists. He found 'erstaunlich viele Hilfwillige' for this operation. With this 'autodafé' Amsel only pretends to be falling in with the prevailing totalitarian methods:

...Eduard Amsel...von Zeit zu Zeit, auch während der lustigen Verbrennung, 'Itzich' gerufen...sieht etwas...Der...brennende Vogel... (beschenkt) ihn mit quicken Ideen... Denn wie das entzündete Tier, Geburt aus Lumpen, Teer und Federn, sprühend, prasselnd und höchst lebendig einen letzten Flugversuch macht, dann stiebend in sich zusammenfällt, hat Amsel...beschlossen später...die Idee des Vogel Piepmatz wieder aufzunehmen: einen Riesenvogel will er bauen, der immerzu brennt, päsert und funkert, der dennoch nie verbrennt, sondern ewig, immer und von Natur, apokalyptisch und dekorativ zugleich, brennt, päsert und funkert.<sup>51a</sup>

This vow summarises and concludes Amsel's first phase

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50) HJ p.78

51) HJ p.78

51a) HJ pp.79-80

as an artist. We have come full circle - with one essential difference. When Amsel acted on his first insight (see p.202) and decided to destroy one of his most successful creations, he had also been prepared to sacrifice his artistic principles. The present destruction however is only a concession in name, but not in substance. The circle is therefore open-ended and leads to a higher stage of development: Amsel may conform to the pressures of society outwardly; inwardly, he is now determined to spite his surroundings and let his vocation triumph in the midst of adversity. His artistic and political consciousness is gradually awakening and his strength is growing with the increasing difficulties of his task:

[der] Brand... (entzündete) in  
Amsels Köpfchen allerlei Zunder  
und (legte) ein Päserchen, das  
nicht mehr zu löschen war.<sup>52</sup>

52) HJ p.80

The combination of Tulla's birth and the arrival of the dog Harras, both exponents of National Socialism, endanger the survival of the scarecrows. Amsel resorts to painting instead, which, being another form of art, has a bearing on the scarecrows. One of Amsel's models is Harras. His relationship to the dog is worth analysing, because of its symbolic overtones (the significance of the dog itself will be dealt with in greater detail in the second half of this chapter). Liebenau warns Amsel to keep at a distance from Harras, for, he explains, 'der Hund ist scharf und hält sicher nichts von Künstlern!'. As it happens, Amsel turns out to be a 'Hundebezwinger'; the dog succumbs to the artist's hypnotism and his potential evilness is thus kept in check. Amsel, incidentally, has baptised the dog Pluto, which says a lot for his perceptiveness. Who besides him could have foretold the dog's political 'career'? Tulla's 'natural' claim on Harras is thus threatened by Amsel, a situation she will not tolerate, because it would be tantamount to letting art (Amsel) triumph over bestiality (Tulla).

Amsels Macht über den Höllenhund  
Pluto wurde zu ihrer Ohnmacht  
unserem Harras gegenüber.<sup>53</sup>

However, Tulla counteracts her impotence by constantly

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53) HJ p.148

interfering with Amsel's painting sessions. She could have inhibited Amsel's creative talents, had it not been for the artist's astounding capacity to turn her attacks into an advantage to his art. For instance:

Als Tulla,  
 von rückwärts heranstürmend,  
 eine Handvoll Sägemehl,...auf  
 ein nahezu fertiges, noch feucht  
 und frisch glänzendes Blatt warf,  
 lachte Eddi Amsel, nach kurzem  
 Erstaunen, verärgert und gut-  
 mütig zugleich, drohte Tulla,...  
 onkelhaft mit wurstigem Zeige-  
 finger und begann dann, mehr und  
 mehr an der neuen Technik interes-  
 siert, das haftende Sägemehl auf  
 dem Blatt zu verarbeiten und der  
 Zeichnung das zu geben, was man  
 heutzutage Struktur nennt; er  
 entwickelte die zwar amüsante,  
 aber kurzlebige Manier, aus der  
 Zufälligkeit Kapital zu schlagen...<sup>54</sup>

'Kurzlebig' indeed; Tulla only needs to exploit his most vulnerable spot, for Amsel to lose his delicate balance:

'Itzich!' Das Wort in den Hof  
 geschleudert...Das Wort, dreimal  
 nacheinander das Wort. Amsels  
 Gesicht, das beim Zeichnen glühte,  
 erkaltet. Ein Lächeln ist nicht  
 wegzubekommen. Schweiß...läuft  
 über Fett und Sommersprossen.  
 Sommersprossen werden grau. Das  
 Wort. Immerzu das eine...Zappelig  
 Tulla: 'Itzichitzichitzich!!!'...  
 Da gibt Harras, dem Zwang ent-  
 lassen, seine anbefohlene Stellung  
 auf. Er wittert, begreift. Schon

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54) HJ p.149

spannt sich die Kette: Die Stimme  
des Hundes. Tullas Stimme.<sup>55</sup>

With racial hate reverberating through the air, the dog, unleashed by Tulla, remembers his 'original creed' and promptly turns his back on Amsel, under whose spell he had been for so long. The precarious position of art has manifested itself once again.

Every defeat is followed by a period of readjustment, not to say regression in Amsel's case. It is at this moment, at the time of the Nürnberg laws, that Amsel absorbs Weininger's outrageous theories about the Jews. He is so busy counteracting them one by one, that art is neglected in the process. When his training in Aryan virtues ends in failure - 'Eddi Amsel ließ es mit dem Sport genug sein' - he reverts to his scarecrow art: 'und [Tulla] half ihm dabei'<sup>56</sup>. Tulla becomes active again, but this time her wickedness finds an outlet in the pursuit of the pianist Felsner-Imbs (of course she persecutes an artist!), and the dog is instrumental to her campaign. The result, relatively harmless in this case, is a tattered garment, and it is precisely this picturesque coat that drives Amsel back to his vocation.

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55) HJ p.151

56) HJ p.160

In this second phase Amsel insists on calling his scarecrows 'Figuren', which indicates a change of approach to his craft: a more deliberate attitude, a drawing away from fantasy products to recognisable figures which have their real life counterparts. It is interesting to note that Amsel needs a direct confrontation with the evilness of a system, through its visual expression (the torn coat), to regain his own identity<sup>57</sup>. With a higher degree of consciousness concerning his art goes a more developed sense of political awareness. Pronouncements on his creative process contain more and more political innuendoes. The following key passage illuminates Amsel's view of his society and formulates his artistic intentions towards it:

Hier wird behauptet, Amsel hatte keine besonderen Vogelkenntnisse... Aber Sperlingen gegenüber hatte er empfindliche Augen. Was kein Vogelkundiger vermag, Amsel konnte ein Volk...Spatzen..., die alle Welt für gleich farblos hält, als Individuen unterscheiden. Was in Dachrinnen badete,...wertete er statistisch: lauter Einzelgänger, die sich als Massengesellschaft verkappt haben.<sup>58</sup>

The artist as an individualist, that is to say, the

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57) Felsner-Imbs represents the suffering of many artists under the Hitler regime. It is in this sense that Tulla's pursuit is symptomatic of the system.

58) HJ pp.164-5

artist who reserves to himself and to others the right to be an individual. In fact, we may well read a moral injunction into 'die sich als Massengesellschaft verkappt haben'. Surely, the implication is that people should not seek to lose their identity in the masses, because they will use this loss of identity as an escape from their own responsibilities as individuals.

How does this individualistic view of society affect Amsel's concept of art?

Dennoch baute Eddi Amsel keine Vogelscheuchen gegen die ihm vertrauten Spatzen..., gegen niemanden baute er, aus formalen Gründen. Allenfalls hatte er vor, einer gefährlich produktiven Umwelt seinerseits Produktivität zu beweisen.<sup>59</sup>

The argument is potentially misleading. In the first sentence, Amsel claims, as he had done in the past, that his products are art for art's sake. Doubts about the validity of Amsel's postulate have already been expressed at some length; they apply here as much as they did then (see pp.200f.). The second sentence: 'Allenfalls hatte er vor einer gefährlich produktiven Umwelt, seinerseits Produktivität zu beweisen', only confirms those doubts. The introductory 'allenfalls' not only modifies Amsel's

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59) HJ p.165

alleged aestheticism, as one would expect, it actually refutes the substance of the remaining sentence altogether. Furthermore, the moralising tone implicit in the former 'als Massengesellschaft verkappt' is made explicit in the subsequent statement in which that same mass society is exposed as a 'gefährlich produktive Umwelt'. The fact that Amsel attempts to confront this 'dangerous' productivity of the masses with his own productivity is to our mind the essence of Engagement.

Before, however, putting this last insight into practice, Amsel has to go through another, most intense Weininger period. Seclusion from the world is, as has already been observed, detrimental to Amsel's art. As a consequence, his figures - 'bei aller ästhetischen Ausgewogenheit' - lack the dynamism of his former creations. Self-critical as he is, Amsel is the first to notice what he terms 'Substanzschwund'. The birds' indifference to his scarecrows confirms it:

...niemand hätte sagen können,  
daß sich eine Wolke Vogeltier,  
durch den Anblick der Figur in  
Panik versetzt...hätte...Kunst  
stagnierte. Weiningers Text blieb  
Papier.<sup>60</sup>

Is the scarecrows' 'refusal' to bring Weininger's thought to life not symptomatic of their inherent

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60) HJ p.169



commitment? Amsel's art is only valid as a reflection of truth, and as Weininger's ideology is the very opposite of truth, Amsel's art, when inspired by Weininger, is doomed to failure.

There is only one remedy: to meet the challenge of reality. We remember how the first return to his scarecrow building was stimulated by Felsner Imbs' torn garment. This time Amsel himself is the victim: when a gang of SA youths throw stones at his villa, Amsel takes them as a model for his next scarecrow group. To render his visions as accurately as possible, the artist needs SA uniforms; he does his utmost to persuade Matern

das zu tun, was Amsel, der notwendigen Uniformstücke wegen, gerne getan hätte, aber nicht durfte.<sup>61</sup>

This is a perfect example of the end justifying the means, for the outcome of this highly dubious manoeuvre is going to be moral, irrespective of the artist's intentions. At the sight of Amsel's ideological scarecrows, Matern, half won over to Nazi ideology, vents his long-harboured grievance. He cannot bear to see the truth, although he is perceptive enough to recognise it, when it is put in front of him.

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61) HJ p.170

...knirschend gab er zu verstehen, daß irgendwo für ihn der Spaß aufhöre; Amsel solle sich nicht in ein und dasselbe Thema verrennen; schließlich gebe es bei der SA und auch bei der Partei Leute genug, die ernsthaft ein Ziel vor Augen hätten, Pfundskerle und nicht nur Schweinehunde.

Amsel's reply is conciliatory,

...genau das sei seine künstlerische Absicht, keinerlei Kritik wolle er äußern, sondern Pfundskerle wie Schweinehunde, gemischt und gewürfelt wie nun mal das Leben spiele, mit künstlerischen Mitteln produzieren.<sup>62</sup>

But in fact, in contrast to previous occasions, he does not make any concessions at all. His next creation is 'der Pfundskerl SA Mann Matern'. Amsel does not have to criticise, his art speaks for itself. Whether you call them 'Pfundskerle' or 'Schweinehunde' is merely an exercise in semantics. His most explicit creation, where the final breakthrough in favour of committed art is achieved, shows nine mechanical SA scarecrows, which turn out to be an anticipation of nine real-life Nazi gangsters climbing over Amsel's garden fence. Art and reality have become one:

...Figuren, denen nicht Amsel, sondern der liebe Gott die Mechanik eingebaut hat...sie (wirken) scheu-chenhaft und erfunden, sind aber keine Scheuchen, sind blutwarme Männer...<sup>63</sup>

The emotionally charged scene between the two blood-

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62) HJ p.179

63) HJ p.190

brothers punctuates this second stage of the artist's evolution. Helped along by Matern's murderous attack on him, Amsel undergoes a physical transformation. His metamorphosis is no doubt symbolic of the immortality of art itself, for his own resuscitation is paralleled by that of his artistic counterpart, the ballet dancer Jenny, who has been subjected to similar tortures and like Amsel has emerged victorious.

The second phase in the history of the scarecrows reaches its climax in the ballet: it is here that 'Künstler- und Zeitroman sich gegenseitig (durchdringen)' as Paul Kurz comments<sup>64</sup>. From a thematic and structural point of view it occupies a central position in Hundejahre<sup>65</sup>. One should therefore attempt a close interpretation of the scarecrow ballet, because it defines Amsel's concept of art in a social context.

Before delving into it, here is a brief outline of the plot of the ballet: Amsel, or rather Haselloff as he calls himself after the 'Schneewunder', has given his creation three alternative titles: the non-controversial one of 'Die Vogelscheuchen', the

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64) Paul K. Kurz, loc.cit., p.117

65) For Jenny's description of the scarecrow ballet see pp. 297-300

interpretative title 'Der Aufstand der Vogelscheuchen', and the descriptive one 'Die Gärtnerstochter und die Vogelscheuchen'. The ballet is divided into three acts. Act one opens with an old gardener crying out for a scarecrow to frighten off the birds that ravage his garden. His daughter, played by Jenny, sides with the birds and mocks at the wicked old man. Along comes a living scarecrow who offers his services to the gardener and the gardener's daughter falls in love with him and finally surrenders to his charm. In act two 'offenbart sich...des jungen Mannes wahre Natur'<sup>66</sup>. The young man is not just any scarecrow, he is actually the prefect of them all, and rules

'ein unterirdisches Reich, in dem  
sich Vogelscheuchen dieser und  
jener Natur unermüdlich drehen  
müssen'.<sup>67</sup>

There follows an elaborate description of the activities in this subterranean realm, unmistakably a preview of the scarecrow inferno which concludes the novel. The gardener's daughter, now terrified, manages to escape. Only after her successful flight do the scarecrows awake. Act three reverts to the gardener in his garden. His daughter asks for forgiveness, but her repentance is spurned. Finally, the

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66) HJ p.298

67) HJ p.298

gardener's daughter is recaptured by the scarecrows and taken prisoner in a bird's cage.

Zurück bleibt der zerstörte Garten. Zurück bleibt eine in Lumpen hinkende Gestalt: der böse alte Gärtner...Jetzt hebt er müde und wie zur Abwehr die Arme in Fetzen gehüllt: und seht, schon die erste Bewegung erschreckt, scheucht die Vögel. Er hat sich in eine Vogelscheuche verwandelt, ist fortan Gärtner und Scheuche in einer Person. Über seinem makabren Vogelschuchensolo - Herr Haselloff spielt mit dem Gedanken, diese Rolle zu tanzen - fällt der Schlußvorhang des letzten Aktes.<sup>68</sup>

Furthermore, the ballet has never been performed, because:

Zwei Herren vom Reichspropagandaministerium...fanden den ersten Akt hübsch und vielversprechend, räusperten sich erstmals beim zweiten Akt und erhoben sich sogleich nach Schluß des dritten Aktes. Insgesamt war ihnen die fortschreitende Handlung zu sinister und zu anzüglich. Es fehle das Lebensbejahende, denn so sagten beide Herren gleichzeitig: "Soldaten an der Front wollen was Lustiges sehen und keine düster rumorende Unterwelt."<sup>69</sup>

There are three key figures in the ballet on which this interpretation will depend: the gardener, the gardener's daughter (Jenny) and the scarecrows.

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68) HJ p.299

69) HJ p.300

Let us assume that the gardener and his garden represent pre-war, down-trodden Germany (birds are looting his garden), a Germany crying out for law and order - 'Vogelscheuche gesucht' - and getting it by way of National Socialism: a male scarecrow immediately puts himself at the gardener's disposal. Similar political overtones can be discerned in one of Grass's early poems called

An alle Gärtner

Warum wollt ihr mir verbieten Fleisch zu essen?  
 Jetzt kommt ihr mit Blumen,  
 bereitet mir Astern zu,  
 als bliebe vom Herbst nicht Nachgeschmack genug.  
 Laßt die Nelken im Garten.  
 Sind die Mandeln doch bitter,  
 der Gasometer,  
 den ihr den Kuchen nennt -  
 und ihr schneidet mir ab,  
 bis ich nach Milch verlange.  
 Ihr sagt: Gemüse,-  
 und verkauft mir Rosen im Kilo.  
 Gesund, sagt ihr und meint die Tulpen.  
 Soll ich das Gift,  
 zu kleinen Sträußchen gebunden,  
 mit etwas Salz verspeisen?  
 Soll ich an Maiglöckchen sterben?  
 Und die Lilien auf meinem Grab,-  
 wer wird mich vor den Vegetariern schützen?

Laßt mich vom Fleisch essen.  
 Laßt mich mit dem Knochen alleine,  
 damit er die Scham verliert und sich nackt zeigt.  
 Erst wenn ich vom Teller rücke  
 und den Ochsen laut ehre,  
 dann erst öffnet die Gärten,  
 damit ich Blumen kaufen kann -  
 weil ich sie gerne welken sehe.<sup>70</sup>

Gardeners in this poem as well as in the scarecrow

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70) 'An alle Gärtner': a poem in Grass's first collection Die Vorzüge der Windhühne (1956), in Gesammelte Gedichte, Neuwied 1971, p.22

ballet stand for the dangerous romanticism of German idealists; for the flight into the realm of artificial beauty, at the expense of confronting reality. This reality, coarse and primitive as it may be, is evoked by the basic foodstuffs, meat and milk, as against the sophisticated man-made breeding of garden flowers. The poet asks for 'reality' in the opening question: 'Warum wollt ihr mir verbieten Fleisch zu essen?' The gardeners present him with falsely primitive carnations and <sup>like, of the valley</sup> mayflowers instead. Their shying away from reality makes them silent accomplices of National Socialism, as the metaphors 'Mandeln', 'Gasometer' and 'Kuchen' unequivocally imply<sup>71</sup>. Appreciation of sophisticated pleasures such as garden flowers is only legitimate after, and in addition to, a serious confrontation with the everyday world:

Esßt mich mit dem Knochen alleine,  
damit er seine Scham verliert und sich  
nackt zeigt...  
...dann erst öffnet die Gärten,...

On a general level, the poem could simply be read as a polemic against nature poetry. But in connection with Grass, gardeners represent the whole complex of escapist idealists, so that the gardener is to be looked upon as an 'archetypal Heidegger'.

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71) See the 'Glaube Hoffnung Liebe' chapter in BF p.165 where these images are intimately associated with the Hitler regime.

If the gardener of the ballet embraces ideology, his daughter seems its very antithesis. As a classical ballet dancer she is the personification of 'pure art' and, as such, opposed to her father. In artistic terms, she is Amsel's counterpart<sup>72</sup>. One need only recall her role throughout the novel, a role that is made quite explicit in a separate essay Die Ballerina<sup>73</sup>, where her craft is described as 'eine der un-natürlichsten und damit formvollendetsten aller Künste'<sup>74</sup>. But also her personal life corresponds to that of Amsel. Like Amsel's Jewishness, Jenny's mysterious Gipsy origins make her an outcast. Both characters are thus victims of persecution. Their simultaneous transformation underlines their affinity. As far as the direction of Jenny's art is concerned, however, it is diametrically opposed to Amsel's. Whilst the latter's art, as this study has tried to show throughout, has always borne some relation to reality, Jenny's dancing has been pure form, aesthetic perfection. Consequently, through her lack of involvement, the gardener's daughter finds herself in a precarious moral position. Not surprisingly, she

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72) Just as 'pure art' and 'engaged art' were represented in BT by Oskar's voice on the one hand and his drum on the other, HJ dramatises 'pure' art in Jenny and 'engaged' art through Amsel.

73) 'Die Ballerina' in Akzente 6, 1956

74) Ibid, p.538



immediately falls for the male scarecrow and pays lip service to National Socialism, malgré elle.

Although the daughter's aestheticism greatly differs from her father's opportunism, they are both incapable of resisting the temptation of a ready-made Weltanschauung, because both live in a vacuum. When the scarecrow presents itself at first, it looks attractive and trustworthy; it is the semblance of these qualities that seduce the gardener's daughter into embracing it. But when she finds herself face to face with the realisation of this ideology in the 'unterirdischem Reich', she is so horrified that her only wish is to depart as quickly as possible.

Her father undergoes a similar process of disillusionment. Initially, all he had wanted was some means by which he could safeguard his private interests (i.e. his garden). What the gardener secures is rather different. Far from being a protector, the head of the scarecrows - for all his good manners and prepossessing appearance - turns out to be an exploiter, a destroyer, a power maniac who makes people serve his own interests rather than helping them to safeguard theirs. Jenny's letter alludes to this revelation: 'Im zweiten Akt offenbart sich... des jungen Mannes wahre Natur'. Thus both father

and daughter have let themselves be misled by false appearances.

The realm under the rule of the 'Vogelscheuchenpräfekt' is a conglomeration of elements that constitute National Socialism. All these elements will re-appear in a magnified form in the 'Vogelscheucheninferno'. For a short time the gardener's daughter manages to escape from it, or to put it differently, she scores a brief victory. Just as Amsel was capable of holding Harras in check for some time, Jenny dances the scarecrow monsters to sleep, including the prominent black dog. But her victory over the demons is as short-lived as Amsel's was: they catch up with her and, to give visual expression to her enslavement, they incarcerate her in a bird's cage.

Her father's lot is just as miserable. He, who had beckoned for help to protect his garden from the ravaging birds, now finds that scarecrows and birds 'sind seltsam im Bunde', in contrast to the first act, where scarecrows and birds were sworn enemies. If the birds are elements of opposition (hence his daughter's incarceration in a bird's cage), this new alliance would merely indicate that after a short period of scarecrow rule, all previous opposition

had been ruthlessly absorbed into National Socialist machinery. The gardener represents its victim. He, too, has been turned into a tool to serve the regime: gardener and scarecrow have become one: "Über seinem makabren Vogelscheuchensolo fällt der Schlußvorhang des zweiten Aktes.' No wonder that 'die Herren vom Reichspropagandaministerium' did not approve of Amsel's ballet and found it 'anzüglich'. Amsel could hardly have delineated the baseness of the system more forcefully than he did in the second act.

Die Vogelscheuchen, dealing with the same themes and using the same imagery, sums up our thoughts on the scarecrow ballet.

Die Vogelscheuchen

Ich weiß nicht, ob man Erde kaufen kann,  
ob es genügt, wenn man vier Pfähle,  
mit etwas Rost dazwischen und Gestrüpp,  
im Sand verscharrt und Garten dazu sagt.

Ich weiß nicht, was die Stare denken.  
Sie flattern manchmal auf, zerstäuben,  
besprenkeln meinen Nachmittag,  
tun so, als könnte man sie scheuchen,  
als seien Vogelscheuchen Vogelscheuchen  
und Luftgewehre hinter den Gardinen  
und Katzen in der Bohnensaat.

Ich weiß nicht, was die alten Jacken  
und Hosentaschen von uns wissen.  
Ich weiß nicht, was in Hüten brütet  
welchen Gedanken was entschlüpft  
und flügge wird und läßt sich nicht verscheuchen;  
von Vogelscheuchen werden wir behütet.

Sind Vogelscheuchen Säugetiere?  
Es sieht so aus, als ob sie sich vermehren,  
indem sie nachts die Hüte tauschen:

schon stehen in meinem Garten drei,  
verneigen sich und winken höflich  
und drehen sich und zwinkern mit der Sonne  
und reden, reden zum Salat.

Ich weiß nicht, ob mein Gartenzaun  
mich einsperren, mich aussperren will.  
Ich weiß nicht, was das Unkraut will  
weiß nicht, was jene Blattlaus will bedeuten,  
weiß nicht, ob alte Jacken, alte Hosen,  
wenn sie mit Löffeln in den Dosen  
rostig und blechern windwärts läuten,  
zur Vesper, ob zum Ave läuten,  
zum Aufstand aller Vogelscheuchen läuten.<sup>75</sup>

In the first stanza, as in the previous poem (see p.224) a rhetorical question is raised. The poet asks himself whether an arbitrarily delineated piece of land can justifiably be the substitute for the real thing, i.e. the garden. The 'ich weiß nicht' formula is only a posture. Although the dilemma is potentially a real one, for the poet, the negative answers are already implied in the formulation of the question.

The second stanza introduces the birds as elements of opposition, uncontrollable, 'zersetzend', as the Nazis would have called them.

'tun so, als könnte man sie scheuchen,  
als seien Vogelscheuchen Vogelscheuchen'

As in the ballet, we have the conflict between 'Sein' and 'Schein'. On the one hand, ideology claims to shut everything out that does not fit into its system;

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75) 'Die Vogelscheuchen', a poem in Grass's second collection of poems Gleisdreieck in Gesammelte Gedichte, pp.103-4

on the other hand, there still exists individual resistance to the luring security of a Weltanschauung: the birds only pretend to be frightened. In this poem, the chances of standing up to oppression are considerable, which reveals a more optimistic belief in democracy than the ballet does, where everyone is swallowed up by National Socialism.

The third stanza turns to the components of the scarecrow ideologies: 'alte Jacken' and 'alte Hosen' probably refer to the old system, to the pre-war state of our gardener in the ballet. The antiquated system is a breeding-ground for both constructive and destructive thought, for revolt and submission. Whatever the outcome of private deliberations, they assume a life of their own and can no longer be done away with: 'von Vogelscheuchen werden wir behütet.' The gardener too, thought that the scarecrow was going to protect him - how little did he know that the protector was a monster in disguise! The whole stanza illustrates the essential ambivalence of the scarecrows: the satisfaction of belonging has to be paid for at a high price. With man's growing sense of insecurity, Weltanschauungen are on the increase, as the poet states in the third stanza. They are all interchangeable, whether it be Catholicism, Communism or National Socialism (hence the number 'drei') - they all look equally promising, and all prove equally dangerous.

The last stanza is an appeal to all ideologies to rebel against their own inflexibility. As long as 'Unkraut' and the 'Blattlaus' undermine our mechanised society, there is hope that the scarecrows will call 'zum Aufstand aller Vogelscheuchen'.

The ballet is significant, because it symbolises the fundamental issues of the novel: the interaction between art, society and politics, with Jenny as the aesthete, the gardener as society and the scarecrows as political ideology. Interestingly enough, the scarecrow symbol distances itself more and more from its original meaning (the last poem illustrates this, too), i.e. art, and is more closely identified with totalitarianism, a shift of emphasis that has already been mentioned at the beginning of this chapter (see p.198) and has now been demonstrated with particular reference to the constellation of the symbols in the ballet.

This development reaches its climax in the third phase, the scarecrow inferno, and in the period leading up to it. Not only has the symbol of the art scarecrows turned into an allegory of a scarecrow of ideology, but it actually changes its owner. The scarecrow becomes independent of Amsel, it assumes a life of its own and, for a time, becomes closely associated with

Matern. Whenever and wherever it occurs, one knows that the narrator is attacking a regime where doctrinaire thinking is prevalent. But, although the allegory is now purged of ambiguity, the dialectic element is still there. The scarecrow is both representation and negation of ideology, in the sense that its grotesqueness reveals its intrinsic corruptions. Needless to say that the moralising element is already contained in the mere name of 'Vogelscheuche', so pejorative are its connotations. There can be no doubt about the predominant moral function of the scarecrow: even Amsel insists on telling us so at the end of his account, calling the novel 'jene hochmoralische Geschichte von den Vogelscheuchen'<sup>76</sup>.

For a large part of book three, with which we are now concerned, we lose sight of Amsel, as the figure of Matern now occupies the front stage. Remembering the changed meaning of scarecrows, one is not surprised to encounter them for the first time again on Matern's journey to East Germany,

Denn Vogelscheuchen kennen keine  
Grenzen: parallel zu Matern reist  
die Vogelscheuchenbotschaft ins  
Friedenslager, schüttelt den Staub  
ab, läßt kapitalistischen Roggen  
hinter sich, wird von klassenbe-  
wußten Scheuchen im volkseigenen

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76)HJ p.471

Hafen ergriffen: von drüben nach drüben ohne Kontrolle und Laufzettel; denn Vogelscheuchen werden nicht, aber Matern wird kontrolliert.<sup>77</sup>

Scarecrow mentalities are neither time- nor place-bound. According to Grass, there is not much to choose between National Socialism on the one hand and Communism on the other; in his view, the former finds its perfect equivalent in the latter. And Matern, the stereotype waverer between both dogmas assumes the rôle of a scarecrow propagator. Not only have the scarecrows switched proprietors from Amsel to Matern, they have been debased to as low a level as that of the dog:

...das Friedenslager darf vom fahrenden Zug aus nicht gefilmt werden. Ungefilmt halten sich die als Vogelscheuchenarmee getarnte Kampfgruppe Wenck und ein Hund namens Perkun Senta Harras Prinz Pluto auf gleicher Höhe mit dem zähneknirschenden Walter Matern...<sup>78</sup>

When Amsel reappears at the end of the novel he takes charge of the scarecrows again, whilst the dog stays with Matern.

Goldmädchen muß sich mit seinen Vogelscheuchen beeilen; Matern sollte seine Hundegeschichte schneller abwickeln.<sup>79</sup>

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77) HJ p.457

78) HJ p.459

79) HJ p.473



This 'Handbuch für den Bau wirksamer Vogelscheuchen' ends in a savage finale where political past and present mingle, where the Germany of the economic miracle does not notably differ from National Socialist Germany. Amsel is the owner of this hell, the Firma Brauxel & Co. It is his contribution to the 'reeducation' of Germany, a task that starts with Matern's enlightenment. What the latter will be shown is intended as an eye-opener. In a symbolic gesture, Amsel deprives his friend of the dog Pluto, in order to facilitate the process which Matern is to undergo. Evil has to be unmasked before there is any hope of expurgation, a hope that is borne out by the resigned, yet hopeful sentence concluding the novel:

Beide sind wir nackt. Jeder badet für sich.<sup>80</sup>

Isolation, certainly, but catharsis as well: the bath after the soiling in the mine-hell may cast a different light on this inferno. As Vormweg writes: 'Das Inferno, es könnte Purgatorio sein'<sup>81</sup>. But in fact, conventional distinctions between above and below no longer apply to Brauxel's view of the world. If anything, the world above bears a stronger resemblance to hell than does this underground realm. Not so much because they differ in substance - Amsel's inferno

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80) HJ p.503

81) Heinrich Vormweg: 'Apokalypse mit Vogelscheuchen' in Deutsche Zeitung. Köln, 31.8.63

is after all supposed to be an analogy of the world above - but because the 'real' world is unpredictable, and therefore terrifying. What is so frightening in the mine has one great advantage over its actual counterpart: it can be produced mechanically, and is under the control of human technicians who can start and stop production as they please. Amsel is his own master inside this self-made reality, outside, however, he is at the mercy of imponderabilities; there he is the victim. Is this not what Amsel means, when he exclaims 'Der Orkus ist oben!' <sup>82</sup>?

What exactly is the substance of this hell? What explains Matern's reaction to it? Finally, does it deepen our insight into the novel's commitment?

The areas under scrutiny in the inferno are sufficiently representative to comprise humanity as a whole. They concentrate on four aspects of the human condition: instinctive man, intellectual man, political and scientific man. All of these are treated with the same acrimony, nobody is spared. It is the indiscriminate nature of the attack which makes one wonder about its validity. The author suggests that the basic emotions raging through our society, now

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82) HJ p.503

as much as in the pre-war years, are 'Rache, Haß und Wut'. Matern, for whose benefit this confrontation has been arranged, does recognise himself, but draws the wrong conclusions. Rather than rejecting his mirror image, he warms to it, it inflates his sense of importance.

Juxtaposed to this undisciplined bunch of scarecrows are the 'demokratischen Tugenden des Vogelscheuchensstaates'. This passage has often been misunderstood as an invective against parliamentary democracy, but the attack is only directed against the inhabitants of this democracy, the 'deutsche Bundesbürger', against those who have misused the system, not against the system itself. In other words, the best constitution is worthless without the responsible cooperation of its citizens. Intellectual man also comes to the fore in his philosophical, sociological and ideological vices. A whole sector of the inferno is devoted to Heidegger. The ideological battles, so familiar to Matern, raise some fundamental questions, or at least they are argued in such a way as to make one believe that these questions have been held to be fundamental in the past:

Gibt es eine Hölle? Oder ist diese schon auf Erden? Kommen Vogelscheuchen in den Himmel? Stammt die Scheuche vom Engel ab, oder gab es Scheuchen, ehe Engel gedacht wurden? Sind Scheuchen schon Engel?

Haben die Engel oder die Scheuchen den Vogel erfunden? Gibt es einen Gott, oder ist Gott die Urvogelscheuche? Ist nicht, wenn der Mensch nach dem Bilde Gottes und die Vogelscheuche nach dem Bilde des Menschen erschaffen wurden, die Scheuche das Ebenbild Gottes?<sup>83</sup>

The language of this parody is unmistakably theological and so is the nature of these preoccupations: the point of departure is a general enquiry into the relevance of scholastic concepts. Does hell really exist? Or is it just a projection of our mind? Is life on earth not hell? Do ideologies have an 'after life', i.e. are they eternal? 'Stammt die Scheuche vom Engel ab, oder gab es Scheuchen, ehe Engel gedacht wurden?' Do ideologies or ideas generally have their origin in God, or have they always been in existence, independent of Him? 'Sind Scheuchen schon Engel?' Do ideologies correspond to messengers of God? in other words do they quench the thirst for security in the same way that religion does? 'Haben die Engel oder die Scheuchen den Vogel erfunden?' The bird, we remember from the scarecrow ballet, is the anti-ideological principle, the opponent, or in theological terms, the devil. The question would then mean: is evil (within the Christian terms of reference) an invention of God or man? This leads to the climax of the enquiry: 'Gibt es einen Gott oder ist Gott die Urvogelscheuche?'

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83) HJ p.495

Does God really exist, or is he a projection of man's mind? And the final question proceeds by analogy: If man is created in the image of God, and the scarecrow is created in the image of man, the scarecrow must be an image of God and this takes us back to God as 'die Urvogelscheuche'.

Whether or not the narrator believes in God is not relevant in this context - the line of attack is simply directed against any system of belief, irrespective of its substance, because all the 'Heilslehren' have one thing in common, they give man a false sense of security and lure him away from the more pressing issues of the day.

If the first part of the argument was theological, the second part is socio-political:

Sind alle Vogelscheuchen gleich?  
 Oder gibt es Elitescheuchen?  
 Sind Scheuchen volkseigen? Oder  
 darf jeder Bauer auf seinen  
 Vogelscheuchenbesitz pochen?  
 Welcher Rasse sind Scheuchen?  
 Steht die germanische über der  
 slawischen? Darf eine deutsche  
 Vogelscheuche bei einer jüdischen?  
 Ja, fehlt nicht den Juden die Gabe?  
 Ist sie überhaupt denkbar, die  
 semitische Scheuche? Scheuchen-  
 itzich! Scheuchenitzich! 84

Are all ideologies equal or are some 'more equal than

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84) HJ p.495

all these questions are basically irrelevant, that they are intellectual games, in which man dissipates his energies which could be better spent in the solution of practical problems.

The inferno does not add anything new to the novel, nor does it deepen our insight into the novel's commitment. Whereas the rest of the novel had been selective in its choice of targets, the inferno seems to condemn every aspect of Western civilisation, without differentiation. Although it acts as a conclusion to the novel, the inferno is purely descriptive, and degenerates into a laborious enumeration of vices, whilst lacking both the analytic and dynamic power of the main bulk of the novel.

Before parting from Amsel and his scarecrows, we should like to summarise our findings: Three distinct phases have been observed in the history of the scarecrow; all three phases coincide with the divisions of the novel. Phase one showed the scarecrows to be primarily symbols of art with a potential political content. At the end of phase two, the breakthrough has been effected: Amsel decides to capitalise on the inherent power of his art for political ends. This decision finds its best illustration in the scarecrow ballet. In phase three, the scarecrows

have dissociated themselves completely from their artistic connotations and have turned into explicit allegories of ideology. In the inferno, their meaning is enlarged again, in as far as they illustrate the vices of mankind at large.

So far, this study has concentrated almost exclusively on the protagonist Eduard Amsel, on Weininger's fatal influence and on the development of Amsel's art, that is, of the scarecrows. The second part of the study, still intent on finding the nature of Grass's commitment in Hundejahre, will examine the other protagonist, Walter Matern, the philosophical influence of Heidegger and his 'attribute', the dog.

Within this simplified scheme, Matern corresponds to Amsel, the dog to the scarecrow and Weininger to Heidegger. The emphasis on the three components differs from the previous scheme, and so does their complexity. Whereas the scarecrows mystified us by their manifold meanings, the dog symbol will appear straightforward in comparison. The reverse applies to the two philosophical thinkers: Weininger's function within the narrative had been relatively translucent; substantial quotations straight from Geschlecht und Charakter have

been integrated into the novel and the political implications suggested themselves without any need of further explanations. The attack on Heidegger is only allusive, although infinitely more important for our purpose. It is one thing to expose the pathetic absurdities of a sick mind, as in the case of Weininger, who, although greatly influential in his time, has been completely discarded since. It is another, entirely different thing, to debunk one of the allegedly greatest German thinkers of our days, Heidegger, who is still alive. It cannot be our task to investigate the justification of Grass's onslaught, nor are we able to decide whether the author has misunderstood Heidegger's philosophy. This problem would demand an independent enquiry. Here we are only concerned with Heidegger's thought as represented to us in Hundejahre, and our analysis will try to find out the reasons for the particular use that Grass makes of his source.

For this purpose, it is helpful to clarify first the meaning of the dog, for the dog complements visually what Grass's version of Heidegger tries to achieve intellectually. Like the scarecrow, the dog motif undergoes a process of politicisation. The dog has two main functions, a structural and a thematic one. Structurally, it acts as a link between the Amsel-



Matern and the Tulla-Harry-Jenny story<sup>86</sup>. 'Der Hund steht zentral'<sup>87</sup>, that is how the narrator of the 'Materniaden' introduces his account, thus underlining yet again the central importance of the dog to the novel. Its significance as a living evidence of political evil has already been hinted at. Whenever the dog is mentioned, feelings of doom and disaster are conjured up<sup>88</sup>. Its family history is stated meticulously, and cloaked in religious phraseology. Never is one allowed to forget the dog's genesis:

Perkun zeugte Senta. Senta, vom Stamme Perkun, wird Harras werfen. Harras, vom Stamme Perkun, wird Prinz zeugen. Prinz vom Stamme Perkun Senta Harras...wird Geschichte machen...<sup>89</sup>

If it were not for the anticipation in the last phrase, one might not harbour any suspicions about Senta, for she seems to be a normal family dog. With Harras the emphasis changes considerably:

das war er: ein laggestreckter schwarzer Schäferhund mit Stehohren und langer Rute. Kein langhaariger belgischer Groenendael sondern ein deutscher stockhaariger Schäferhund.<sup>90</sup>

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86) Harry writes: 'Man hätte Walter Matern als unseren Verwandten ansehen können, weil seines Vaters Schäferhündin Senta unseren Harras geworfen hatte.' HJ p.145

87) HJ p.321

88) HJ p.8: dogs and scarecrows are introduced on the very first page of the novel.

89) HJ p.37

90) HJ p.113

Not only is he black - the colour of doom in Grass's work - he is of pure Germanic descent, too: 'Harras ist ein Rassenhund und steht im Zuchtbuch'. There is even more compulsive evidence for Harras's connections with National Socialism, when one thinks of his intimate relationship with Tulla.

Tulla's birth is the symbol of a juncture point in politics: not only is her birth bound up with the rise of the NSDAP, it also heralds the persecution of the Jews, the imminent publication of Heidegger's Sein und Zeit, and finally, it is connected with Harras<sup>91</sup>. The emotional bond between the two creatures Tulla and Harras, becomes particularly strong after the death of her brother Kurt, the only human being Tulla ever loved. It is in the kennel that Tulla mourns her brother. Harras and Tulla have become subservient to each other, and apart from Amsel's temporary abduction of the dog into the realm of art - 'dieser Amsel verdarb unseren Hund' - Tulla rules over Harras's destiny, his death included. She knowingly lets Matern poison him, which proves how incapable she is of any sustained affection. Her sadistic enjoyment of cruelty is stronger than her attachment to the animal.

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91) HJ p.103

The so-called political career of Harras begins with Prinz, one of his puppies, being presented to Hitler for his birthday. 'Warum geht es dem kleinen Prinz... so gut...?', the song goes, 'weil unser Führer die Hunde liebt und immer gut ist zu den Hunden'<sup>92</sup>. Harras, as Prinz's father, brings fame to the Liebenau/Pokriefke family. All the local journalists crowd around the saw mill, with the noble exception of a Socialist editor: Die Blechtrommel did not know of such exceptions, Hundejahre is more willing to acknowledge elements of resistance to the regime:

Einzig Brost, der Redakteur der bald darauf verbotenen 'Volksstimme' weigerte sich, unseren Harras zu interviewen. Vielmehr glossierte er den Presserummel unter dem Titel 'Auf den Hund gekommen'.<sup>93</sup>

This is a clear example of the figurative meaning of the title being incorporated into the narrative and this polemic tone is sustained throughout Matern's account. In book three the dog, like the scarecrow, is reduced to an allegory of National Socialism, and, later on, of ideologies in general. It is no coincidence that, with Matern, ambiguous symbols are transformed into political allegories. This process is fully in line with his role in the novel. Matern's appearance is bound to polarise political undercurrents

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92) HJ p.138

93) HJ p.140

and bring them to the surface.

To Matern himself, the dog Harras, and later Prinz/Pluto, is a 'Gleichnis'<sup>94</sup>. He uses the animal as a scapegoat, because Harras represents to him the incarnation of Nazism and Catholicism combined (both creeds having failed Matern): 'Du katholisches Nazi-schwein', he bursts out and poisons him. But as we know already from Die Blechtrommel: 'Das Unglück kann man nicht einkellern'. Needless to say, the storing away of Niobe<sup>95</sup> did not halt the cruelty of the Crystal Night, nor did the murder of Harras alter fatal events; Matern's murder is nothing but a gesture, an outlet for frustration. National Socialism goes on prospering and Prinz, Harras's successor, is very much alive. What is even more disturbing, he survives the official collapse of the Third Reich<sup>96</sup>, is rejuvenated in East Germany<sup>97</sup>, and finishes his career as the watchdog Pluto of Amsel's scarecrow hell.

Before moving on to the significance of the Heidegger

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94) HJ p.473: 'Der den Hund als Gleichnis wertenden Matern.'

95) BT p.160: 'Das Weib starb nicht. Das wurde...im Museumskeller...aufbewahrt. Doch man kann das Unglück nicht einkellern...'

96) HJ p.316

97) See his reappearance, together with the scarecrows, in the German Democratic Republic.

parody, as the intellectual background to the visual manifestation of the dog, here is Paul Kurz's comment on the development of the dog motif:

Die Hunde gehören verschiedenen realen Ebenen an, dienen dem Autor zu unterschiedlichem Zweck. Im ersten Teil sind die Hunde als Familienhunde physisch reale Tiere...Im zweiten Teil gerät das traute Haustier in die Fänge Hitlers. Auf dem Weg über den Führerhund Prinz, wird 'Hund' zur übergreifenden pejorativen Metapher. Die von Hitler vorgenommene Abwertung des Menschen ins Untermenschliche macht der Romandichter durch die Hundemetapher sichtbar. Die Jahre des Menschen scheinen als 'Hundejahre' auf; der Mensch verfügbar, entwertet, mißbrauchter Hund eines brutalen Machtherrn. Seine naturstarke Realität hat der Hund im dritten Romanteil verloren. Prinz, der als Pluto Matern zuläuft, ist nur noch ein vom Autor herbeigeholter, gebrauchter, romantisch montierter Hund. Die Metamorphose des Romans von der Darstellung lebender Welt in konstruierte Welt wird an der Metamorphose und Konstruktion des Hundes sichtbar. Pluto ist nicht mehr da wie Senta, Harras und auch Prinz da waren, er ist nur noch Funktion des Erzählers, Attribut Materns, der 'gekommen ist, zu richten mit schwarzem Hund'...

and he concludes:

Harras war ein Lebewesen. Mit Prinz verband sich die pejorisierende Metapher. Pluto ist primär Attribut, Demonstrations- und Kompositionsprinzip. Die logische Linie, das 'Gleichnis', ist erkennbar.<sup>98</sup>

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98) Paul Kurz: loc. cit. p.116

It has already been stated that the attack on Heidegger in Hundejahre has to be viewed against the background of German philosophy. The school of thought that Grass turns against in his novels, essays and speeches alike is German idealism. He maintains that this mode of thinking encourages a search for absolute values, a search that takes no account of day-to-day problems, and thus results in mere escapism. In a letter entitled 'Das Grundübel ist der Idealismus' he writes:

Das Grundübel unseres 'Vaterlandes',... scheint mir die durch nichts zu unterbrechende Fortsetzung des deutschen Idealismus zu sein. Totale Ansprüche, ob von links oder rechts vorgetragen, sind nach wie vor vom deutschen Idealismus geprägt, verdanken ihm seine übermenschlichen Masse. Ob die rechte Reaktion in ständestaatlichen Ordnungsprinzipien eine heile Welt anstrebt (und dafür alles mögliche in Scherben gehen lassen will), ob die Linke nach Marcuses befriedetem Dasein hungert (dessen Vorstufen ein halbes Dutzend Vietnam bedeuten dürften), es sind jeweils idealistische Schwierigkeiten, die es den Heilsaposteln unmöglich machen, die Widersprüche der Wirklichkeit auszuhalten und dem eigenen Unvermögen konfrontiert zu bleiben.<sup>99</sup>

In Grass's view, Heidegger is one of those 'Heilsapostel'. He therefore deserves to be exposed as a dangerous promoter of ideas that contributed to the

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99) 'Unser Grundübel ist der Idealismus': Günter Grass über sein politisches Engagement.' in Spiegel, 8/69, p.94

rise of National Socialism. In Hundejahre reproaches levelled against Heidegger fall into two categories: those concerning his personal behaviour, and those concerning his philosophy, or more specifically his philosophical language. Similarly, there are two different ways in which Grass formulates his attacks: there is the discursive passage, in which the nature of the grudge is stated explicitly<sup>100</sup>, and there is the abstruse parody, where the very meaninglessness of the passage reflects the lack of substance in Heidegger's thought<sup>101</sup>.

The first category of reproaches, those directed against Heidegger, the man, is clear enough. It denounces the philosopher's flirtations with the notions of a 'Führerstaat', resulting in his enthusiastic acclaim of Hitler's rise to power in 1933. Grass's contempt for this complicity is perhaps best expressed in Matern's outburst: 'Der [Hitler] und der andere [Heidegger] haben sich gegenseitig erfunden'<sup>102</sup>. Matern also reminds us that Heidegger disowned his Jewish mentor Husserl at a time when Husserl needed his support

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100) See the 'Knochenberg' episode p.274, p.279, Matern's visit to Heidegger p.352, and the attack on Heidegger's language in the scarecrow hell p.494.

101) See the rat hunt pp.269ff., the miscarriage pp.286ff. the dog's flight pp.308ff. and the radio discussion pp.430ff.

102) HJ p.352

most urgently: 'Was hast Du mit dem kleinen Husserl gemacht?'<sup>103</sup> and more aggressively 'Wie lang maß die Zipfelmütze, mit der Du den kleinen Husserl erwürgt hast?'<sup>104</sup>. He also makes Heidegger responsible for his own brutality against his Jewish friend Amsel: 'Was hast Du angestellt mit dem dicken Amsel?'<sup>105</sup>. Heidegger's support of National Socialism is to be considered as an inevitable outcome of his philosophical outlook. Grass is not isolated in this view<sup>106</sup>. There is, for example, an indisputable affinity between Grass's interpretation of Heidegger and Theodor Wiesengrund-Adorno's<sup>107</sup> - so much so that Adorno's analysis can serve as an intellectual basis for Grass's artistic parody. Adorno and Grass would both subscribe to the view: 'Der Jargon der Eigentlichkeit ist Ideologie als Sprache unter Absehung von allem besonderen Inhalt', and all their criticisms are epitomised by this statement. As Grass intends to show just this, it is hardly surprising that most of the Heidegger parodies yield

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103) HJ p.292

104) HJ pp.353-4

105) HJ p.292

106) A detailed study on this subject is Alexander Schwan's book: Politische Philosophie im Denken Heideggers, Köln, 1965

107) Theodor W. Adorno: Jargon der Eigentlichkeit. Zur deutschen Ideologie, Frankfurt a.M., 1965



little intellectual content. Therefore it seems legitimate to complement and back up quotations from Hundejahre with Adorno's analytical comments on Heidegger's ideology. Grass's criticisms fall into three main categories, which are also those discussed in Adorno's Jargon der Eigentlichkeit.

Firstly, what makes people succumb to a philosophy like Heidegger's? Secondly, what are its salient ideas, and why are they dangerous? Thirdly, how are these ideas expressed? What are the political and social implications of Heidegger's style?

First, what kind of men are his disciples? They are Störtebecker, Harry Liebenau and Walter Matern. All of them, admittedly in varying degrees, suffer from weakness of character which they are trying to compensate for by identifying themselves with a cause. Their basic lack of security is exacerbated by the political turmoil in which the three youngsters find themselves. Störtebecker, son of a police prefect, and former leader of the 'Dusters' (a militant group of rowdies in Die Blechtrommel) plays the part of a self-made philosopher, without being endowed with the necessary critical mind. Harry is characterised by an 'angeborenen Nachahmungsdrang', and finally, there is Matern, the other of the two main protagonists

in the novel. With him, admiration and subsequent hatred of Heidegger are most extreme. Grass defines Matern's representative function as follows:

In dem Roman Hundejahre ist mir, so glaube ich, in der Figur des Walter Matern ein deutsch-idealistischer Ideenträger gelungen, der innerhalb kürzester Zeit (ohne Opportunist zu sein) im Kommunismus, im Nationalsozialismus, im Katholizismus, schließlich im ideologischen Antifaschismus jeweils die Heilslehre sieht. Am Ende betreibt er mit faschistischen Methoden seine Art Antifaschismus.<sup>108</sup>

The clinching word here is 'Heilslehre'. All of them, Störtebecker, Harry and Matern are desperately longing for a system of belief which will relieve them of the burdens of thinking for themselves, or to quote Adorno: 'So liefert der Jargon den Menschen Schnittmuster des Menschseins'<sup>109</sup>. This is what Harry means, when he paraphrases his own time as the moment: 'als das Denken die Metaphysik verließ'<sup>110</sup>. Matern comes to the same conclusion:

Der las sich weg wie Butter. Der war gut gegen Kopfschmerzen und half gegen das Denken...<sup>111</sup>

Acceptance of this belief is independent of its contents. 'Man muß nur ein gläubiger Mensch sein', Adorno

108) Spiegel, 8/69, p.94

109) Theodor W. Adorno: op.cit. p.18

110) HJ p.270

111) HJ p.352

writes, 'einerlei, woran man glaubt'<sup>112</sup>. He develops this criticism by drawing the same political analogy that Grass is suggesting throughout his parody:

[Heideggerianer] finden tatsächlich etwas wie Kontakt, vergleichbar dem Gefühl, in der angedrehten national-sozialistischen Volksgemeinschaft sei für alle Artgenossen gesorgt, keiner werde vergessen: metaphysische Winterhilfe in Permanenz.<sup>113</sup>

In this context, one more socio-political aspect must be mentioned, because it explains why Heidegger's jargon has a particular appeal to semi-educated youngsters:

[Der Jargon] ist das deutsche Symptom fortschreitender Halbbildung; wie erfunden für solche, die sich als geschichtlich verurteilt oder wenigstens absinkend empfinden, aber vor ihresgleichen und sich selber als inwendige Elite sich gerieren.<sup>114</sup>

Grass illustrates their semi-education by referring to the boys' 'philosophische Gymnasiastensprache', an amalgam of philosophical nonsense, where the pretentiousness of the terms matters far more than their contents, let alone their proper application. The following may serve as an example:

Die Ankunft des noch unausgesprochenen Wesens der Unverborgenheit, also schlankweg das Sein. Sagte

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112) Theodor W. Adorno: op.cit. p.21

113) ibid. p.65

114) ibid. p.19

aber Harry: 'das Sein', verbesserte  
Störtebecker ihn ungeduldig: 'Du  
meinst wieder mal das Seiende!'<sup>115</sup>

What are Heidegger's ideas as represented in Hunde-  
jahre, and how does Grass view them in a political  
context? Prefacing the more elaborate polemics  
against existentialist jargon is the excursus on  
purity. Previously, unconnected allusions had been  
made about Heidegger's association with National So-  
cialism, such as the coincidence between Tulla's  
birth and the printing of Sein und Zeit. More out-  
rageous was the seemingly accidental evocation of  
Sein und Zeit in the midst of a drunken and brutal  
NSDAP meeting<sup>116</sup>, but the link between Nazi bestiality  
and Heidegger's main oeuvre remains as yet unexplained.

The discourse on purity reveals the author's funda-  
mental reservations concerning Heidegger. By nega-  
ting the ideal of purity, it expresses in general  
terms Grass's distrust of absolutes. The passage  
illustrates artistically the author's position in  
the letter quoted above (see p.249): Idealism and  
purity are here to be taken as synonyms; both betray  
a dangerous desire for absolutes:

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115) HJ p.267

116) HJ p.176

Und die Knochen, weiße Berge, die geschichtet wurden, neulich, wuchsen reinlich ohne Krähen: Pyramidenherrlichkeit...nichts ist rein, kein Kreis, kein Knochen. Und die Berge, hergestellte, um die Reinlichkeit zu türmen, werden schmelzen kochen sieden, damit Seife, rein und billig. Doch selbst Seife wäscht nicht rein.<sup>117</sup>

Rhythmical, stylised and contrived, this passage contains in abstract terms what the subsequent passages will exemplify by specific instances. The method employed is the same throughout: confrontation between theory and practice. Heidegger's concept of 'Eigentlichkeit' is one of those absolute values that Grass takes exception to. The term, in Grass's view, means simply to be fully what one is, or to use Adorno's definition:

'Eigentlichkeit' (nennt) kein Eigentliches als spezifische Eigenschaft, sondern bleibt formal...Es besagt nicht, was eine Sache sei, sondern ob, in welchem Maß sie das in ihrem Begriff schon Vorausgesetzte sei, in implizitem Gegensatz zu dem, was sie bloß scheint. Bedeutung empfinde das Wort allenfalls von der Eigenschaft, von der es prädiiziert wird. Das Suffix '-keit' aber reizt zum Glauben, es trüge bereits jenen Inhalt in sich. Die bloße Relationskategorie wird herausgefischt und ihrerseits als Konkretes ausgestellt; das Höchste wäre nach dieser Logik, was durchaus ist, was es ist.<sup>118</sup>

And Adorno concludes, an insight for which examples abound in Hundejahre:

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117) HJ p.266

118) Theodor W. Adorno: op.cit. pp.104-5

Im Namen zeitgemäßer Eigentlichkeit jedoch könnte auch ein Folterknecht allerlei ontologische Entschädigungsansprüche anmelden, wofern er nur ein rechter Folterknecht war.<sup>119</sup>

With special reference to the persecution of the Jews:

Juden werden dafür bestraft, daß sie es sind, ontologisch und naturalistisch in eins.<sup>120</sup>

The most notable examples illustrating this attitude are the passages describing the rat hunts. Holthusen's interpretation of this episode does not do full justice to their impact. He writes:

Die Suggestivität der Wirkung liegt in dem grotesken Kontrast zwischen dem Schleimig-Erdhaften des Rattenwesens und dem Vergrübelt-Verstiegenen der philosophischen Terminologie.<sup>121</sup>

He concedes that the intention of writing this episode must have been

eine ...Anklage gegen jenes bewußte Gehirn, das auf eine absurd-perverse Weise der Entstehung einer Rattenwelt, d.h. einer Welt des katastrophischen Verfalls, durch falsches Denken Vorschub geleistet haben soll.<sup>122</sup>

But Grass does not content himself with such vague allusions, he defines the 'Welt des katastrophischen Verfalls' more precisely. The extermination of the

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119) Theodor Adorno: op.cit.p.105

120) ibid. p.106

121) Hans Egon Holthusen: 'Günter Grass als politischer Autor', Der Monat Nr.216, Sept.1966, p.73

122) ibid.p.74

Jews, and in the background, there is always the smoke emanating from the nearby Stutthof concentration camp<sup>123</sup>. All these descriptions are generously endowed with Heidegger's terminology. The clipped syntax makes nonsense of it, but the contrasting effect between verbose pomposity and dehumanisation is always maintained.

Brutality is rewarded; in practice it means the systematic killing of millions of Jews. This is, according to Grass and Adorno, 'Eigentlichkeit' in action, on a national level. On a private level, the concept of 'Eigentlichkeit' has equally disastrous consequences. When applied to the individual, it means, in Matern's own words: 'Freiheit zum Ich', or to put it more bluntly, it justifies boundless egotism and encourages antisocial behaviour. Matern, weary of his self-inflicted responsibility towards Inge, whom he has seduced, sees a perfect excuse in Heidegger's jargon to rid himself of his burdens:

Ingemaus möchte weinen...Matern  
 übt Nachsicht und spricht...vom  
 Abschied, dem man immer voraus  
 oder voran sein müsse...Ingemaus  
 mag das,...wenn er...brüllt, knirscht,  
 zischt und merkwürdige Worte preßt:  
 'Ich existiere umwillen meiner! Welt  
 ist nie, sondern weltet. Freiheit  
 ist Freiheit zum Ich. Ich seiend.

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123) HJ p.270

Das entwerfende Ich als entwerfendes  
 Inmitten. Ich, befindlich und ein-  
 genommen. Ich, Weltentwurf! Ich,  
 Ursprung des Gründens!...Ich, Mög-  
 lichkeit - Boden - Ausweis! ICH?  
 GRUND, GRÜNDEND IM ABGRUND!'

Den Sinn dieser dunklen Rede erfährt  
 Ingemaus kurz vor Weihnachten. Ob-  
 gleich sie für den Gabentisch schon  
 viele nette und nützliche Säckelchen  
 beieinander hat, geht er.<sup>124</sup>

Other fundamental notions which Grass chooses for his attack, and all of which flow from the key concept of 'Eigentlichkeit', are Heidegger's concept of life, 'als das Sein zum Tode', or to quote Störtebecker who uses an identical phrase: 'Wir müssen das...Ausdauern zum Tode als das volle Wesen der Existenz denken.' Grass's polemic against Heidegger concerns above all the latter's attitude to suffering, death and sacrifice. Again, Adorno puts Grass's objections in a nutshell, when he writes:

Leid, Übel und Tod seien, wie es im  
 Jargon heißt, anzunehmen; nicht zu  
 ändern.<sup>125</sup>

In fact, and this is something which neither Adorno, nor Grass can condone, the philosopher turns himself into an advocate of the status quo:

Als oberste Maxime springt heraus,

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124) HJ pp.338-9

125) Theodor W. Adorno; op.cit.,p.57



daß es so ist, daß man sich zu fügen  
 - positivistisch; anzupassen - habe,  
 das erbärmliche Gebot, dem zu gehor-  
 chen, was ist.<sup>126</sup>

Heidegger's glorification of death does not take into account factors that might make death worthwhile: 'Ontologische Entschlossenheit darf nicht fragen, wofür sie stirbt'<sup>127</sup>. Such an abstract concept of death leads inevitably to a celebration of sacrifice: 'Das Opfer (duldet) keine Berechnung,...mögen die Ziele niedrig oder hoch gestellt sein.'<sup>128</sup>

This is also what Störtebecker, Harry and Matern thought - if they thought anything at all - when they were put face to face with the irrefutable reality of the 'Knochenberg'. Not that this discovery came as a surprise to them, 'Aber niemand fragte nach seinem Gehalt, obgleich alle und Harry ihn auf der Zunge hatten.'<sup>129</sup> As long as they were able to wallow in Heidegger's incantations, they could avoid the horror of reality:

Worte fallen Harry ein; Ortschaft -  
 Inständigkeit - Richtung<sup>130</sup>

and Störtebecker's

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126) Theodor W, Adorno: op.cit.p.126

127) ibid. p.132

128) ibid. p.133

129) HJ p.275

130) HJ p.274

Antwort lag, obgleich frisch ausgesprochen, schon seit Wochen bereit; 'Wir müssen das Zuhaufliegen in der Offenheit des Seins, das Austragen der Sorge und das Ausdauern zum Tode als das volle Wesen der Existenz denken.'<sup>131</sup>

Tulla presses for more tangible information, but Störtebecker does not want to know;

Er winkte ab und wurde ungeduldig:  
'Quatscht doch nicht immer mit Euren abgeklapperten naturwissenschaftlichen Begriffen. Allenfalls kann man sagen: Hier ist Sein in Unverborgenheit angekommen.'<sup>132</sup>

He blesses the pile of bones, pronouncing solemnly;

Das ist der Wesensraum aller Geschichte.<sup>133</sup>

This oracle reveals what Adorno and Grass denounce in Heidegger's thought: the uncritical sanctification of history. Here the link of Heidegger's philosophy with the older German Idealists becomes visible, especially the influence of Hegel (who enthusiastically approved of history as) <sup>in whom history was</sup> the manifestation of the 'spirit'.

When Störtebecker is physically presented with a skull, he is still unable to recognise the horror for what it is - his indoctrination has gone too far:

Seine engstehenden Augen sahen das Seiende, welches in seinem Geschick an sich hielt, worauf sich jäh und unversehens Welt ereignete.<sup>134</sup>

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131) HJ p.275

132) HJ p.275

133) HJ p.275

134) HJ p.277

Harry and Matern react differently. At least the shock affects them and for a few moments, Heidegger's fascination seems to fade:

Hinter ihm hielt geometrisch still;  
die Ortschaft, die Inständigkeit,  
die Nichtung, der Wesensraum aller  
Geschichte, der Unterschied zwischen  
Sein und Seiendem; die ontologische  
Differenz.<sup>135</sup>

In the final third of book two, the reader is told, in the form of an amazingly unambiguous statement, what the Heidegger parody is all about. This, to our mind unnecessary explanation, represents Harry's total mystification by Heidegger:

Mit Hilfe dieser Vorbilder [Heidegger and Löns] gelang es ihm, einen tatsächlichen aus menschlichen Knochen erstellten Berg mit mittelalterlichen Allegorien zuzuschütten. Er erwähnte den Knochenberg, der in Wirklichkeit zwischen Troyl und dem Kaiserhafen gen Himmel schrie, in seinem Tagebuch als Opferstätte, errichtet, damit das Reine sich im Lichten ereigne, indem es das Reine umlichte und so das Licht stifte.<sup>136</sup>

Only towards the end of the war does Harry begin to realise his gullibility:

Löns und Heidegger irren in vielen Dingen.<sup>137</sup>

Adorno attributes this blinding process mainly to Heidegger's language.

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135) HJ p.277

136) HJ p.279

137) HJ p.307

Seine Formeln (~~s~~schalten) sich  
 zwischen die Sache und das Subjekt  
 und verblenden es gegen eben das,  
 worauf das Geschwätz sich bezieht.<sup>138</sup>

His comment relates so perfectly to the 'Knochenberg' episode in Hundejahre that it might have been written for this purpose. This brings us to the final point of our Heidegger analysis: his jargon and its political implications. There are a number of philosophical ideas with which the novel tries to come to terms, such as Heidegger's concept of 'Bodenständigkeit', his definition of 'Denken als reine Tätigkeit', and his predilection for archaisms as a measure of authenticity. But primarily, Grass's attack on Heidegger is directed against the philosopher's mystifying language, its pomposity, its vagueness and its irrationality, finally its irrelevance to the urgent demands of our time. ✕

Just how irrelevant Heidegger's verbose tautologies are is best illustrated by the passage in Hundejahre which describes Prinz's flight on Hitler's birthday - a flight that coincides with the German capitulation. This episode is most explicit in its total equation between Heidegger's jargon, the military National Socialist jargon, and the dog's activities. Here is

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138) Theodor W. Adorno; op.cit.p.85

an example of this linguistic mixture:

Der fahlen Ungestimmtheit der Reichshauptstadt hat zwölfte Armee Gegenstimmung anzudemonstrieren. Seinsentlastungen in Steglitz und am Südrand des Tempelhofer Feldes haben vorgeschobenen Selbstpunkt zu entwerfen. Der Endkampf des deutschen Volkes ist zu führen im Hinblick auf das vom Fernsinn durchstimmte Nichts.<sup>139</sup>

'Das vom Fernsinn durchstimmte Nichts' is no other than Hitler's dog Prinz. This is Grass's way of expressing his contempt for National Socialist objectives. How low must the German people have sunk, when they have to fight their final battle and at the same time devote their energies to the capturing of an Alsatian dog. But just as reprehensible as the dog's perspective is the dishonesty with which they disguise their moral ugliness by using 'Seinsentlastungen' as a euphemism for death. Adorno's comment points in the same direction:

Das Falsche der Sinngebung, das Nichts als Etwas, erzeugt die sprachliche Verlogenheit.<sup>140</sup>

Why does Prinz flee? Is he distancing himself from the regime? And if the dog distances himself, does Heidegger too? The first question is answered by the text:

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139) HJ p.311

140) Theodor W. Adorno: op.cit. p.134

Eines Tages lief dieser Hund dem  
Führer davon. Warum wohl?... 'Weil  
genug hin und her, Weil kein festes  
Hunde-Hier Hunde-Da Hunde-Jetzt.  
Weil überall Knochen vergraben und  
nie mehr wiedergefunden. Weil kein  
Entspringenlassen. Weil immer Im-  
Sperr-Raum-Sein...'<sup>141</sup>

Life has become too uncomfortable and restrictive under Hitler; this is hardly an insight with far-reaching moral consequences. The dog's defection, which can be seen as a parallel to Heidegger's withdrawal from National Socialism, is inspired by sheer opportunism. Grass implies that for both, Prinz and Heidegger, this flight is a matter of self-preservation, it is not to be confused with a change of heart.

Particularly revealing in this passage is the author's stylistic adaptation to the state of affairs: the sprinkling with Heidegger's terminology is very generous at the beginning of Prinz's flight and trickles down to a mere nothing as the German fight for survival hots up. Grass wants to demonstrate that there is a limit to the comforting effect of Heidegger's jargon. As long as one's own life is not at stake, it is easy to stylise other people's sufferings and eventual death in meaningful sounding euphemisms. To call a mountain of bones an 'Opferstätte' - other people's bones -

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141) HJ p. 314

prevents any enquiry into the reasons of mass extermination. No such hypocrisy is possible when one's own life hangs in the balance. Then the jargon of 'authenticity' loses all its magic.

Matern, too, mocks at the philosopher's abstract language: 'In welcher Mütze hast Du sie versteckt die chlorbestreuten Seinsvergessenen?'. Needless to say that 'Seinsvergessene' refers to corpses again. Another example of Matern's impatience with Heidegger's metaphysical approach to life is the following outburst: 'Schluß mit aller Geworfenheit und Immernichtdaseinlichkeit'. At the end of book three the narrator reveals his disgust in the scarecrow hell devoted to Heidegger:

Hat 1000 Worte für das Sein, für  
die Zeit, für Wesen, Welt und Grund,  
für das Mit und für das Jetzt, für  
das Nichts und das Gescheuch als  
Gestell.<sup>142</sup>

Political reality does not enter his vocabulary at all. Not only is the language vague, not only does it cover up atrocities, it positively encourages moral cowardice. The radio discussion is a case in point. 'Die Diskussion heißt Daseinsbewältigung' we are told<sup>143</sup>, but Matern's 'Daseinsbewältigung' consists of running

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142) HJ p.494

143) HJ p.439

away from all the issues detrimental to his person. Although Matern thinks he has turned against Heidegger, the latter's mode of thought has left its mark on him; only by means of the miracle spectacles are his crimes exposed.

The main points that emerged from our discussion of the Heidegger parody in Hundejahre are Grass's distrust of blind faith and his plea for rationality. All the passages devoted to the denigration of the philosopher, whether discursive or parodistic, lay bare the gulf that exists between Heidegger's priest-like language and the world outside that seems devoid of any sense. This applies to the rat passages, the mountain of bones, the description of Tulla's abortion<sup>144</sup>, to the dog's flight, the radio discussion and the scarecrow hell.

To conclude this interpretation of Hundejahre, we must as always, consider the significance of the novel in a wider context. If the novella Katz und Maus proved a transitional work between the two major novels Die Blechtrommel and Hundejahre, Hundejahre itself marks

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144) HJ pp. 286-7



a transition within the whole of Grass's work, and consequently holds a key position. The leading idea throughout our investigations has been that of commitment. According to the distinction made between Engagement and Tendenz, Die Blechtrommel was discussed as a prototype of Engagement; Katz und Maus represented a more specific type of Engagement; Hundejahre is the first work to show traces of Tendenz.

The transition from Engagement to Tendenz takes place within the novel itself, and therefore conveys the difference between these two modes of expression much more convincingly than if this distinction were superimposed from outside. In mood, part one of Hundejahre is closest to Die Blechtrommel; its vitality recalls the ebullience of Oskar's drumming. Towards the end of part two a strong moral purpose is making itself felt and, by the end of part three, any previous playfulness is crushed by undisguised didacticism. It is not so much that one is told what should be done - that stage has not yet been reached - but the reader is left in no doubt as to what should not be done.

Critics have reacted unfavourably to this didacticism in Hundejahre. Idris Parry, for one, would prefer to do without the whole of part three on the grounds

that Grass's good intentions make for bad art,

Grass is outraged by what he finds; social injustice, hidden Nazis, murderers living respectable lives. His feelings are admirable - for a politician, for an artist, they are disastrous. He sacrifices art to morality.<sup>145</sup>

Paul Kurz contents himself with simply registering the movement from Engagement to Tendenz, without evaluating it aesthetically. He speaks of the transformation of the dog as being symptomatic of the transformation of the whole novel. The 'Lebewesen' HARRAS, he writes, turns into the 'Demonstrations- und Kompositionsprinzip Pluto'.

The dog is by no means the only symbol to undergo this type of transformation. The same applies to its counterpart, the scarecrow. The three phases observed in Amsel's art run parallel to the three phases of the dog's development. One remembers Amsel's first creations as products of his imagination; their Engagement revealed itself only in their efficacy; it was not the result of a conscious commitment on the part of the author. The mechanical scarecrows are already accompanied by strong tendentious overtones. When it comes to the scarecrow functioning as an allegory of ideology in East Germany and as a relic of

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145) Idris Parry; 'The special quality of Hell', Listener, 3.5.66, pp.173-4

National Socialism in the Federal Republic, the overtones have turned into straightforward statements. Thus, the directness of the scarecrow in Amsel's hell is diametrically opposed to the ambiguity of its initial appearance. Whether this shift from ambiguity to directness is in itself a sacrilege of art, as Idris Parry suggests, is a question outside the framework of this study. Our task is to unravel patterns of commitment in Grass's work, and not to decide whether these are aesthetically viable or not.

Apart from the dog and the scarecrow, there is a third metaphor, the knife. In part one, it is a symbol of the blood brotherhood between Amsel and Matern. Already at this stage, the knife is loaded with significance, for Matern wants to rid himself of it. The reader senses the underlying tension, without knowing what causes it. By the end of part three, the mystery is resolved; the knife has now become a symbol of the love-hate relationship between Germans and Jews. The fact that it has been retrieved, and, according to Amsel, always will be, conceals a political message; whatever the difficulties, Jews and Germans have to learn how to live together; coexistence between the two communities is essential to both.

Grass's representation of the German-Jewish conflict

has given rise to conflicting interpretations, George Steiner, for instance, sees it in the following light:

The neurotic conjecture of some secret, fore-doomed relationship between Nazi and Jew, of a hidden fraternity or mutual fascination deeper than the outward show of loathing and destruction crops up tenaciously.<sup>146</sup>

It is most unlikely that Grass intended to present such a mystic German/Jew relationship, nor is Steiner's interpretation borne out by our reading of the novel. Far from reaffirming the view that love-hate is inherent to racial differences between German and Jew, Grass is making nonsense of the racist theory altogether. One can only agree with Neveux when he writes;

Grass a bien vu la complexité des relations entre Amsel et Matern, et il les a décrites comme si Matern en voulait à son ami d'être plus que lui un aryen exemplaire; le père d'Amsel se considérait comme un pnr Allemand,...faisait du sport...et considérait surtout comme une nouvelle bible le livre d'Otto Weininger...qui lui enseignait tout ce qu'il fallait faire pour ne pas passer pour Juif.<sup>147</sup>

The mere fact that it is possible for Amsel to be 'un aryen exemplaire', completely refutes the idea that German and Jew are intrinsically different. It is not accidental that Grass prevaricates several times about Amsel's origins: 'Natürlich war Albrecht

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146) George Steiner; Language and Silence, London 1967, p.133

147) J.B. Neveux; loc.cit., p.546

Amsel ein Jude!<sup>148</sup> and three pages later 'Albrecht Amsel war 'natürlich' kein Jude'. What makes the Jew different in the end is being constantly reminded by society of his alleged difference. As Sartre puts it so concisely in Réflexions sur la question juive, it is society that creates the Jew:

...s'ils méritent tous le nom de Juifs, c'est qu'ils ont une situation commune de Juif, c'est-à-dire qu'ils vivent au sein d'une communauté qui les tient pour Juifs. En un mot, le Juif est parfaitement assimilable pour les nations modernes, mais il se définit comme celui que les nations ne veulent pas assimiler.<sup>149</sup>

and he concludes 'C'est l'antisémite qui fait le Juif'<sup>150</sup>. Amsel is in that respect a modified version of the non-Jewish Andri in Max Frisch's Andorra, who is so convinced of his Jewish origins as a consequence of the harassment of society, that he allows himself to be butchered by the Nazis at the end.

What separates Amsel and Matern are not their origins, but temperamental differences. The reader knows this, even though the characters themselves do not. For they have been brought up to believe in an antagonism

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148) HJ p.30

149) J.P. Sartre; Réflexions sur la question juive, Paris 1954, p.81

150) ibid. p.84

between the Jew and the German, and the society in which they live has spared no efforts to prove them right. Paradoxically, it is the Jew that instigates reconciliation; Amsel alone is in a position to save Matern from his destructive self-hatred.

The dog for Matern, the scarecrow for Amsel and the knife as the eternal link. However much these three symbols puzzled us by their multilayeredness at the beginning, by the end of the novel, they convey a clear political message. Thus, part three serves as an elucidation of the two preceding parts. Every episode, every image is there for a purpose.

Miller Matern's prophetic worms are no exception. They, too, are resuscitated from the past and their dubious contribution to the Wirtschaftswunder is spelt out; Augstein of Der Spiegel, Bucerius of Die Zeit and the Springer press, all of them come in for heavy criticism. So do the political parties, the SPD for its lack of realism, the CDU for having ex-Nazis sitting on its front benches,

Even more directly than the dog, the image of the worm has immediate pejorative connotations. There is no need for Grass to bring these to our attention, but he does;

Vom Anfang an war im Vater des  
Wirtschaftswunders der Wurm drinnen.<sup>151</sup>

Grass is not interested in economic development for its own sake, but in the striking discrepancy between political apathy and material prosperity. He fully subscribes to Alexander Mitscherlich's explanation;

Statt einer politischen Durcharbeitung der Vergangenheit als dem geringsten Versuch der Wiedergutmachung vollzog sich die explosive Entwicklung der deutschen Industrie. Werktätigkeit und Erfolg verdeckten bald die offenen Wunden, die aus der Vergangenheit geblieben waren.<sup>152</sup>

The only new device - it can hardly be called a symbol any more - that we encounter in the final part is the 'Wunderbrille', also known as the 'Erkenntnisbrille' or 'Familienentlarver'. Having debunked Germany's economic achievements by means of the image of the worm, Grass invents this device to bring the ex-Nazi face to face with his political past. Amsel's firm is the producer of this gadget. Another deliberate choice; if the Jew has to redeem the German, it is also he who has to facilitate this process. The invention of the 'Wunderbrille' is one step in that

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151) HJ p.371

152) Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich; Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern, München 1968, p.23

direction. Another is Matern's guided tour through the scarecrow hell.

The confrontation with the past must not be an occasion for self-pity, but a prerequisite for constructive policy in the future. This plea for honesty and reason is sharply contrasted with Matern's dishonesty in his relentless campaign of reckoning. The attack against German idealists and their total indifference is resumed in this context:

Aber das ist wieder mal typisch:  
 Von einem Extrem ins andere und  
 wollen immer den Teufel mit  
 Beelzebub...Außerdem lernen sie  
 nie aus ihrer Geschichte; meinen  
 immer, die anderen...Wollen jederzeit  
 alle Brüder werden und Millionen  
 umarmen...Jede Freiheit wohnt  
 auf zu hohen Bergen...Revolution  
 immer nur in der Musik und niemals  
 das eigene Nest.<sup>153</sup>

Again, there is congruence between the point of view of the social psychologist Alexander Mitscherlich and Grass:

Diese deutsche Art, das schier Un-  
 erreichbare kompromißlos so zu  
 lieben, daß das Erreichbare darüber  
 verlohrengeht, wiederholt sich in  
 der deutschen Geschichte seit dem  
 Heiligen Römischen Reich Deutscher  
 Nation.<sup>154</sup>

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153) HJ pp.386-7

154) Mitscherlich; op.cit. p.16



The seriousness of the situation is heightened by the fact that it is Matern who voices this criticism. He, who is pathologically incapable of recognising his own criminal tendencies, can see them so clearly in his compatriots. He, who accuses his former colleagues of forgetfulness, practices this art to perfection. The self-styled resistance fighter, who has taken it upon himself 'zu rächen mit schwarzem Hund' is shown to be every bit as worthless as those he sets out to condemn, with the difference that he suffers more acutely from guilt feelings, because of his personal involvement with Amsel.

At the same time, it is precisely this acute guilt feeling that drives him to the idealisation of his own past. Like Mahlke of Katz und Maus, Matern uses the political field to solve a personal dilemma. 'Erinnern heißt auswählen', we read on the first page of 'Die Materniaden'. Apart from being a comment on the process of writing, this is also a description of the workings of historical memory. Although Matern sets himself up as a judge, the fraudulence of his own position is quickly exposed. As Sawatzki, Matern's war companion, puts it:

'Iss ja glücklich väbai dä ganze  
Zaubä mit Ändleesung und Ändsieg.  
Heer bloß auf damit. Schwamm drierber  
ond nuä kaine Vorwirrfe nech. Da  
weerd ech fuchtich. Dänn wiä baide

main lieber Schwan, wiä send midde  
selbijen Wasser jewaschen, ond  
kainer von ons is ain Stickchen  
saubrer als dä andre, stemmts?<sup>155</sup>

Because all are guilty, everybody absolves everybody else. Only a mechanical gadget like the miracle spectacles possesses the necessary impartiality, and the postwar generation is the only one in a position to administer this type of justice. Walli tries, but the truth is too cruel for her to bear. She falls ill, and when she returns from hospital, she, too, has learned how to forget:

...gute Pflege, damit Walli vergißt.  
Diese Verhaltensweise wird mehr und  
mehr zur Hauptlebensregel aller  
Beteiligten: Vergessen!<sup>156</sup>

For reasons of self-preservation, the revolution of children against their parents does not take place. Statement after statement follows, deploring the suffocation of an awakening conscience:

Jeder Mensch muß vergessen können.  
Die Vergeßlichkeit ist etwas Natürliches.  
Das Gedächtnis sollte von angenehmen  
Erinnerungen bewohnt sein und nicht von  
quälenden Garstigkeiten...Deshalb muß  
jeder etwas haben, woran er glauben kann:  
Gott zum Beispiel; oder wer nicht an den  
kann, der soll an die Schönheit, an den  
Fortschritt, an das Gute im Menschen  
oder an sonst eine Idee.<sup>157</sup>

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155) HJ p.335

156) HJ p.411

157) HJ p.411

The sarcasm culminates in the statement; 'Also Aktivität! Das Vergessen als produktive Tätigkeit.' The last quotation could be taken straight out of Alexander Mitscherlich's Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern.

Mitscherlich analyses two alternative responses, both of which are discussed in Hundejahre. His phrase 'Verjährung ohne Trauerarbeit' is the scientific equivalent of Sawatzki's 'Schwamm drierer' formula. The other alternative is:

Durcharbeiten, wenigstens im Detail, beginnend mit jenen Einzelheiten, die an sich noch keine Unmenschlichkeiten sind, in der zahllosen Verbreitung freilich das Klima schufen zum Beispiel für Projekt und verbissene Verwirklichung der 'Endlösung'. Darauf folgt jene panische Schuldangst, die zur Ausdauer in blinder Selbstzerstörung zwang und dann zur totalen Äußeren Abkehr von dieser Identifikationslinie mit dem Nazismus.<sup>158</sup>

This sums up Matern's position, whose memory for detail is extremely accurate as far as other people are concerned, but which fails him when it comes to his own person, precisely because he shuns the above identification with Nazism.

With Grass's new declamatory style, goes a deeper analysis of National Socialism and its aftermath. Die Blechtrommel ends with a forceful reminder

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158) Mitscherlich: op.cit. p.10

of everybody's individual guilt: 'Du bist schuld und Du bist schuld und Du am allermeisten' is the refrain reverberating through the air. Coupled with this obsessive guilt feeling, there is Oskar's equally obsessive fear of life, a fear that threatens to suffocate him. Thus, the author contents himself with denouncing National Socialism. Apart from the implicit suggestion that something has to be done, a large question mark hangs over the future. Katz und Maus restricts itself to the wartime period, so that the question of finding a modus vivendi in present-day Germany does not arise.

In Hundejahre Grass strengthens his denunciation of Nazism. Firstly, he suggests that Hitler's reign was not an inexplicable accident, but that it was rather the result of totalitarian thinking peculiar to German philosophy. Through the example of Matern, it is made clear that, as long as such habits of thought persist, the danger of further dictatorships cannot be dismissed out of hand. Secondly, Grass is also much more explicit as to how Germany should deal with her past; Matern's method of rehabilitation is so fraught with self-deception, that it would be merely comical if it were not so pernicious. Who is he to set himself up on a pedestal and indulge in mass condemnation? But even if Matern's past were

'clean', such attitudinising is nothing but an exercise in self-righteousness.

Sawatzky's 'Schwamm drierer' solution is portrayed as equally reprehensible. Forgetting without digesting, deafening one's conscience, instead of facing up to it, is obviously no solution either. There is only one rational answer: understand, live with the past and above all learn from it. But before you can understand, you must remember, even things most detrimental to yourself. This is why the Wunderbrille is so helpful: it reveals accurately what happened, not as an end in itself, but as a step towards therapy.

'Trümmer sollte man nicht beschreiben, sondern verwerten', this is Grass's advice to his readers, for the present and the future. Amsel, although far removed from moral perfection, incorporates many of Grass's ideas. In the same way as Matern represents ideology, for ever desirous of believing in a 'Heilslehre', Amsel is the advocate of anti-ideology, of scepticism. His point of departure is always reality, Matern's is an abstract idea. And because Amsel wants to change reality, he instigates a long overdue reconciliation. A reconciliation, however, which, far from wallowing in emotional excesses, is soundly

based on self-knowledge.

Beide sind wir nackt, Jeder badet  
für sich

is an appropriate end to the novel. Only now is a new beginning possible. Had it not been for Grass's tendentiousness, his hopes for the future might have been concealed from us. However much this new style detracts from the mystery of his art, intellectually, Tendenz has a lot to recommend itself, as long as its ideology is that of anti-ideology.

CHAPTER SIXDIE PLEBEJER PROBEN DEN AUFSTAND

Die Plebejer proben den Aufstand, Grass's first full-length play, represents both a farewell and a new beginning. The adolescent world of Danzig-Langfuhr of his three previous novels is left behind, and so, though only temporarily, is his preoccupation with National Socialism. Instead, the play focuses on the mature figure of the Chef, alias Brecht, and his behaviour on 17 June 1953, the day of the East Berlin Uprising. Grass is the first writer on the West German scene to take a postwar event as his historical subject matter.

But the novelty of Die Plebejer within Grass's work extends far beyond the contemporaneity of its subject matter. The 17 June, although important in its own right, is used as a test for what Grass sets out to investigate: the dilemma of the artist and intellectual when confronted with a political crisis. He defines his premises more precisely, by choosing Bertolt Brecht as a model for the artist and 17 June as a model for the crisis. At a superficial level, the play thus becomes a polemic against Brecht as a manager of stage revolutions, and a traitor to the

real revolution. At a deeper level, the play is a highly complex exploration of the discrepancy between preaching and doing, between theory and practice. The formulation of the problem is as precise as its solution is ambiguous. In fact, as will be seen later, the play allows of two contradictory interpretations. Initially, the Chef's non-involvement seems to be contemptible; retrospectively, however, his behaviour is justified and emerges as the only right course of action for him to take. Grass's own view is that there is right and wrong on both sides, on the workers' side and the Chef's. He claims:

Dieses Stück versucht einen dritten Weg als Denkvorgang,<sup>1</sup>

and suggests that the search for, rather than the acquisition of truth is important. Reinforcing this idea of Lessing, he expresses the hope

daß das Stück aufklärend wirkt.<sup>2</sup>

Die Plebejer is the most searching statement concerning our topic of the writer and the problem of commitment in the whole of Grass's work. The previous novels, especially Die Blechtrommel and Hundejahre

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1) 'Ein Staat ist kein Vaterland', der Schriftsteller und der dritte Weg. Ein Gespräch mit Günter Grass. Christ und Welt, 11 November 1966, Nr.6, XIX J, p.19

2) Ibid, p.19



are also deeply concerned with this problem, especially when one thinks of Oskar and Amsel. But nowhere is it stated so starkly. What had been conveyed metaphorically in the first three novels, has now made way to undisguised discursive argument.

The main reason for this resides in a further escalation in Grass's awareness of his political responsibility. The play was immediately preceded by Grass's intense involvement in the 1965 West German election, so that he was simultaneously reflecting on and reacting to the problem, when writing Die Plebejer. It would be naïve to look at Grass's political activities and crudely infer from them what he was getting at in the play, although his remark

Wahreden sind für mich schriftstellerische Arbeiten<sup>3</sup>

would offer some justification for doing so. But it would be equally misleading not to acknowledge the inevitable cross-fertilisation between the play and Grass's political involvement. It is impossible to determine a chronological sequence. Whether the play was an outcome of his electioneering or vice versa is immaterial, as long as one is aware that from now on there is an overlap between the two activities. This coincidence must have had some bearing on the

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3) Grass Dokumente, p.34

conception of the play, for the demarcation line between writer and political activist is now blurred. The tendentiousness of the closing part of Hundejahre was only a prelude to a more and more pronounced trend in Grass's later work, of which Die Plebejer is the first result.

Other reasons can be found for Grass's concentration on one theme: the genre of the drama encourages sustained enquiry into a well-defined conflict. Die Plebejer is essentially a play about ideas; one might well call it a pièce à thèse in the sense that its area of investigation can be summed up in a single sentence. In sharp contrast with the novels, there are no incapsulations, there is no symbolism demanding to be unravellèd; the tin drum and scarecrows are imaginative relics of a long-abandoned past. The difficulties which remain are of a different order; they are due to the intellectual substance of the problem itself rather than to the way in which the problem is presented.

In the play the various levels, historical ones, in this instance, are explicitly stated; indeed, they are an integral part of the dramatis personae. The novels operated differently; in them all levels of meaning were contained within one and the same symbol,

and it was up to the reader to extrapolate their significance at any given moment in the narrative. This process is reversed in Die Plebejer. The different ideas that constitute the problem are perfectly intelligible, but to grasp them in their entirety is an almost impossible task, and yet essential to the real appreciation of the play. Thus the dimension of the Chef's dilemma can only be fully comprehended if we understand how the various historical and literary levels interact and relate to one another.

We have already mentioned that the play lays itself open to two kinds of interpretation. On the whole, critics have labelled it an 'anti-Brecht' play. In spite of Grass's later protestations, he himself is largely to be blamed for this misunderstanding. He encouraged this view by supplying his own interpretation of the play long before it was written. The following extract from his Shakespeare Speech implied a debunking, a denunciation of Brecht which was not borne out by the play itself:

In meinem Stück weigert sich der Chef des Theaters nicht rundheraus, jenen Text zu schreiben, den die Arbeiter sich von ihm erhoffen. Er will ihn aufsetzen, sobald ihm die Maurer und die Zimmerleute demonstriert haben, wie man sich... auf der Stalin-Allee verhalten hat; ihm kommt es darauf an, aus der Aktualität Nutzen zu ziehen für seine Coriolan-Inszenierung, für

seinen Plebejeraufstand. Die Bauarbeiter sprechen von Ulbricht und Grotewohl; er spricht von den Volkstribunen Sicinius und Brutus. Die Arbeiter erläutern die Normenerhöhung; er betont, welche Rolle sizilianische Getreidelieferungen für Rom gespielt haben. Die Arbeiter zitieren ihn; er zitiert Shakespeare. Die Arbeiter berufen sich auf Marx; er beruft sich auf Livius. Die Arbeiter wollen ihn für den Aufstand gewinnen; er benutzt die Arbeiter für die Inszenierung des Plebejeraufstandes. Die Arbeiter sind unschlüssig und wissen nicht, wie sie sich weiterhin verhalten sollen; er, der Chef des Theaters, ist sich seiner Tendenz gewiß; bei ihm siegen die Plebejer, während auf der Bühne des Theaterchefs, die den Aufstand der Bauarbeiter spiegelt, der Arbeiteraufstand zusammenbricht.

In der Historie...und auf meinem Theater lassen sowjetische Panzer den Aufstand zusammenbrechen. Während die Arbeiter des Theaterstückes den Einsatz der Panzer als Fatum werten, dem sie nicht oder allenfalls mit Steinen begegnen können, hält der Chef des Theaters einen Stegreifvortrag über das Thema, ob und wie sich Panzer auf der Bühnen verwenden lassen; was immer passiert, alles wird ihm zur Szene; Parolen, Sprechchöre...alles wird ihm zur ästhetischen Frage: eine ungetrübte Theaternatur. Der Spaß an der Tragödie. Coriolanus und Coriolan. Zwei Volkstribunen und zwei Assistenten des Berliner Ensembles. Das Schicksal blindlings und die Tendenz gesteuert. Getreidepreise und Normenerhöhung. Bauarbeiter- und Plebejeraufstände. Ein öffentlicher Platz zu Rom und der Sitz der Regierung Ecke Leipziger Straße. Livius, Plutarch und die Sendeprotokolle des RIAS. Die Geschichte und ihre Bearbeitung. Das geistige Eigentum und seine Besitzer. Der nationale Feiertag und das Shakespearejahr:

dieses Stück will geschrieben werden.<sup>4</sup>

Sentences like

Ihm kommt es darauf an, aus der Aktualität Nutzen zu ziehen,

or

was immer passiert, alles wird ihm zur Szene;

and finally,

alles wird ihm zur ästhetischen Frage: eine ungetrübte Theater- natur

they all tend in the same direction: a moral indictment of the Chef.

Judging by the Shakespeare Speech, the solution to the Chef's dilemma is suspiciously simple: had the Chef not been such an egocentric aesthete, obsessed with the perfection of his art, had he really been the revolutionary he had pledged himself to be, there would have been no conflict: the Chef would have supported the workers without hesitation and his manifesto might have turned the failure of the uprising into a success; perhaps it might even have kept the Soviet tanks at bay. This, one would think, was the implication of the Shakespeare Speech.

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4) Günter Grass: Die Plebejer proben den Aufstand, Fischer Bücherei Nr.910, Frankfurt 1968, p.124 (to be subsequently referred to as PL)

As Baumgart points out, such a view of politics and history would reveal an unbelievable naïveté on the part of Grass:

Wollte Grass im Ernst heimkehren  
zu den Theaterhelden und -illusionen  
vor Dantons Tod, sich treuherziger  
stellen, als es selbst Grillparzer  
war, von Ibsen und allen kommenden  
ganz zu schweigen?<sup>5</sup>

Baumgart answers his own question in the affirmative, but before coming to his conclusion, he draws parallels between Hochhuth's Stellvertreter and Grass's Plebejer and points to similarities in the writers' respective attitude to history. Both Grass and Hochhuth seem to believe that it is in the power of an individual to influence and even alter the course of history. However, the difference is evident: there are strong grounds for believing that a word from the Pope could have saved many lives, a conjecture which hardly applies to the case of Brecht.

All that remains, according to Baumgart, is

ein blankes Häuflein Idealismus,  
die enttäuschte Hoffnung offenbar,  
dieser erfundene Brecht hätte doch  
eine wie immer wirkungslose, so  
immerhin mutige Haltung zeigen,  
einen Tag lang moralisches l'art  
pour l'art demonstrieren sollen.<sup>6</sup>

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5) Reinhard Baumgart: 'Plebejer-Spätlese' in Von Buch zu Buch. Günter Grass in der Kritik, herausgegeben von Gert Loschütz, Neuwied 1968, p.152

6) ibid. p.152

What Baumgart dismisses as 'moralisches' l'art pour l'art, namely taking on responsibility as a potential maker of history in the full knowledge of one's own ineffectualness, would have been the height of moral commitment within Grass's frame of reference. To Grass, 'moralisches' l'art pour l'art is preaching revolution as a form of art, but not practising it as a way of life. The revolutionary artist (e.g. the Chef) who concentrates on his art at the expense of the welfare of the workers is guilty of treason.

The conclusion one is to draw from the Shakespeare Speech is that the artist has to make a straightforward choice between his art and active politics, as if art stood inevitably in the way of politics, as if the two disciplines were, by definition, irreconcilable. This is also the clear-cut message from Grass's Princeton Speech. And yet, within Grass's work this message is challenged. The drummer Oskar, and even more so the scarecrow-builder Amsel, had shown to what extent art was able to fulfil a revelatory function in the Sartrean sense<sup>7</sup> and therefore manifest itself as an important form of protest.

From Die Blechtrommel onwards, there has been a subtle

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7) 'L'action par dévoilement' QLL p.29

Die Arbeiter sind un schlüssig,  
 der Chef ist sich seiner Tendenz gewiß.

That statement is a complete misrepresentation of the Chef's position. The fact that the play is infinitely more complex and differentiated than the critic Grass anticipated in his speech is entirely to the credit of the writer and his intellectual integrity. As a consequence of the speech, which preceded the play by two years, Die Plebejer has consistently been misunderstood as an invective against Brecht. This already widely spread misconception has now been consecrated by the fact that the play is generally published in conjunction with the Shakespeare Speech. The polemical interpretation of the play therefore rests mainly on the Speech.

The other interpretation as a dialectical one. Grass's retrospective comments, after the play had actually been performed, have far more bearing on the play, than the speech that was specially designed for it two years before its birth. Grass must have changed his mind in these two intervening years. Although initially his position towards Brecht might have been one of unequivocal disapproval, the character of the Chef must have asserted its independence, while the play was being written, a process to which Grass



himself refers. The result is an open-ended assessment, one which makes the Chef emotionally guilty, but absolves him intellectually. As Völker Klotz puts it:

Er hatte recht und unrecht.<sup>9</sup>

In that same interview, in which Grass advocated a 'third way', he denied ever having intended to write an anti-Brecht play.

Man hat - so meine ich - zu Unrecht von mir ein Anti-Brecht Stück erwartet. Diese Anti-Haltung ist - ganz gleich, ob es sich nun um Brecht handelt oder wen auch immer - für mich gar keine kritische Kategorie, schon gar keine theatralische. Und die Stilbezeichnung der 'Plebejer' heißt ja nicht 'Ein Anti-Stück', sondern 'Ein deutsches Trauerspiel'.<sup>10</sup>

The juxtaposition of 'Anti-Stück' and 'deutsches Trauerspiel' is not a logical one. The description of Die Plebejer as a German tragedy is not meant as a literary classification, but simply as an expression of regret. The play deplores, not primarily, as is commonly believed, the failure of the uprising, but what Ide and Grass would term

die ideologische Verantheit im Entweder-Oder-Denken.<sup>11</sup>

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9) Völker Klotz: 'Ein deutsches Trauerspiel' in Gert Loschütz: op.cit., p.133

10) Christ und Welt, loc.cit.,

11) Heinz Ide: 'Die Geschichte und ihre Dramatiker' in Beihefte zum Jahrbuch der schlesischen Friedrich Wilhelms Universität zu Breslau, Bd.VII, 1967,p.143

of both East and West. To remain within the framework of the play, it is the existence of the Coriolanus-mentality which is at the root of the German tragedy; what it actually represents will become clear later.

In the play Grass questions his own conception of the uprising, as he explains in the following quotation:

Ich stelle...meine eigene Vorstellung vom 17. Juni mit in Frage. Ich glaube, das tut jeder Autor, wenn er arbeitet. Ich muß mich ja auch während des Schreibprozesses revidieren lassen von dem einen Arbeiter oder von dem Chef. Die Figuren machen sich selbstständig, sie fangen an zu agieren, sie fordern ihr Recht.<sup>12</sup>

Grass's tentativeness here stands in sharp contrast to his harsh judgments in the Shakespeare Speech. Just as the pros and cons are weighed up in the case of the Chef, blame is evenly distributed between the West's denial of moral support to the East German workers and the use of force against the uprising by the Soviet Union. In the face of such double failure, Grass sees a way out in advocating the already mentioned third way. Here he elaborates what he means, whilst using the occasion to attack his favourite scapegoat Peter Weiss, and the latter's Parteilichkeit:

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12) Christ und Welt loc.cit.

Und wenn mein Kollege Weiss von Schweden aus ziemlich laut verkündet, es gäbe ihn nicht, den dritten Weg - dann muß an diesem dritten Weg etwas dran sein. Ich sehe ihn jetzt nicht so sehr als politische Richtung, mehr als Denkvorgang, als - nennen wir es altmodisch - liberales Forum: daß man sich frei hält von Parteiungen und festgefahrenen Fronten.<sup>13</sup>

In order to prove that he has always rejected all 'Entweder-Oder-Denken' he quotes his two 'Feldgendarmen' from Die Blechtrommel in search of Koljaiczek.

'Feldgendarmen kennen immer nur zwei Möglichkeiten.' Die dritte, wo nun Koljaiczek steckt, nehmen sie nicht wahr.<sup>14</sup>

What has been stylised into a 'Denkvorgang' above is in fact nothing but a political preference, as a more precise definition of the concept reveals:

Ich kann da gar nichts anderes sagen, als daß ich bei den Sozialdemokraten eine Menge Ansätze sehe, ...diese dritte Position wahrzunehmen.<sup>15</sup>

While Grass's Shakespeare Speech was misleadingly simple, his arguments after the publication of the play are fraught with contradictions. Grass's contempt for what he calls Weiss's 'Alternativdenken' and 'Parteilichkeit' is a case in point. His aspersions against

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12) Christ und Welt, loc.cit.

13) ibid.

14) ibid.

Weiss would shed a curiously sympathetic light on the Chef, who, in the play, does not seem to take sides. In fact, the Chef also chooses a 'third way'; like Grass himself, he is sitting between two stools. He will not identify himself with the workers, nor will he allow himself to be turned into a spokesman of the regime. The play, therefore, ought to be a eulogy on Brecht rather than a condemnation of him.

But Die Plebejer is neither. It states the problem, that is, the moral danger in which any intellectual might find himself. To a certain degree one ought to abstract from the individual Brecht, who, though enhancing the interest of the reader, might block his insight into the more general implications of the play. As Klotz puts it:

Keine Privatperson steht in Frage...  
sondern ein brisanter Sachverhalt:  
die Tragödie der Theorie.<sup>16</sup>

In Die Plebejer Grass focuses on the paradox of the committed artist, who runs the danger of taking his ideas for reality. Worse, he might consciously put his ideas before reality; worst of all, he might force reality into the mould of his ideas. The reader is already familiar with this preoccupation of

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16) Volker Klotz: op.cit.p.133

Grass from Hundejahre. The purpose of the Heidegger travesty was to demonstrate the gulf between theory and practice (e.g. Heidegger's jargon and the pile of bones). Only the situation of the Chef is more serious, because there is more at stake in his case; the practical influence of the Chef is potentially greater than that of Matern, for instance. Hence, the fact that the Chef does not grasp his chance might not only change the situation for the worse, but it also reflects on the sincerity of his convictions. In Ronald Bryden's view the play deals solely with the following discrepancy:

Grass clearly means to attack the puritan aloofness of left-wing intellectuals who would rather plan ideal models of revolution than soil their hands with actual political means; who enact mini-dramas of symbolic revolt, but dismiss the masses as brainwashed and alienated.<sup>17</sup>

In the same way that Heidegger's jargon blinded the youngsters in Hundejahre to the atrocities of the Stutthof concentration camp, the Chef's concept of art seems to function as a barrier between him and the realities of the 17 June. To the Chef, revolution is, as Lenin had put it, an art, and the shapelessness of the workers' uprising does not correspond to his

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17) Ronald Bryden: 'Germany's tragedy', The Observer Review, 26 July 1970.

ideal notion. But this is only one side of the story.

The fact which should not be overlooked is that the Chef himself undergoes an evolution. Initially, he forces all his experiences, including the invasion of the workers on to the stage, into what seems to be an aesthetic concept; not out of callousness, but through his conviction that the workers will learn from his production of Coriolan how to go about their revolution. The Chef's response is formulated in one of Brecht's own reflections Über das Anfertigen von Bildnissen:

(Der Beobachter) kann Verhaltensarten einfügen, die der andere selber gar nicht fände, diese zugeschobenen Verhaltensarten bleiben aber keine Illusion des Beobachters; sie werden zu Wirklichkeiten; Das Bildnis ist produktiv geworden, es kann den Abgebildeten verändern, es enthält (ausführbare) Vorschläge.<sup>18</sup>

But to Grass, the Chef's justification of his reflective attitude to the spontaneous uprising, which constitutes the first part of the play, is not acceptable. Hence the second part of the play demonstrates that the Chef's belief in the changeability of reality through 'Bildnisse' is a delusion in the short term,

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18) Bertolt Brecht: Gesammelte Werke, Frankfurt a.M. 1967, volume 20, p.170

although necessary in the long term. The short term requires work and self-analysis from the makers of the 'Bildnisse'. At the end of the play the Chef himself comes to this conclusion. At the beginning, however, he is still working on the basis that he has to train the builders. When they invade the stage, he subjects them to a stringent enquiry. The Chef's experience of the Spartakus uprising has made him very sceptical; he is determined to avoid the diletantism that spoiled the 1918 revolution. Before the actual appearance of the East German workers, the Chef decides on the following course of action:

Also: Lehrstück machen. Publikum klüger machen! Hier! Mit geschulten Volkstribunen den Plebejern zeigen: Wie macht man Revolution, wie macht man keine.<sup>19</sup>

And halfway through the play:

Indem wir aufzeigen, was nicht sein darf, wird deutlich, was die Revolution fordert.<sup>20</sup>

From the outset, he disbelieves the reports of his cast about the revolt. The Chef deflates the enthusiasm of Volumnia, who wants him to stop the rehearsal. He deprecates the uprising as 'laienhaft', or describes it as an 'ungeprobte Zappelei' and resolves:

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19) PL p.17

20) PL p.47

Ich werd sie lehren, klassisch  
Schlingen knüpfen.<sup>21</sup>

Throughout, he discards the spontaneousness of the rebellion as being synonymous with ineffectualness, holding it up against his 'classical', i.e. effective and perfect concept of revolution.

His disbelief is not shaken by the appearance of the workers themselves. Grass's remark in his Shakespeare Speech

er, der Chef, ist sich seiner Tendenz  
gewiß

is certainly applicable to this part of the play, but only to this part. At that stage he still clings to the conviction that the workers are mere amateurs and that their revolution is therefore doomed to failure. He has decided to educate them, thus putting them on the same level as Shakespeare's Plebeians, who are equally 'awaiting' the Chef's training. No matter what the builders say, the Chef's mind is made up. At first his mistrust of the workers seems unwarranted, and his detachment could be mistaken for sheer arrogance. He does not even attempt to disguise the gulf that exists between him and the workers. When they remind him that he is supposed to write a manifesto for them, he replies:

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21) PL p.21



Gewiß schreibe ich für euch;...  
 nur verlernt ihr das Lesen schon  
 in der Schule<sup>22</sup>

thus exhibiting a kind of haughtiness worthy of  
 Coriolanus.

The ironic tension throughout the play arises because  
 Grass compresses two perspectives in one and the same  
 dialogue. The Chef's, that is Brecht's beliefs, are  
 worded in such a way that they convey Grass's com-  
 mentary on Brecht's views at the same time. Whereas  
 the Chef is intent on showing the hopelessness of the  
 revolutionary enterprise in reality, and is thereby  
 justifying his theatre as an essential instrument of  
 political education, Grass wants to show the irrele-  
 vance of Brecht's theatre to the uprising on 17 June,  
 and contrast it with the realism of the builders.

This perpetual tug of war between theory and prac-  
 tice is actually formulated by the Chef himself, when  
 he says rather pointedly:

Wissen möchte ich, wer am Ende die  
 besseren Noten nach Hause trägt:  
 die Natur oder mein Theater!<sup>23</sup>

In concrete terms, the tension is externalised by the  
 inter-relation of various historical levels: the  
 Roman uprising and the East Berlin one. The Chef

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22) PL p.28

23) PL p.26

acts on his motto

mit geschulten Volkstribunen den  
Plebejern zeigen! Wie macht man  
eine Revolution, wie macht man  
keine.<sup>24</sup>

But Grass turns Brecht's intention into its opposite.  
His Chef uses the workers only to improve his fic-  
titious Roman Plebeians.

Or so it seems. For up to the test of the Menenius  
fable, the workers make the Chef look a second-rate  
sadist. It is only after they have fallen into the  
trap of the fable, that their own credibility is  
seriously impaired, and the Chef's misgivings prove  
to have been founded. His parable about the tiger  
(which stands for reality) limping sadly behind the  
theoretician (the Chef) -

Fortan folgte der Tiger dem Theo-  
retiker und schämte sich mehr und  
mehr seiner Unwissenheit.<sup>25</sup>

- which looked outrageously smug before, is later  
borne out by the workers' unquestioning acceptance  
of the natural hierarchy of men, as proclaimed in  
Erwin's version of Menenius's 'Bauch und Gliederstory'.  
Like the revolutionary consciousness of the Roman  
Plebeians, that of the East German workers is too  
undeveloped to stand up to Menenius's ideological

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24) PL p.17

25) PL p.36

brainwashing.

The tragedy is that the Chef had been right all along. What previously looked like arrogance is now revealed as remarkable foresight. But what this foresight unveils is nothing to rejoice about. It turns out to be tragic for the uprising, tragic for the workers, tragic for the Chef himself, tragic even for his art. But, tragic though it may be, the events legitimise the Chef's initial comportment. It is a Pyrrhic victory for him. In fact, nobody wins, everything ends in failure, the rehearsal included. And yet, this failure itself is productive. Far from indulging in self-righteousness, the Chef is stirred into a reappraisal of his own position.

The reversal of the situation between the builders and the Chef also applies to the ensemble, who, with the exception of Erwin, had all distanced themselves from the Chef at the beginning of the uprising. Volumnia, in particular, had insisted on insulting him, which had made her look a heroine. But when the Russian tanks take over, she is the first to turn round, pleading fervently for the Chef's signature to Kosanke's manifesto, sealing the GDR's suppression of the uprising. Volumnia's immediate volte-face reveals her previous sympathy for the uprising as opportunism,

and the Chef's seeming indecisiveness as strength of character.

Once again, the Chef stands alone, but unlike Coriolan, for the right reasons:

Nein. Wieviele Wandlungen traust Du mir zu?! Zuerst sollte ich euch den Helden mimen; als es sich mir verbot, auf die Straße zu gehen, hielt man mich für eine treffliche Coriolan-Besetzung. Und wie jener den Aufidius, soll ich jetzt Kosanke umarmen. Man bietet mir Rollen an. Allzu leicht spielbare. - Dá! Laßt ihn unterschreiben! (schüttelt die Coriolan-Puppe)<sup>26</sup>

Experience of reality has taught him a lesson. Instead of the artist transforming reality, reality has transformed the artist, instead of the Chef transforming the play, Coriolan has transformed the Chef.

On an abstract level, the crucial battle between theory and practice is formulated in Brecht's famous question with which the play opens:

Warum ändern wir Shakespeare?<sup>27</sup>

to which Litthenner glibly replies:

Der Chef sagt, weil wir ihn ändern können.<sup>28</sup>

How different this sounds from the Chef's insight

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26) PL p.94

27) PL p.11

28) PL p.11

which concludes the play:

...daß wir Shakespeare nicht ändern  
können, solange wir uns nicht ändern.<sup>29</sup>

These questions and answers frame the play. They contain the whole mental process the Chef has undergone. The first answer, 'weil wir ihn ändern können', is that of a self-assured Marxist whose ideas have not been put to the test of reality. His intellectual system is intact, because as yet unchallenged by a real-life situation. 'We can change Shakespeare' is another way of saying 'We can change Shakespeare's hierarchical society into an egalitarian one.'

Applied to Coriolanus, it means to abandon Shakespeare's concept of a gigantic hero and represent him as a war specialist whose excessive pride prevents him from responding to the needs of a historical situation. Incidentally, Brecht, unlike Grass, is convinced that Shakespeare himself would also have represented the class struggle between the Plebeians and the Patricians had he lived four hundred years later:

Ich glaube nicht, daß die neue  
Fragestellung Shakespeare davon  
abgehalten hätte, einen Coriolan  
zu schreiben. Ich glaube, er  
hätte ungefähr in der Weise, wie  
wir es taten, dem Geist der Zeit

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29) PL p.94

Rechnung getragen...<sup>30</sup>

Grass's Brecht, however, i.e. the Chef, radically modifies his previous belief in the possibility of social change, when he finally states:

daß wir...den Shakespeare nicht  
ändern können, solange wir uns  
nicht ändern.<sup>31</sup>

This implies a total reappraisal of his intellectual position, sparked off by a personal sense of betrayal. No wonder that this reappraisal also extends to the viability of his art. The Chef sets out with the idea that he was going to transform Coriolanus, instead of which he finds that Coriolanus has transformed him. It is not the figure of Coriolanus which proves to be a stumbling block; it is the Chef's own feelings for this gigantic figure, a strange love-hate relationship, that stands in the Chef's way:

Von nun an stehen wir uns im Wege...  
- Und wir wollten ihn abtragen, den  
Koloß Coriolan! Wir, selber kolossal  
und des Abbruchs würdig.<sup>32</sup>

Contrary to the Chef's previous belief, the rehearsal of the uprising and the educational value of the theatre is to be doubted from now on:

Archiviert die Regiebücher. Ein-  
motten soll man die Plebejerlumpen.

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30) Bertolt Brecht: Gesammelte Werke, volume 17, p.1253

31) PL p.94 (my underlining)

32) PL p.94

Roms Kulissen ins Arsenal.<sup>33</sup>

On the other hand, it was only the experience of the theatre which instigated such an insight in the first place, so that Erwin's comment

Den Anteil des Theaters an der Mensch-  
werdung der Affen kennt jeder Humanist.<sup>34</sup>

is equally valid. We are faced with another paradox: just as the failure of the uprising demonstrated its vital necessity, the failure of the rehearsal as a schooling for revolutionaries can only be tested on the stage itself. The Chef's insight results directly from the failure of the revolution. He says:

Als die Maurer vom Sieg plapperten,  
waren sie mir lächerlich. Erst ihre  
Niederlage überzeugte mich...<sup>35</sup>

The fundamental paradox is that only the collapse of the workers' rebellion can convince the Chef of its necessity.

The reader is already familiar with Shakespeare's Coriolanus and Brecht's Coriolan (see chapter two, pp.67-71). How is the character represented in Die Plebejer and what is his relationship to the Chef?

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33) PL p.94

34) PL p.95

35) PL p.94

Unlike the Plebeians, he is not impersonated by an actor. He only exists and that in itself is symbolic, as a 'Schneiderpuppe', a lifeless and yet powerful figure which dominates and overshadows the stage by its mere presence. His immobility operates as a foil to all the characters, the Chef, the plebeians and the builders from the Stalin-Allee - they all define their identity in opposition to him. The two interpretations, Shakespeare's and Brecht's, with which the play opens, interact all the time: Coriolanus as 'ein Berg, ein Koloß, nicht abzutragen',<sup>36</sup> and:

ein Gigant, schicksalsgetrieben,<sup>37</sup> on the one hand; and on the other hand, Coriolan as 'Kriegsspezialist'<sup>38</sup>, 'Handwerker der Schlacht'<sup>39</sup>. Both versions have their corollaries in the positions taken by the plebeians. On the one hand, they are 'frischgewählte Esel', 'beleidigte Privatiers',<sup>40</sup> cowardly warriors and a fickle mob, easily fobbed off by Menenius's fable; on the other hand, there is the determined class-conscious united front of the revolutionaries leading the oppressed to stand up to

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36) PL p.11

37) PL p.11

38) PL p.11

39) PL p.13

40) PL p.40



their oppressors. Paradoxically, both in Shakespeare's and in Brecht's play, Coriolanus falls; the oppressed, i.e. the plebeians are victorious, whilst on the most significant level, that is the real-life level, the 17 June, the workers lose their battle, and Coriolanus is victorious.<sup>41</sup>

Thus the concept of Coriolanus and the plebeians is made up of three layers: the Shakespearean view of the Roman level, the Brechtian adaptation of it, and thirdly the Grass level, which is a contemporary synthesis of the other two. The Chef hesitates between two versions of Coriolanus. Whilst his rational self vigorously rejects such a gigantic stature, his emotional self finds it difficult to resist its lure until he comes to the conclusion that he himself has those elements of Coriolanus's character in him which he is trying to destroy. The East Berlin workers, too, exhibit some characteristics both of the despicable plebeians of Shakespeare and of Brecht's streamlined revolutionaries. Both, the Chef and the plebeians, vacillate between two extremes, until the decision is taken out of their hands through the invasion of the Soviet tanks.

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41) See the introduction to Shakespeare's Coriolanus, edited by G.R. Hibbard, Penguin 1967.

Although Grass's main concern is to show up the differences between his and Brecht's conception of Coriolanus (cf. Shakespeare Speech), their assessment of the character is remarkably similar - only their conclusions differ. Both Grass and Brecht accept Shakespeare's view of the tragic figure, the incarnation of the solitary hero who has his opposite pole in the masses, so that the class conflict which Grass is so reluctant to acknowledge, is already <sup>versteckt</sup> latent in Shakespeare's Coriolanus as it was indeed in Plutarch's Life of Martius Coriolanus. But the difference between Shakespeare's and Brecht's conception is that the latter's perspective is determined by class war, whereas Shakespeare focuses on the personal conflict of the hero. In order to present the class battle as a fight between equals it was necessary for Brecht to make his Plebeians more dignified and to devalue Coriolanus. Thus Coriolanus's behaviour has social repercussions: his tragedy of pride takes place, after all, at the expense of the people. This is Brecht's view on the implications of Coriolanus's behaviour:

Es mag dabei bleiben, daß es sich für den Coriolanus lohnt, seinen Stolz so maßlos auszuleben, daß Tod und Untergang da nicht 'ins Gewicht fallen'. Aber schließlich bezahlt die Gesellschaft, bezahlt Rom mit; es kommt ebenfalls in die Nähe des Untergangs dadurch.<sup>42</sup>

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42) Bertolt Brecht: Gesammelte Werke, volume 17, p.1252

This is why the adaptation of the first scene, the discussion of which sets the tone for Grass's play, is so crucial.

Nur das Studium der Einheit der Widersprüche gestattet es etwa, die erste Szene des Coriolan richtig zu arrangieren, und sie ist die Grundlage des ganzen Stückes! Wie anders soll der Spielleiter darauf kommen, den Unterschied zwischen dem falschen ideologischen Versuch des Menenius Agrippa, eine Einheit aus Patriziern und Plebejern herzustellen und der wirklichen Herstellung dieser Einheit durch den Krieg deutlich zu machen?<sup>43</sup>

The apparent union of the patricians, whose spokesman is Menenius, with the plebeians is only a euphemism for the fear of a common enemy. It is strictly limited to self-interest on both sides and does not even last throughout the war against the Volsces. As soon as Coriolanus catches sight of the plebeians, he hurls gratuitous insults at them, which emphasises the fundamental clash between the two classes. For whatever Grass may say about Coriolanus's classlessness, his pathological aversion to the plebs places him unambiguously in the camp of the patricians.

In fact there is more common ground between Brecht's and Grass's concept of Coriolanus than Grass would have us believe. Both are agreed on the psychological

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43) Bertolt Brecht: Gesammelte Werke, volume 17, p.1253

level: Grass speaks of Coriolanus's 'brutale Eindeutigkeit'<sup>44</sup> and Brecht comments:

Seine Wandlung vom römischsten der Römer zu ihrem größten Feind geschieht gerade deshalb, weil er der gleiche bleibt.<sup>45</sup>

What separates Grass from Brecht is the evaluation of Coriolanus's giganticness, a synonym, in Grass's case, for ruthless self-realisation. Grass says about Coriolanus's 'Eindeutigkeit':

Keine Partei kann ihn uminterpretieren.<sup>46</sup>

because, he argues,

Coriolan steht...zwischen beiden Klassen.<sup>47</sup>

Brecht does not accept such a subjective judgment. He maintains that the play treats an objective social problem, namely that of the class conflict. Even if Brecht's claim to objectivity were not justified - his historical source Plutarch suggests that it is - his adaptation would nevertheless be acceptable. He has the same right to interpret history as Shakespeare and Grass have. Grass's rejection of Brecht's Coriolan as a falsification of Shakespeare's Coriolanus is unconvincing. This makes one suspect, as has already

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44) See the Shakespeare Speech, p.106

45) Bertolt Brecht: Gesammelte Werke, volume 16, p.886

46) Shakespeare Speech, p.106

47) ibid, p.107

been suggested in a previous discussion of the Shakespeare-Speech (see chapter two, p.71), that Grass's aesthetic judgment is marred by political prejudice.

Thus Coriolanus and Coriolan do not differ in essence, but in the author's evaluation of their social functions. As Ide puts it:

Zum Thema der Coriolan-Gestalt bei Shakespeare, Brecht und Grass ergab sich, daß sie im Kern die gleiche bleibt, insofern die Problematik des Selbstseins bei allen drei Dramatikern auf dem Spiel steht, doch jeweils nicht nur verändert, sondern differenziert und weitergeführt wird, und zwar bei Grass in der Differenzierung noch erheblich über Brecht hinaus vorgetrieben wird.<sup>48</sup>

In Grass's version, the Chef is a composite of Shakespeare's and Brecht's figure, and so is his view of the East Berlin plebs, the builders of the 17 June. What Grass says about Coriolanus - 'er steht zwischen beiden Klassen' - is far more applicable to the main protagonist of Die Plebejer, the Chef, than it is to Coriolanus. The Chef really does sit between two stools, neither identifying himself with the workers (except at a very late stage), nor pledging his wholehearted support to the East German regime. Both the 'Maurer', the most militant of the workers, and Kosanke leave the stage empty-handed. The Chef becomes an

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48) Heinz Ide: loc.cit, p.137

outsider by necessity, not by choice. According to Heinz Ide, that makes him a tragic hero,

dem Grass nicht aus Zaghafteit Brechts Namen nicht gibt, sondern weil er als Kunstfigur Bert Brecht nicht sein kann, andererseits nur als mit Brecht nicht zu identifizierende Kunstfigur die Brecht-Existenz zu repräsentieren vermag. Diese Existenz wird tragisch verstanden und in eine...Beziehung zu Coriolan gebracht, dessen Problematik der Chef auf die Bühne zu bringen im Begriff ist. Diese Bühne aber ist nicht nur einfach Bühne,...sondern...sie hat entscheidende gesellschaftliche Funktion.<sup>49</sup>

The figure of the Chef is inextricably linked with his theatre, and the workers' defeat on the stage has its corollary in the personal and social tragedy of the Chef. Grass's play presents the very dual tragedy that Brecht's Coriolan demanded:

(Wir) kommen bei Grass wie bei Brecht 'in den Genuß des Vergnügens an der Tragödie des Volkes' sowie des Helden, haben den Spaß, 'ein Stück durchleuchteter Geschichte zu behandeln. Und Dialektik zu erleben.' Grass konnte dieses Stück nur darum schreiben, weil er dialektisch denkt, und er ist ein so guter Dialektiker, daß er noch die Tragödie des Dialektikers schreiben konnte.<sup>50</sup>

For the position of the Chef is a dialectical one: he must live at a distance from society and can only

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49) Heinz Ide: loc.cit. p.135

50) ibid. p.135

fulfil his social role from that distance. He constitutes the intellectual link between Podulla's (i.e. Brecht's) demand for a substitutable Coriolan who is a mere war specialist, and Litthener's (i.e. Shakespeare's) claim for 'ein(en) Gigant(en), schicksalsgetrieben'. Grass accepts neither version entirely, his Chef is an extension of both:

Als Stückeschreiber und als Theatermann bewegt er sich auf der Nahtlinie zwischen den abzubauenen gegenpoligen Strebungen, die Coriolan ist. Einnehmen und halten kann er diese Position nur als der Denkende.<sup>51</sup>

When he does at last identify himself with the uprising, his enthusiasm is due to weakness. The same foresight that makes him anticipate the failure of the rebellion helps him also to anticipate the misrepresentation of his own behaviour by others:

So also wird die Schuld zubereitet: Man nehme: Unwissenheit und einen gestrichenen Löffel voll falsch betontem Bedürfnis nach Freiheit, rühre mein wissendes Zögern in dieses Eintopfgericht, und schon kommen sie, weisen auf mich, den Koch.<sup>52</sup>

How much easier it would be for him to give way to the feeling of togetherness:

Könnte ich mitschwimmen, Rom verlassen,

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51) Heinz Ide: loc.cit. p.138

52) PL p.66

mich bewegen, bewegt werden, falsch  
oder richtig betonen, schreien,  
außer mir, aber dabei sein.<sup>53</sup>

At one point, after the dramatic capturing of the flag from the Brandenburg Gate, he gives up the struggle, lets himself be carried away by the romantic revolutionary passion of the hairdresser, though fully realising that his impulse is leading him astray. The hairdresser

bläst Wünsche wach, die besser  
schlafen sollten.<sup>54</sup>

Ide explains in what way she is dangerous:

Die Friseurin repräsentiert vollkommen jenen Pol im Dasein des Chefs, der die gesellschaftslose, rauschhafte Selbstverwirklichung in der Selbstaufgabe will. Indem er diesem Sog des Elementaren, der Natur, unterliegt, sich losläßt, den Sprung tut, schwimmt, sich treiben läßt, wird er selbst kolossal, gigantisch, unabtragbar Coriolan. Das ist Coriolans Verrat, ~~der~~ ausschließliche Wille zu sich selbst, Vergessen des gesellschaftlichen Bezugspunktes, Aufgabe der Position des Denkenden, des Dialektikers.<sup>55</sup>

The East German workers have proved that they are not essentially different from the Roman plebeians, and therefore not ready for a revolution. Like them,

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53) PL p.66

54) PL p.82

55) Heinz Ide: loc.cit. p.141



they can easily be appeased by food and drink; like them, they become an easy prey to Menenius's fable. They ask the Chef to be their leader, but, except for his one lapse towards the end, the Chef consistently refuses, because the leader ought to come from their midst. They should learn to live without heroes. If he simply filled the gap, it would spare them the effort of rethinking their position, in order to base their revolt on a sounder foundation. There is no doubt that the Chef sympathises with the workers, as his final succumbing to the hairdresser's enthusiasm demonstrates. But in the workers' own interest and in the interest of the revolution, his job is to supply the intellectual foundation; the revolutionary practice ought to be theirs alone.

Even this last interpretation is not quite satisfactory. There is in fact no satisfactory solution. The Chef is guilty both ways, when he participates and when he withholds participation.

Das Erliegen des Chefs beweist die elementare Daseinswirklichkeit des in der Friseur Repräsentierten, beweist also aufs neue die Notwendigkeit der Position des Denkenden. Weil es eine elementare fordernde Wirklichkeit ist, ist aber Schuld vor ihr auch das Zurückgehen des Chefs auf die Position des Denkenden.<sup>56</sup>

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56) Heinz Ide: loc.cit. p.141

should never have been in this position.

Die Plebejer proben den Aufstand reveals a deep understanding of Brecht's conflict and considers that, given his premises, the Chef could not have acted differently. What the play does query, however, are those premises themselves. This is the point where we differ from Ide's interpretation, whose analysis suggests an undisturbed harmony between Grass and the Chef. Although Grass is full of sympathetic insight into the Chef's difficulties, his distancing irony implies that these difficulties could have been avoided. Had there been a strict demarcation line between art and practical politics from the beginning, in other words, had the Chef never fostered the illusion that the two areas could be substituted for one another, there would have been no deadlock. Nor would the Chef's position lay itself open to criticism from both the artistic and the political angle: the artist will accuse him of tendentiousness (see Grass's Shakespeare Speech), the political activist denounces him as an aesthete (see Die Plebejer).

But this is too simplistic. There is ambivalence, because Grass speaks both as an outsider to the problem and as an insider, as one who partakes in it in his writing, and one who presumes to have solved it

in his personal life. As a practitioner of committed literature, he must, like Brecht/Chef, believe in the educational function of art, otherwise this play would never have seen the light of day. As a political activist, he cannot but disapprove of the Chef's aloofness. Die Plebejer proben den Aufstand can be described as a literary equivalent of Grass's polemical Princeton Speech. In the latter he claims to have solved the problem by dividing himself into a writer and a political activist. In the play he shows both the desirability of such a categorical division, and its practical impossibility.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

ÖRTLICH BETÄUBT

Die Plebejer represented a turning point in Grass's literary development, in as far as its didactic intentions were immediately apparent and no longer encapsulated in the politically loaded symbols and allegories which characterised the three previous novels. Örtlich betäubt begins where Die Plebejer left off, faintly echoing structure, images and themes of the three previous novels.

Like them, örtlich betäubt has a tripartite structure; the first and the last part describing different stages in Starusch's dental treatment, and the middle part concentrating on Scherbaum's plan of burning the dog. Starusch, like Oskar, is a first person narrator; but whereas Oskar's account is chronological, Starusch moves arbitrarily between past, present and future. There are already different levels of time intermingled in Die Plebejer. The telescoping of different levels in both this play and örtlich betäubt is no doubt intended to emphasise the historical dimension underlying Grass's political thought as expressed in his literary work. Far from seeing history as the supercession of one set of events by others, Grass

believes in constant interaction between past, present and future, none of which ought to be considered in isolation.

Starusch resembles Oskar in more than one way: he is, as it were, a mature contemporary version of him, an Oskar with an outsize conscience. But, when soliloquizing, he often takes leave of his conscience, indulging, just like the protagonist of Die Blechtrommel, in irresponsible fantasies of murders and other acts of violence. Like him, he projects versions of his personal life which fit his purpose at the time, so that the borderline between imagination and reality is often blurred. But unlike Oskar, his belief in reason saves him from enacting these excesses.

Another point of contact with Die Blechtrommel is Starusch's biography, his past as Störtebecker, the leader of anarchist youngsters called the 'Stäuberbande'. Starusch's idealisation of these unprincipled hooligans into self-styled resistance fighters does not only reflect on the inaccuracy of his memory, but also raises doubts as to his qualification to judge and guide the political education of the pupils entrusted to him. Furthermore, this retrospective moralisation has led to speculations whether this new gloss cannot be read as internal evidence of

Grass's repudiation of his own literary past.

Reminiscent of Hundejahre are occasional occurrences of 'Heideggerianisms'<sup>1</sup> and the reappearance of familiar metaphors: teeth and dogs. Amsel's teeth were knocked out in a fit of rage by his Nazi bloodbrother Matern. In örtlich betäubt teeth figure as objects to be attended to with the greatest care, because 'prevention is better than cure'. The contrast between the uses of this metaphor in Hundejahre and örtlich betäubt conveys already the fundamental difference in outlook. Matern's act was violent, born of frustration; it was a purely destructive act. Starusch's and Scherbaum's dental treatments are measures taken to prevent destruction, they are constructive. Hundejahre was about the immorality of 'Radikalkuren' (Walter Matern), örtlich betäubt dwells on the bitter-sweet victories of evolutionary cures. The dog is the other metaphor linking up with Hundejahre; its different use is again symptomatic of Grass's transformation. In Hundejahre there is Matern's senseless killing of Harras. In örtlich betäubt Scherbaum's projected burning of his dog is conceived of as an act of 'demonstrative Aufklärung'. But even this version of violence is finally condemned.

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1) örtlich betäubt, Neuwied 1969, to be subsequently referred to as öb. Heideggerianisms, e.g. p. 137: 'an sich liberale und nur uneigentlich radikale Studienrat', p. 254: 'da hinten geht es weiter, da ist noch was, was denn? das Eigentliche, na das. Zwischen Stehenden, Hockenden, schiebend...suchend Erwartung. (Auf was? - Na auf das)'

However, more striking than certain parallels of örtlich betäubt with Grass's previous work, are its new features. Only since the appearance of örtlich betäubt has the unity of Die Blechtrommel, Katz und Maus and Hundejahre become irrefutable, so much so that they seem to form a trilogy. They all draw on the Danzig world and the life of the petty bourgeoisie under the impact of National Socialism. According to Manfred Durzak<sup>2</sup>, örtlich betäubt is the

Korrelat eines völlig neuen, sich vom Sujet der anderen Romane grundsätzlich unterscheidenden Inhalts,

because it portrays 'contemporary reality' in a much more real sense than did the three previous novels.

The absolute contemporaneity of its subject matter is expressed both in its historical setting, as well as in the choice of characters. Instead of focusing on a single event, like that of the East Berlin uprising in Die Plebejer, it depicts the political mood of West Germany in the <sup>late</sup> 1960s, its student unrest and the reactions to the American involvement in Vietnam. Its main protagonist also lacks the sensationalism which characterised the Chef/Brecht figure. If one abstracted from the figure of Brecht, the conflict

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2) Manfred Durzak: 'Abschied von der Kleinbürgerwelt. Der neue Roman von Günter Grass.' in: Basis.Jahrbuch für deutsche Gegenwartsliteratur, herausgegeben von R. Grimm und J. Hermand, Frankfurt a.M. 1970, p. 228

delineated in Die Plebejer was that of the politically committed artist who claims to teach politics in his art, but fails to cope with political reality when confronted with it. The message of Die Plebejer was the paradox of the political writer, a paradox which could theoretically be solved by neatly separating art from politics.

Örtlich betäubt does not even attempt to do so; the point has already been made in Die Plebejer. Apart from a spurious mention of 'politisch engagierte Kunst', the whole problem of art as a factor in shaping political consciousness does not enter into the discussion. Grass's steadily increasing directness does not reveal itself only in the choice of his subject matter and the tone in which it is conveyed; just as indicative is the choice of the characters who populate this novel. The figure of the didactic artist (Chef/Brecht) from Die Plebejer has made way for the figure of the teacher tout court. And to make him as representative a teacher as possible, he teaches 'Deutsch und also auch Geschichte', the most portentous subjects in the education of adolescents.

Starusch represents a break with the traditional caricature of the teacher in German literature. As Manfred Durzak writes:



Man könnte sagen, daß Grass...die  
Figur des Lehrers äußerst bewußt  
umfunktioniert,<sup>3</sup>

and reminds us of caricatures like Heinrich Mann's Professor Unrat. But even within Grass's own work, Starusch breaks with his professional predecessors, most of whom were also satirised. The spinster Miss Spollenhauer, described by Oskar himself, as a 'vorgeschriebene Existenzkarikatur', Mallenbrandt and Klohse as exponents of National Socialist ideology and finally the pathetic figure of Brunies, well-meaning, but weak.

Starusch is Grass's first post-war teacher and, as such, fully aware of the responsibility his position demands. He himself laments:

Lehrer haben an andere Lehrer zu  
erinnern.<sup>4</sup>

His background marks him out from his antecedents; unlike Brunies, he is not the sentimental Eichendorff lover and sweet addict who has never known a life outside school. Starusch has seen the world. As a former engineer, he is a technocrat, as well as a humanist. He has come to the teaching profession because he was strongly motivated to communicate and

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3) Manfred Durzak: loc.cit., p.232

4) 8b p.171

share his experiences with the as yet innocent younger generation. Starusch conceives of his role as

der zur Erkenntnis Aufgerufene, der die Vergangenheit ebenso wenig abschütteln, wie gängige Rezepte für die Probleme der Gegenwart bieten kann. Die Ernsthaftigkeit seines Einsatzes, die Bereitschaft, seine eigene Haltung in Zweifel zu ziehen, sind also zentrale Kennzeichen seiner Erkenntnishaltung.<sup>5</sup>

He dominates the novel, as one whose powers of perception are more acute than those of the people surrounding him, not however, as one who has easy solutions to offer. His apparent indecisiveness, a character trait he shares with the Chef, is a direct outcome of his extreme susceptibility to the inherent contradictions of life.

The previous novels had been written from the perspective of the pupils, portrayed as victims of authoritarian school regimes. Örtlich betäubt is told from the perspective of the teacher, a perspective which is, above all, marked by its openness and lack of self-righteousness. There is nothing punitive in Starusch's attitude to his pupils. In fact, his ideal is to remove the barrier between teacher and pupil.

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5) Manfred Durzak: loc.cit. p.232

The school framework is a reflection of the conflict between the generations at large, a theme which runs through all Grass's novels, Die Blechtrommel and Hundejahre in particular. In both these novels the gap seemed impossible to bridge. Oskar came to the conclusion that Kurt's antagonism towards him was indispensable to the latter's independence. In Hundejahre this psychological conflict was exacerbated by the political background. Children suspect their parents of complicity with National Socialist atrocities, and the parents, for fear of rejection, hide their past from their offspring. The deadlock can be broken only by a mechanical device: the miracle spectacles. Örtlich betäubt proves that this gulf is not inevitable. As regards mutual respect and accessibility to reason, this novel is the most hopeful statement on the human condition. It is a statement all the more optimistic, as it is never oblivious of the seeming absurdity of all human endeavours.

In the face of such absurdity, the protagonists ask themselves whether their protest, either political or artistic, is valid. Belief in art as a means of political education proved a fallacy in Die Plebejer. Örtlich betäubt takes up the theme again. But it is dealt with in an off-hand manner, as if to indicate that the problem has already been settled elsewhere

and that it is only mentioned in this novel for the sake of completeness. The fundamental paradox, as in all his other works, is that Grass discusses these problems through the medium of literature.

When Starusch has come to the end of his tether in his attempts to direct Scherbaum's revolutionary zeal into non-violent channels, he tempts him, as a last resort, with the political rewards of protest songs:

'Also schreiben Sie, Scherbaum, schreiben Sie! Sie wissen wie ich, welche Kraft, welche politische Kraft dem lyrischen Wort innewohnen kann. Denken Sie an Tucholsky, Brecht und Celans Todesfuge. Immerhin hat das politische Chanson bei uns seit Wedekind Tradition. Deshalb sollte der Protestsong, besonders hier in Deutschland, neue Impulse bekommen.'<sup>6</sup>

But Scherbaum is wiser than his teacher. He has tried to write such songs before and knows that it does not work:

'Das ist doch zum Einlullen. Da glauben Sie doch selber nicht dran. Das bewegt doch nichts. Damit kann man, wenn's gut geht, Geld verdienen. Drückt doch nur auf die Tränendrüsen.'<sup>7</sup>

Besides, he abhors this mentality made up of 'Welt-schmerz plus Engagement', which Grass denounces elsewhere as 'Beschäftigungstherapie'.

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6) Öb pp. 220-21

7) Öb p. 221

The tone in which Starusch gives his advice is sufficient proof that he takes no serious interest in the matter. He is simply bidding for time and exploits an intrinsically important topic for this purpose. The quick dismissal of the problem reveals Grass's reluctance to give the issue theoretical status.

It is true that Starusch presses on:

'Sie sollten in dieser engagierten Richtung fortfahren,'

he pleads with Scherbaum. The teacher claims that their altercation in itself is sufficient evidence 'welch infragestellende Kraft dem engagierten Song gegeben sei'<sup>8</sup>.

But Scherbaum wants action, not words. He wants to obtain an immediate impact. Starusch admonishes him:

'Zumindest sollten Sie versuchen, die Welt in ihrer Vielgestalt und Widersprüchlichkeit zu verstehen.'<sup>9</sup>

Scherbaum's explosion at this stage lays bare the intellectual gulf that separates teacher and pupil:

'Ich will nicht verstehen...Weiß ich doch, daß sich alles erklären läßt...Alles ist zu erklären. Alles ist zu verstehen. Weil dieses, muß das. Einerseits schlimm, aber um Schlimmeres zu verhüten...'<sup>10</sup>

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8) Öb p.222

9) Öb p.224

10) Öb p.224

and he gives an example which holds up to ridicule Starusch's position:

'Napalm verhindert den Einsatz nuklearer Kampfmittel. Die Lokalisierung des Krieges ist ein Sieg der Vernunft. Mein Vater sagt: Gäbe es nicht die Atombombe und so weiter, wäre der dritte Weltkrieg schon längst. Recht hat er. Läßt sich beweisen. Wir sollten dankbar sein und Gedichte schreiben, die erst übermorgen wirken...Nein. Nichts wird bewegt. Menschen verbrennen jeden Tag langsam. Ich mach es. Ein Hund, das trifft sie.'<sup>11</sup>

Not surprisingly after Die Plebejer, protest in and through literature is dismissed as an aesthetic game, a pure exercise in rhetoric, which helps only those who indulge in it. No comment could illustrate this feeling of impotence underlying all committed literature better than Grass's own 'committed' poems (written at about the same time as the novel). This is the second half of In Ohnmacht gefallen:

Wir kauen Nägel und schreiben Proteste.  
Aber es gibt, so lesen wir,  
Schlimmeres als Napalm.  
Schnell protestieren wir gegen Schlimmeres.  
Unsere berechtigten Proteste, die wir  
jederzeit  
verfassen falten frankieren dürfen, schlagen  
zu Buch.  
Ohnmacht, an Gummifassaden erprobt.  
Ohnmacht legt Platten auf: ohnmächtige  
Songs.  
Ohne Macht mit Gitarre.-

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11) Öb pp.224-5

Aber feinmaschig und gelassen  
wirkt sich draußen die Macht aus.<sup>12</sup>

Much more biting are his comments in another poem called Irgendwas Machen, in which all forms of protest are unmasked as inconsequential gestures, as moral attitudinising:

Da können wir doch nicht zusehen,  
Wenn wir auch nichts verhindern,  
wir müssen uns deutlich machen.  
(Mach doch was, Mach doch was,  
Irgendwas, Mach doch was.)  
.....  
Ich spreche vom Protestgedicht  
und gegen das Protestgedicht,  
.....  
Ohnmächtig protestiere ich gegen ohnmächtige  
Proteste.<sup>13</sup>

In the next stanza he denounces the commercialisation of engaged poetry as an example of noble sentiments capitalising on the ills of the world. Grass's indignation reaches a climax when he reflects on those who mistake, worse still, misuse poems as a political weapon (c.f. the Chef in Die Plebejer) to further their own literary ambitions:

Ist das Gedicht eine Waffe?  
Manche, überarmiert, können kaum laufen.  
Sie müssen das Unbehagen an Zuständen  
als Vehikel benutzen:  
sie kommen ans Ziel, sie kommen ans Ziel:  
zuerst ins Feuilleton und dann in die Anthologie:  
Die Napalm-Metapher und ihre Abwandlungen

12) 'In Ohnmacht gefallen' from Grass's latest collection of poems Ausgefragt, in Gesammelte Gedichte, p.216

13) 'Irgendwas machen', in Gesammelte Gedichte, pp.216-7

im Protestgedicht der sechziger Jahre.  
Es handelt sich um Traktatgedichte.<sup>14</sup>

This derogatory description is meant as an insult to those colleagues already decried as 'red ivory tower aesthetes' in Über das Selbstverständliche<sup>15</sup>. The term 'Traktatgedicht' itself and its equation with 'Protestgedicht' confirms previous speculations that Grass uses the term Engagement where we would use Tendenz, the irony being that the very poem which holds the tradition of protest poems up to ridicule is itself a specimen of this genre.

One new aspect emerging more and more clearly is that Grass does not criticise these 'Protestgedichte' on artistic grounds, as he criticised Brecht's Coriolanus for instance<sup>16</sup>, but on the grounds of their political ineffectiveness. In fact, it is their very aestheticism which arouses Grass's anger, as if aestheticising misery was a way to stabilise it. Protest through literature is morally and politically suspect to him. The message from Die Plebejer is still alive in örtlich betäubt: political art and artistic politics are sworn enemies of Realpolitik.

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14) Gesammelte Gedichte, p.218

15) See the Princeton Speech.

16) See the Shakespeare Speech.



What solutions does Örtlich betäubt offer, the novel that discards the role of art altogether and concentrates exclusively on 'reality' itself, a reality crying out for change? How can this change be effected? Revolution versus evolution - the whole novel from the overall concept to the smallest detail is subjugated to this central theme. Structure, style, symbols and characters are all functional to it.

Örtlich betäubt presents two types of revolutionaries, one sympathetically, the other disdainfully. Scherbaum fits the first category, his girl friend Vero and their teacher Irmgard Seifert the second.

Irmgard Seifert is the most 'dangerous' of the three. A female version of Matern, she is one of those ideologists whom Grass abhors, a moral weakling, who has to believe in a 'Heilslehre' at all costs. Twenty years ago she believed in Hitler, now she believes in the socialist revolution. Politics to her is secularised religion; she <sup>invests?</sup> invests all her emotional energy into it. At the <sup>moment</sup> time of the Hitler regime she was seventeen years old (i.e. Scherbaum's age). Since then, she is obsessed by the memory of an act of fanaticism: she had denounced a labourer to the Nazi authorities, because he would not toe the party line. In fact, nothing had happened to him. It is not her remorse which is disturbing, but the hysterical way in

which she cultivates it. She clings to her guilt feelings and magnifies her failures. Starusch's criticism of her is one of his typical understatements:

Sie leidet zu gerne, zu leicht  
und zu laut,<sup>17</sup>

or elsewhere,

(sie wirbt) um ihren Untergang.<sup>18</sup>

Her remembrance of the past is like a ritual, it is more present to her than the present itself. She is incapable of cool political analysis.

What appeals to her is the political drama. Her dream is 'ein Zeichen setzen. Ein Beispiel geben.'<sup>19</sup> Seifert longs for purification, for redemption, but she is unable to redeem herself. Liberation can only be brought about by the younger generation, her pupils. As Kurz puts it:

Die Seifert 'glaubt' an die Jugend  
wie einst an den Führer.<sup>20</sup>

That is why she has a vested interest in Scherbaum's plan to burn the dog. She works herself into a frenzy about the pupil's project. Starusch comments:

17) Öb p.310

18) Öb p.182

19) Öb p.74

20) Paul K. Kurz: 'Das verunsicherte Wappentier. Zu Davor und örtlich betäubt von Günter Grass', p.94 in Über moderne Literatur III. Standorte und Deutungen. Frankfurt a.M., 1971

...Irmgard Seifert hatte Scherbaum für sich entdeckt. (Oder hatte sie sich in ihm entdeckt?) Einen richtigen Schmerzensmann werkelte sie aus ihm. Er sollte leisten, was sie, als Siebzehnjährige nicht geschafft hatte.<sup>21</sup>

When she first hears of the project, she is horrified and even considers denouncing him to the police, which earns her a parenthetical comment from Starusch:

(Irmgard Seifert hat es mit der Polizei. Muß ich jetzt sagen: immer noch?)<sup>22</sup>

Irmgard has learnt little from her past denunciation of the labourer, precisely because this shameful act has turned into a fixation. Like the fanatic Matern, she is as passionately a revolutionary Socialist now as she was a National Socialist then. Her letters, fateful evidence of her denunciation, have to be destroyed, burnt - another act of violence - to Irmgard the only means of redemption. Grass himself deeply mistrusts her:

Sie kann zur Mitläuferin werden,  
bei einer Protestbewegung - jederzeit.<sup>23</sup>

The 'Revolutionsfackel' Vero Lewand, contemporary of Scherbaum, seems to have no axe to grind. Never-

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21) Öb p.266

22) Öb p.192

23) 'Gespräch mit Günter Grass' in Theater Heute, April 1969, p.31

theless, her naïve revolutionary fervour and her pseudo-messianic hopes for a new world are reminiscent of Irmgard Seifert. Like her, she must 'do something' (see the poem on p.332), she too depends on a liberating deed. The most trivial activities can go some way to quench her thirst. 'Sternchenpflücken', the sawing off of the brandmark of Mercedes cars is one such activity. Her frequent communions with her Maoist friends satisfy latent desires to 'belong' somewhere, and, above all, provide her with a leftist jargon. She is uncomplicated and deliberately provocative. Everything she does, says or feels remains on the surface; concerning politics or sex her progressive attitude is nothing but modishness. Totally uncritical of her surroundings, she subjects herself to their non-conformist standards, unaware of the fact that she is the victim of another brand of conformism. Scherbaum's criticism of her: 'Sie riecht nach Gruppe' tends in this direction.

He also objects to her emotionalism, when he says 'Die liest ihren Mao, wie meine Mutter Rilke schmökert. Reine Gefühlssache'. Rilke figures here as the stereotype of the apolitical poet. What Vero Lewand and Irmgard Seifert have in common is that they are both revolutionaries for the wrong reasons. The teacher wants to escape from her past identity,

the pupil hopes to forge an identity for herself by joining the revolutionary movement. Both are using their political adherence for private ends.

Compared to Irmgard Seifert's fascism in reverse and Vero's forced modishness, Scherbaum is the only serious candidate among the three revolutionaries. His shortcomings are also his virtues, especially his acute sensibility to the suffering in Vietnam. In contrast to Vero, he is an individualist, hates groups and fends off any possible disciples. He is rather a taciturn character who thinks for himself and then acts on his convictions.

Kein Held. Keiner, der führen will und Anhänger sucht. Er kann nicht fanatisch gucken...Niemand war er erster...Niemand hat er sich vordrängt...Niemand ist er besonders mutig, auffallend kühn oder schwindelfrei gewesen...Er lügt nie... Seine Stimme verkündet nicht. Er ist kein Messias. Er bringt keine Botschaft.<sup>24</sup>

But act he must. It is only as a final resort that he turns to violence. Not, as in Vero's case, out of sheer sensationalism, but because he is appalled by the political complacency around him. He would fail in his duty, he thinks, if he did not shake up people by drawing their attention to the fact that

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24) Öb pp.271-2

human beings are being burned at the hands of other human beings. In his view, only a comparably drastic measure could bring this fact to the attention of the 'kuchenfressende Topfhüte' of Berlin. This is the reason why he decides to burn his dog, justifying his action as 'demonstrative Aufklärung'. His act is as distasteful to him as it is to Starusch, because he is very fond of his dog. When asked why he does not burn himself, he replies that only dogs can make an impact on the Berliners, as they are dog-loving people.

The personal aspect complicates the situation. Scherbaum maintains that his action is meaningful only because it causes him pain, because he is terrified of carrying it out:

Was man ohne Angst macht, das zählt nicht...Sie glauben nicht dran,<sup>25</sup>

he says to Starusch, who suggests buying another dog for the purpose, to spare Scherbaum's. On the other hand, this makes it all the more difficult for Scherbaum to annul his project without feeling that he is capitulating for the wrong reasons. It is impossible to determine whether he gives up his plan for personal or political reasons.

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25) öb p.202

In fact, the worst fault of the novel is that Scherbaum's conversion remains unexplained. His sudden transformation is foreshadowed only by the episode on the 'Kurfürstendamm' when a mere anticipation of the deed provokes physical nausea in him. Thus actual events tend to make us believe that sentimental reasons restrained Scherbaum from his action, though we know better. The author intended him to come to this decision for political reasons. The whole novel sets out to prove that violence (read 'revolution') makes no sense, politically. And yet, when the author comes to substantiate Scherbaum's change of course from a revolutionary to an evolutionary attitude the argument is missing.

In spite of the elaborate reasonings that precede the conversion, there is no suggestion that Scherbaum is convinced by Starusch's or the dentist's 'lectures'. Starusch's guiding motto: 'Schon im Davor beginnt das Danach' has its strategic corollary in 'Gespräche verhindern Taten'. The deed is seen as an 'active resignation', an escape mechanism, a retrogressive interruption of a process of development. The strongest argument for dropping the project is that the political implication of Scherbaum's sacrifice would be completely lost on the Berliners, and even on Starusch. The heart of the Berliners would flow out

to the burning dog, and Starusch is primarily concerned about Scherbaum's safety, who, as the killer of the creature, would be exposed to the Berliners' rage. Under these circumstances nobody would give a thought to the people burning in Vietnam.

Starusch also tries to dissuade Scherbaum by telling him about a young Polish revolutionary, Bartholdy, who, under the influence of the French Revolution, tried to proclaim the revolution in his own country. He calls Bartholdy's attempt

'...eine leichtfertige Dummheit, die nicht nur ihn ins Unglück gebracht hat, sondern auch die polnischen Hafenarbeiter...Es mangelte Bartholdy an der Nüchternheit des Revolutionärs. Zwar konnte der Junge nicht wissen, was selbst ein Marx erst relativ spät erkannte, daß nämlich nur mit Hilfe einer Klasse, die nichts zu verlieren, aber alles zu gewinnen hat, eine Revolution gewonnen werden kann; doch Sie, Philipp, vorgewarnt, wissend, sollten erkennen, daß ihre geplante Tat, die öffentliche Verbrennung eines Hundes, nur dann wirkungsvoll sein kann, wenn weite Kreise der Gesellschaft - ich vermeide bewußt den Begriff Klasse - Ihre Tat als auslösendes Zeichen zu begreifen bereit sind.<sup>26</sup>

These are indeed legitimate reasons for not burning the animal, but do they convince Scherbaum? He does

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26) öb p.275



not say so. According to Starusch, violence is the consolation of the weak. No one knows more about its attraction than Starusch himself. He is, not unlike the Chef, a schizophrenic. When he allows free rein to his imagination, he projects himself onto the dentist's television screen as a 'Möchte-ger-n-Mörder' with 'Mordanschläge auf Vorrat'. But in his professional capacity,

als Studienrat für Deutsch und also Geschichte sind (ihm) Gewaltaktionen verhaßt.<sup>27</sup>

Whilst the dentist lectures proudly on the dispensability of violence in our 'enlightened' century, Starusch wallows in dreams of revenge: personal dreams, like killing his fiancée, because she humiliated him by preferring another man; political ones, such as bulldozing the whole of our consumer society, 'damit sich die Basis verändern läßt.' Bulldozers loom large in his imagination, not only because he is familiar with the building trade, but because they satisfy his desire to clear the ground and start from scratch:

Schluß machen mit den scheinheiligen Reformisten und den heißen Atem der Revolution wehen lassen, damit eine neue Gesellschaft...<sup>28</sup>

But when he is sober, he knows that terrorism is never

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27) Öb p.41

28) Öb p.187

the way to progress. Even the French Revolution cannot be justified in terms of its achievements:

Das hätte man, bei Geduld, billiger haben können. So wurde Napoleon möglich.<sup>29</sup>

Violence is only for 'Zukurzgekommene', for 'Versager', the result of frustration, its short-term relief is nothing but a delusion.

The responsible Starusch of today makes good his violent past - even at the expense of truth. He prefers to think of himself as one who resisted Hitler rather than to admit his total indifference to Hitler's existence, when he was an adolescent. Desperately trying to find a link between himself and Scherbaum, he sees in his pupil an ideal image of himself. Starusch's only hope of success in influencing Scherbaum is to take himself as an example and describe the way in which he once overcame the conflicts which Scherbaum now experiences.

In reality, the parallelism which Starusch is trying to establish is not only exaggerated, but false. All the readers of Die Blechtrommel will know that Starusch is lying, when he tells Scherbaum about his Störtebecker past:

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29) 8b p.200

Wir leisteten richtigen Widerstand!<sup>30</sup>

In a rare moment of insight Starusch himself admits that he is indulging in wishful thinking:

Warum den verworrenen Unsinn aus  
meiner Stäuberbandenzeit.<sup>31</sup>

He knows deep down that Scherbaum's revolt is more genuine than his ever was.

Anarchism in Starusch's case was mere escapism, revolt for its own sake. Scherbaum is not interested in anarchy at all, he only avails himself of anarchistic methods because he sees no other way out. He is not against constructive co-operation as such, otherwise he would not have consented to take over the editorship of the school magazine as an instrument by which to channel his 'kritische Begabung'.

There is a fundamental difference between the two protagonists, Starusch and Scherbaum. Scherbaum is an idealist, Starusch a realist. The following imaginary dialogue illustrates their respective point of view.

Sch.: Sie mit Ihren Zahnschmerzen.  
Und was ist im Mekong-Delta los?...

St. :Ja, Scherbaum, das habe ich  
gelesen. Schlimm...Doch muß ich

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30) Öb p.16

31) Öb p.281

zugeben, daß mich dieses Ziehen, diese auf immer den gleichen Nerv gerichtete Zugluft, daß mich dieser zu lokalisierende, gar nicht mal schlimme doch auf der Stelle tretende Schmerz mehr würfelt, trifft und bloßstellt als der fotografierte, unübersehbare und dennoch abstrakte, weil nicht meinen Nerv berührende Schmerz dieser Welt.

Sch.: Macht Sie das nicht Zornig? Oder wenigstens traurig?

St. : Oft versuche ich traurig zu sein.

Sch.: Empört Sie das nicht, dieses Unrecht?

St. : Ich gebe mir Mühe, empört zu sein.<sup>32</sup>

On a surface level, this is the life-long combat between selfishness and unselfishness, between personal suffering and universal suffering. The fact that physical pain is involved in this context conveys the immediacy, the urgency, the constant nagging preoccupation, from which Starusch cannot escape.

At a deeper level, it is not simply Starusch's personal suffering that numbs him to far-off misery, but the needs of his own country that numb him to those of remote ones, like Indo-China, for instance. In Starusch's view, the only decisive criterion for political action is efficacy. This is the lesson which he has learnt from his own mistakes and which he would dearly like to pass on to his pupil Scherbaum.

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32) Öb p.17

Can experiences be imparted? Could their communication be a basis for progress? The prospects for progress look extremely bleak at moments when Starusch is overcome by nostalgia for Scherbaum's youthful idealism:

'Nichts können wir lernen. Es gibt keinen Fortschritt, allenfalls Spuren im Schnee.'<sup>33</sup>

In his more balanced moments he says:

Im Grunde bin ich ein Mann der friedlichen Weiterentwicklung, wengleich mir der Glaube an den Fortschritt schwer fällt.<sup>34</sup>

He still clings to the idea of progress, despite his doubts.

Starusch describes himself to Vero as

'...ein liberaler Marxist, der sich nicht entscheiden kann.'<sup>35</sup>

In fact, he does decide, albeit reluctantly. The impulses aroused in the Chef by the hairdresser are even more pronounced in Starusch, who is incessantly exposed to a tug-of-war between emotional preference and rational insight. This resemblance with the Chef is best rendered in Starusch's own comment:

Ich hätte ihr gern von der Traurigkeit

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33) Öb p.114

34) Öb p.147

35) Öb p.205

meines Besserwissens erzählt.<sup>36</sup>

His reasonable attitude may look like resignation, but as he has chosen this course deliberately, it is a positive decision. Like the Chef, Starusch confesses, full of regret: 'Ich klammerte mich an die Vernunft.'<sup>37</sup>

The dentist has little sympathy for Starusch's flirtations with youth, violence and revolution. The difference between the teacher and the dentist is like that between mind and reality, or, as conveyed metaphorically in the novel, between television screen (recipient of Starusch's fantasies) and spitting bowl. Their respective attitudes have a common denominator which Starusch chooses to label 'Humanismus'.

Starusch wavers between optimism and pessimism as to the perfectibility of man and society, and if he comes to believe in progress, it is after long torments of self-doubt. Self-doubts are unknown to the dentist. As a representative of technocratic reformism, and being nameless, he has no value outside his representative function; he holds beliefs which are more securely founded, or so he thinks. His frame of

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36) öb p.206

37) See the Chef's monologue at the end of the fourth act of Die Plebejer.

reference is dental medicine, and it is not difficult for him to boast of the monumental progress that has taken place in his field. Tooth extraction, he believes, is to be avoided at all cost. His professional ethos is preventative medicine. He informs Starusch of the brutal methods of extracting teeth in the Middle Ages, and threatens the teacher to withhold his anaesthetic, just to give him an idea of what the latter's violent fantasies would imply in reality.

For the dentist, the key to these fantasies can be found in Starusch's personal life:

Die Früchte des kleinen... Fortschritts... lasse ich mir nicht zerstören, nur weil Ihnen die Verlobte davongelaufen ist, weil Sie ein Zukurzgekommener, ein Versager sind, der der Welt mit Hilfe seiner krausen Fiktionen, das allgemeine Versagen andichten möchte, damit er sie rechtens vernichten kann... Hier will jemand, wieder einmal, über den Menschen hinaus. Wieder einmal will hier jemand mit dem absoluten Zollstock Maß nehmen.<sup>38</sup>

He concludes his tirade by invoking the virtues of democracy achieved through

gerinfügige, doch immerhin nützliche Verbesserungen,

and the necessity of working

still und fleißig für die Versorgung

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38) Öb p.114

der Menschen.

The dentist's achievements are seen to be genuinely revolutionary, his results are tangible and stand up to scientific examination. Starusch envies him for this:

Bei Ihnen mag es vorangehen, aber die Geschichte...kann uns keine Lehre vermitteln...Absurd wie Totozahlen. Beschleunigter Stillstand.<sup>39</sup>

Starusch's dream is to do away with the difference between teachers and pupils. The dentist too has a dream: he wants to do away with the difference between patient and doctor, for 'alle sind krank, waren krank, werden krank und sterben'<sup>40</sup>. Then he will be able to establish

Die globale Krankenfürsorge..., abseits jeder Ideologie, Basis und Überbau unserer menschlichen Gesellschaften.<sup>41</sup>

He chooses illness as his point of departure. Systems may govern the world, but they do not help the governed. The dentist's view is that the world should be a hospital

in dem es keine Gesunden mehr gibt und keinen Zwang zur Gesundheit.<sup>42</sup>

But even de-systematisation has to be carried out

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39) Öb p.114

40) Öb p.110

41) Öb p.110

42) Öb p.111



systematically, which proves the impracticability and inconsistency of the dentist's utopia. In vain, he prides himself on his flawless pragmatism.

His dentistry is considered as a metaphor of social democracy - both can only function through pragmatism. But this arch-enemy of global solutions, this technocrat with a humanist education - Seneca is his mentor - suffers from one serious disease: overconfidence. Although an 'Antisystematiker', he finds strength in the security of his own limited system, where everything fits neatly together. This self-righteous ideologist of pragmatism thinks that his dentistry, a paradigm of evolution, is infallible. For a long time, his superiority over the ever-doubting, ever-tormented Starusch, seems beyond question. It is, however, Starusch, who finally wins the day. The dentist's treatment has failed; the carefully built bridge has to be sawn through and the lovingly treated tooth extracted. Durzak formulates their respective position in the following terms:

(Der Zahnarzt) ist der eigentliche Verlierer; denn der Erkenntnisgewinn seiner Disziplin, der sich abstrakt behaupten läßt, wird von deren Brauchbarkeit für den Menschen her relativiert, während der sich selbst in Zweifel setzende Starusch, obwohl er vom Schmerz, der aber wiederum die Erkenntnis in ihm befreit, nicht frei wird, eigentlich siegt, indem

es ihm gelingt, Scherbaum umzu-  
stimmen.<sup>43</sup>

What is worse, the preacher of preventive cure, the dedicated fighter against caries is himself addicted to sweets. And to seal the discrepancy between professional integrity and private inconsistencies, the reader is told that he is having an affair with his dental assistant.

The philosophy emerging from the novel is

daß sich Grass für die nie von Zweifeln freie, nie absolut sichere historische Erkenntnis entscheidet, die gegenüber der technokratischen und zugleich pragmatischen als die relevantere erscheint.<sup>44</sup>

Starusch's Weltanschauung is more relevant, indeed, because the dentist's approach is painless, whereas Starusch accepts the necessity of pain as a 'Mittel der Erkenntnis'<sup>45</sup>. In fact, the dentist's whole political and medical ethos is based on painlessness. Starusch formulates their difference when he says:

(Vielleicht geht das doch nicht:  
ein Zahnarzt und ein Lehrer. Er

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43) Manfred Durzak: loc.cit. p.231

44) ibid. p.232

45) Öb p.344. In Katz und Maus and Hundejahre, pain was seen only in negative terms.

ist es gewohnt, schmerzlos zu behandeln; ich werte den Schmerz als Mittel der Erkenntnis...)<sup>46</sup>

And yet Starusch must admit, although it offends his romanticism, that the minimising of pain is a form of progress. In fact, he concludes, sadly, that only under a local anaesthetic is medical effectiveness possible. Figuratively speaking, sensibility to the pains outside one's control must be numbed, if one is to concentrate on those within it. Strength resides in limitation.

Scherbaum with his excessive susceptibility had to be numbed, too.

Da ihn die Welt schmerzt, geben wir uns Mühe, ihn örtlich zu betäuben.<sup>47</sup>

In the terms of the novel, it means that Scherbaum no longer wishes to burn his dog to protest against American involvement in Vietnam, but decides to pull his weight within his own restricted sphere of influence, the school. Spreading the truth, as he finds out to his own cost, is no mean task: an article of his that was to disclose the Nazi past of ex-Chancellor Kiesinger was censored. The course that Scherbaum has taken is an exemplary one, a synthesis between the present Starusch and his previous revolutionary

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46) Öb pp.244-5

47) Öb p.293

self. Scherbaum becomes an active reformer - sober, only passionate in his moderation, patient, industrious and always self-questioning. Thus the novel ends on a mixed note of hope and pain.

One has fundamental reservations about Örtlich betäubt. Not because it is so different from the 'trilogy' - this is the main reason why it has been received so badly by most German critics - but because the more positive view of the world it tries to convey, lacks intellectual cohesion. Though the illustration of the themes, particularly the tour de force of the prevented burning of the dog, seems out of proportion to their importance, the questions themselves are vital to all civilised societies. Less specifically German than Grass's previous work, Örtlich betäubt is still tied closely to Germany through the omnipresent dimension of the Hitler regime and, on a contemporary level, through the student protests in the late 1960s.

The novel's didactic contention is that evolution stands a better chance of changing the world than does revolution: the two reformists, the humanist and the scientist, have their sacrificial victim in Scherbaum. The dentist lectures about the 'friedlich

evolutionären Fortschritt der Zahnmedizin'. Starusch is less fortunate than the dentist; as a teacher of history, he has no concrete evidence of progress. Progress to him is to make others recognise and understand the absurdity of history, above all to give them a critical sense of historical perspective. There lies the only chance of progress. He hopes to convince Scherbaum of the absurdity of his planned deed by exposing 'die Absurdität vernünftig gemeinter Handlungen' of others.

One of the questions underlying the treatment of historical material is whether such experiences can be conveyed so that the mistakes of the past may be avoided. Verbally, Starusch denies it. Like Oskar, he fears that there are no short cuts to progress. But in terms of the plot, his hopes are fulfilled. Whether convinced by political argument, or overcome by love for his dog, Scherbaum desists from his action, and at least one senseless deed is avoided.

The novel poses as an act of reconciliation between the rebellious socialist youth (at that time the Extra-Parliamentary Opposition, APO) and the moderate, power-minded SPD. His effort might have borne fruit, had örtlich betäubt not been marred by basic political misconceptions. The most disturbing feature to critics

of this novel is Grass's personalisation of history, a trend that was already noticeable in Die Plebejer. Here the Chef figured as a saviour manqué, one who missed his chance as a maker of history. And yet in the play, Grass insists on the de-personalisation of the Chef, in order to use him as a representative of all intellectuals. In örtlich betäubt the model is deliberately individualised: the fictitious character Krings is here called by the name of the general he represents, Schörner. Towards the end of the novel, we read: 'Vielleicht doch Schörner sagen, wenn Schörner gemeint ist'<sup>48</sup>. This is not primarily because he wants to give his novel a documentary gloss, but it is symptomatic of Grass's new view of history.

The roots of all political crises are simply attributed to psychological inadequacies. This interpretation is often ridiculed within the narrative, but because it is Vero who complains about Starusch's 'unwissenschaftliche Personalisierung der Geschichte' the objection is weakened. Trivialisation of history is the main reason why the novel is intellectually unsatisfactory. Just how absurd it is, becomes clear when applied to Hitler:

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48) öb p.252

Was wäre der Welt erspart worden,  
wenn die k.u.k.-Prüfungskommission  
der Wiener Kunstakademie den Prüf-  
ling Hitler, der eigentlich Kunst-  
maler werden wollte, nicht hätte  
durchfallen lassen, sondern...  
Denn unser Volk verträgt das nicht:  
Abgewiesene, Zukurzgekommene Ver-  
sager. Überall hocken sie und lauern  
auf Rache.<sup>49</sup>

Whether Grass deals with public or private personali-  
ties, every political attitude, every political con-  
viction is attributed to individual frustration. The  
dentist who is so eager for reforms accuses his patient  
of indulging in revolutionary bulldozer fantasies,  
because his fiancée left him in the lurch. Scherbaum's  
burning of the dog is seen in connection with his  
father's previous war activities:

Der Vater bekämpfte...Brände,  
der Sohn ist zum Brandopfer bereit.<sup>50</sup>

Perhaps the separation of Vero's parents is supposed  
to explain her radicalism. And the 'kurzatmige Revo-  
luzzer Schlottau', lover of Starusch's ex-fiancée,  
who is Kring's daughter,

wollte mit Krings abrechnen, weil  
Krings ihn...vom Feldwebel zum  
Schützen degradiert hatte,<sup>51</sup>

not because he objected to the notoriously ruthless  
tactics of the 'Durchhaltegeneral' Schörner.

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49) öb p.96

50) öb p.278

51) öb p.116

Scherbaum's plan is seen in the same light. Both for Seifert and Starusch it is merely an opportunity for projecting and solving their personal problems. His deed would quench Seifert's thirst for redemption. And Starusch 'der so geworden ist, wie er nicht sein will,' would like to see himself reborn in Scherbaum's activism, if only to impress retrospectively his ex-fiancée Linde. In spite of the book's political character, political motivations are always secondary. ✓

The critic Horst Krüger concludes from this:

Grass verkleinbürgerlicht die Protestbewegung zu einem verkorksten Vater/Sohn Konflikt...Protestbewegung als Pubertätsproblem. Das trifft nicht die Wirklichkeit unserer Tage.<sup>52</sup> ✓

He also reproached Grass with lack of political sensitivity. Starusch's associative equation between the APO and the 'Stäuberbande' is a case in point, the basic difference being that the former act out of political idealism, perhaps misguided, whereas the latter are only interested in confusion and destruction.

Although Starusch is undoubtedly the main protagonist, he is not the 'hero' of the novel. He is far too broken to hold this position, a position where

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52) Horst Krüger in Die Zeit, 22 August 1969



resignation and a strong urge to act hold each other in balance. However much he feels attracted to the Scherbaum position,

am Ende (nimmt) er immer die  
Position der Vernunft, der Auf-  
klärung ein,<sup>53</sup>

Grass says. But that happens only after a desperate inner struggle. One need only recall his disappointment verging on cynicism, when the dentist informs him of Scherbaum's conversion. The dentist's triumph is not appreciated by Starusch. And yet, reason demands that Starusch should congratulate him on having brought about Scherbaum's change of heart. The factor determining Starusch's behaviour is his faith, however precarious, 'in die Politik der kleinen Schritte.' His motto remains:

Also Fleiß, Zweifel, Vernunft,  
Dazulernen, Zögern, mehrmaliger  
Neubeginn, kaum merkliche Ver-  
besserungen, einkalkulierte Fehl-  
entwicklungen.<sup>54</sup>

In spite of his self-characterisation

(Und ich hasse Bekenntnisse, ich  
hasse Opfer. Hasse Glaubenssätze  
und ewige Wahrheiten. Ich hasse  
das Eindeutige.)<sup>55</sup>

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53) 'Gespräch mit Günter Grass' in Theater Heute,  
April 1969, p.31

54) Öb p.193

55) Öb p.289

Starusch himself is unambiguous. His intellectual position is consistent throughout.

The real hero of Örtlich betäubt is the 'vorbildlich beispielhaft(e)' Scherbaum. He is certainly the most positive figure in Grass's work, perhaps too positive to be convincing. He is an amiable combination of idealism and realism, not a wild protester à la Störtebecker. The example he admires and tries to follow is that of the quiet clerk and resistance fighter Hübener.

Grass does not meet his own standards. However vociferously he might dissociate himself from Tendenzliteratur, this novel is a tendentious novel. When defining commitment in chapter one, we discussed the distinguishing feature of tendentiousness as the subordination of artistic considerations to the message. Reich-Ranicki states Grass's literary development when he writes:

Während Grass in Der Blechtrommel nichts verkünden und alles zeigen wollte, wird hier stets verkündet und kaum etwas gezeigt...immer Feststellung statt Darstellung, Mitteilung statt Vergegenwärtigung. Statt Bilder, Szenen, und Situationen erhalten wir bestenfalls Fakten, Thesen und Informationen...<sup>56</sup>

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56) Marcel Reich-Ranicki in Die Zeit, 29 August 1969

It is not true that imagery has disappeared from Grass's style. But whereas previously Grass's imagery had some depth to it, that of örtlich betäubt is restricted to cyphers. When introducing his novel, Grass himself supplies the key to it by explaining the analogy between dental treatment and the state of our society:

örtlich betäubt meint gleichzeitig  
und über den zahnmedizinischen  
Anlaß hinaus den Gesellschafts-  
zustand.<sup>57</sup>

Ailing teeth equal an ailing democracy, and dental treatment stands for the unglamorous attempts of the SPD to establish a Social Democracy in the Federal Republic. But lest these analogies should be lost on the reader, their allegorical connotations are explained in the narrative itself. For instance, the reader is told explicitly that the dentist is giving advice about deflecting Scherbaum from his project, 'als handelte es sich um eine Wurzelbehandlung', and 'Unglück' is explicitly equated with 'Zahnschmerz'. All the images related to the building trade from 'Tuft' to 'Bims' to 'Zement' and 'Beton' belong to the world of violence. When the stone formation is transferred to the field of dentistry, it is subject to evolutionary transformations. Thus Starusch's

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57) From a 'hand-out' issued by Luchterhand on the publication of örtlich betäubt.

'Zahnstein', incrustations of a politically suspect past, can be filed off, medically; psychologically, they can be worked out by projecting them onto a blank television screen. Starusch suffers from 'angeborenen Zahnproblemen', his 'Progenie' is attributed to brutality in his character, his whole medical history is that of one who is 'erblich belastet', an inheritance which is nothing but a simile for the German past. Dental treatment and self-projections go hand in hand to ameliorate both the state of his health and of his political understanding.

The first part of the book, nearly half of the whole, is dedicated to this 'fragmentation' of the past as it is perceived by Starusch in the present. The fact that it constitutes half of the novel merely demonstrates to what extent the past still affects the thoughts of a contemporary German. The second part is dedicated to the present, as lived by the innocent younger generation. But Scherbaum, too, acts out of guilt feelings, although it is not guilt incurred by himself. His concern for Vietnam springs directly from a desire to make good previous German parochialism in political matters and thus represents an exact antithesis to the Starusch part. The third part is the synthesis, the constructive integration between

past and present, between global responsibility and total inactivity, between revolution and evolution.

In chapter one Tendenz was defined as criticism with a definite alternative. Thus the tendentiousness of örtlich betäubt is irrefutable, for with the criticism of the old world goes a vision of the new world:

Man stelle sich vor: ein Zahnarzt und ein Studienrat regieren die Welt. Das Zeitalter der Prophylaxe bricht an. Allem Übel wird vorgebeugt. Da jeder lehrt, lernt auch ein jeder. Da alle dem Kariesbefall ausgesetzt sind, finden sich alle einig im Kampf gegen die Karies. Fürsorge und Vorsorge befrieden die Völker. Keine Religionen und Ideologien mehr, sondern Hygiene und Aufklärung beantworten die Frage nach dem Sein. Kein Versagen mehr und kein Mühsgeruch. Man stelle sich vor.<sup>58</sup>

Grass would say that a vision is not an alternative: in his mind this constitutes the essential difference between literature and politics. But a vision as mundane as the one projected above, a vision that prides itself on its relative attainability, is already an alternative. Die Plebejer was a complex literary equivalent of the polemical Princeton address. Örtlich betäubt goes further in its tendentiousness: it therefore becomes no more and no less than a literary version of Grass's political speeches.

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58) öb p.263

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### CONCLUSION

Concluding our examination of the problem of commitment in the work of Günter Grass, we return to our thesis that Grass's work embraces the two types of commitment set out in chapter one. The study has attempted to trace the author's evolution from Engagement to Tendenz through an analysis of each work. Die Blechtrommel was seen to embody salient features of Engagement, whilst örtlich betäubt displayed features of Tendenz.

Grass's images are the most reliable guide-lines to his work. More than any other aesthetic element, they make the evolution from Engagement to Tendenz immediately recognisable. The main reason for this lies in the exact correspondance between the use of imagery on the one hand, and the tone and contents of the works on the other. Thus, by reviewing the central images of the main prose works and scrutinising their relationship to each other, the evolution from 'moral' to 'moralising' unfolds quite naturally.

These images can be grouped into three main categories: symbols, allegories and cyphers, with the drum and

to the rational is the development from the multi-dimensional to the one-dimensional, from the dialectical to the linear, from the dynamic to the static and from the organic to the functional.

Grass's prose works revolve around one or two central images, or groups of images, which denote reality on the one hand, and on the other, a challenge to reality. The very titles of the books reveal where the emphasis lies. In Die Blechtrommel it is the challenge to reality that is emphasised, a challenge through art. As a denunciation of reality, Oskar's art becomes an art of protest. Both the Black Witch and the drum are emotive symbols, although the drum is somewhat more rational, in that it organises experience. It is, as has already been pointed out, the opposing principle to the Black Witch, for it orders experience along moral guide-lines, thus setting itself off against the Black Witch who is an incarnation of amorality.

Within the framework of Sartre's existentialist literary philosophy, the Black Witch is a symbol of Oskar's anguish, whilst the drum(ming) as the means by which Oskar can overcome this anguish, embodies Engagement. But the type of Engagement conveyed by the drum remains a quest, it is never an answer.

What Oskar's drumming communicates to the reader is precisely what Sartre calls

Un sens obscur, pas un sens élucidé,  
pas un sens avec des concepts

and it is conveyed

avec l'épaisseur d'un style, avec  
une manière d'être, de mettre en  
situation qui doit elle-même être  
obscur.<sup>3</sup>

The fact that the drum takes into account complexities of man and society, refusing to reduce these complexities to concepts, gives the symbol an emotional texture. The depth of the symbol makes its multi-dimensional character possible. Oskar's artistic medium, his protest, encompasses all realms of human experience from the most private to the most public. As our study of the novel has shown, the drum functions as an upholder of morality in the sphere of politics, religion and art, making transparent in each case the corruption against which it protests. To Wilhelm Lang, every symbol is 'die Füllung eines Rahmens'<sup>4</sup>; the frame of the drum is no less than society itself.

The 'Füllung' is more difficult to define, because the drum is merely a signpost and not the morality itself. By attacking all dogmas, for instance, it

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3) In Que peut la littérature?, présentation par Yves Buin, Paris 1965, pp.126-7

4) Wilhelm Lang: loc.cit.



postulates movement and life, a life that even includes destruction, out of which new life emerges, as proclaimed in the 'Partisanenpassage'<sup>5</sup>. The dialectical character of the drum symbol has already been stressed in our discussion of Die Blechtrommel. Not only is the drum itself dialectical - for it can be put to good and bad purposes, radiate hate as well as love - but it also has its dialectical opposite in the Black Witch.

This dialectical process pervades the entire composition of the novel, down to its smallest episodes. Over and above the tripartite structure and the juxtaposition of individual chapters, the sequence of chapters is dialectical. It is striking that chapter headings should announce events that do not materialise until the end of the chapter. This method implies that the event can take place only after a full exposition of all the contributory factors that led up to it. The relationship between 'Fernwirkender Gesang vom Stockturm aus gesungen'<sup>6</sup> and 'Tribüne'<sup>7</sup> may serve as an example. Oskar's involvement on the

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5) See chapter three, p.99

6) BT pp.76-87

7) BT pp.87-100

'Maiwiese'<sup>8</sup> for instance, is the result of his attack on the 'Musen- und Bildungstempel'<sup>9</sup> of the Danzig theatre in the preceeding 'Stockturn' chapter. The step from Oskar's protest through his personal involvement in the 'Illusionstheater' of the 'Waldoper'<sup>10</sup> to Oskar's disruption of its political equivalent, the Nazi 'Illusionsbühne'<sup>11</sup>, is dialectical: his intellectual protest has its antithesis in an emotional experience, while his active protest against the theatricality of Fascism synthesises the two.

The drum is also a dynamic symbol, with its inherent energy being externalised through its musical properties. Quite independently of its owner, the drum generates a moral force, not infrequently to the drummer's own embarrassment. It propels both character and plot; Oskar is, as it were, subservient to the drum, defining his identity either in alliance with or in opposition to it. This means that the emphasis in Die Blechtrommel is on art, in contrast to the play Die Plebejer proben den Aufstand, where the emphasis is on the artist. In Die Blechtrommel

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8) BT pp.97ff

9) BT p.83

10) BT p.88

11) BT pp.94ff

the artist is less than his art, he is totally subsumed by it. Thus in the final analysis, the symbol of the drum, as a fusion of art and protest, grows with the novel as an organic image of creativity against the background of a fragmented universe, inhabited by a disintegrating Oskar.

This disintegration is even more extreme in Grass's subsequent works. In Katz und Maus the black cat takes over from the Black Witch, replacing the fairy-tale symbol with the image of an animal. The mouse symbolises not art, but the 'otherness', the sensibility of the artist. It is a mark of distinction and isolation, a symbol of vulnerability. Whereas the drum challenged reality, the mouse is its victim; the title anticipates this uneven fight.

Hundejahre does not even attempt to maintain a balance in its title; reality is given unequivocal primacy. Moreover, it is a very crude reality, not only because a dog is fiercer than a cat, but also because of the figurative meaning implied in the German title. As has been pointed out previously, the dog image undergoes a metamorphosis, developing from a symbol into an allegory. Its symbolic quality is already evident

with the ancestor dog, Senta, whose appearance is always accompanied by a genealogy, foreshadowing doom, as it runs through the narrative like a leitmotif. With the description of Harras, this doom takes on distinctly political connotations: not only is the dog in line with the black colour of its symbolic predecessors, the Witch and the Cat, but the purity of its pedigree is stressed: race being an essential part of Nazi ideology.

Harras constitutes the turning-point from symbol to allegory. When he is first mentioned, he evokes a multitude of coincidences and associations of a personal, philosophical and political nature: Tulla, Heidegger and the NSDAP. The symbol loses its multi-dimensional quality when one of Harras's puppies is presented to Hitler. From now on, Prinz is irrevocably tied to politics; he becomes an allegory of National Socialism. As Hitler's dog, he no longer 'signifies', he 'is' Fascism. By extension, he later comes to represent Communism as well, with ideological thinking their common denominator. Prinz's survival of the German capitulation simply denotes a survival of Nazi mentality in the post-war period, just as his trip to East Germany is supposed to convey a leftist variety of Fascism practised in the German Democratic Republic. When he, as Pluto, is finally destined to guard the scarecrow hell, he becomes an overall allegory of ideology.

Although art is not mentioned in the title, in itself an indication of the impotence of art in the face of overpowering reality, Hundejahre is as much a novel about art as Die Blechtrommel. The scarecrows are related to the drum, just as the dogs are to the Black Witch. The satire transmitted by the scarecrows reveals an even more severe assessment of the portrayed reality, in contrast to the relatively benign drum.

The scarecrows, too, undergo three distinct stages, evolving from symbols of art into allegories of ideology, thus finishing up on the same level as the dog(s). They start off as products of Amsel's imagination. As artistic creations, they comprise the same levels as the dog(s), namely the personal, the philosophical and the political. Personal, because they are a precise reflection of Amsel's state of mind; philosophical, because they transform Weininger's ideas into visual forms; and political, because Weininger's conceptions play into the hands of National Socialism.

In its first phase, the scarecrow symbol is dialectical: it gives expression to the ideology of the day, yet at the same time it undermines this ideology by caricature. The second phase corresponds to the Harras phase in the history of the dogs. Amsel relinquishes the mystical sources from which his art springs and proceeds to a frontal attack on the regime: Prussian

gods are replaced by scarecrow representations of SA men. Amsel's art has turned into an overt challenge to the National Socialist regime. The response to this challenge is well-known; it results in Matern's brutal assault on the artist. By the third stage, the ballet, the scarecrows have assumed an allegorical character. From then onwards they become abstractions of ideology, thus paralleling the evolution of the dog image. Like the dog, they detach themselves from their owner, and appear in East Germany, in pseudo-scholastic discourses and finally in the scarecrow hell, where their meaning is widened again to encompass the grotesqueness of man's pursuits at large.

With örtlich betäubt there is a drastic change in Grass's use of imagery. The images themselves are familiar - dogs and teeth in particular - but the use to which they are put distorts them almost beyond recognition. The title no longer relates to art, nor to reality, but to man's reaction to reality. It proclaims a state of partial numbness as the only viable answer. Figuratively speaking, local anaesthesia is the curtailment of man's sensibilities, in order to maximise the effectiveness of that part of man's consciousness not suspended. In political terms it means concentrating actively on a small area of

reality, rather than paying lip service to the redemption of the world at large; it means accepting compromise and denouncing the violence of global solutions. Negative criticism has turned into positive criticism. Matern of Hundejahre poisons Harras. He deludes himself that by this act he can eliminate reality. Scherbaum, on the other hand, saves his dog. He is prepared to work with the reality and does not burn Max. In örtlich betäubt it is no longer a question of art versus reality, the title defines the only type of action acceptable to the author. It provides the political answer, and indeed the political programme to deal with the devastation left by Hundejahre.

The imagery fits the programme: teeth and stones are purely functional in contrast to the organic texture of the drum. All images relating to dentistry or dental treatment, like anaesthesia, the filing of teeth or building of bridges, stand for reformism and evolution. They are keys to an attitude where even imperfect dentures (read 'societies') are considered an acceptable point of departure for piecemeal improvements. The stone imagery, on the other hand, represents a threat to this reformist mentality. 'Beton', 'Traß', 'Bims' and other images from the building trade, notably the bulldozer, stand for absolutist theories, legitimating violence and terrorism in the name of a classless society, of

revolution, of the perfection of man.

What Wilhelm Lang says about the cypher is fully applicable to örtlich betäubt:

Bilder scheinen - äußerlich gesehen -  
ohne Beziehung zum Ausgesagten, erst  
ihre Fülle erlaubt allmählich die  
Enthüllung.<sup>12</sup>

Looking at the images in isolation, they would seem to bear no relevance to the main themes of the novel; only their relationship towards the main character and their contrived arrangement make them reveal and reinforce the message of the novel.

Although the overall composition of örtlich betäubt is still dialectical, the individual images are not. Thesis and antithesis are no longer contained within one and the same image, as was the case with drum and scarecrow; instead, thesis and antithesis are each individualised in separate images. Mere products of the mind, they lack the dynamic quality of earlier symbols. As their function is predetermined, they are static elements, neither evolving with, nor propelling characters and plot.

The 'sens obscur' has been 'elucidated' by concepts. However, it is debatable whether this higher degree

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12) Wilhelm Lang; loc.cit.



of abstraction does in fact represent an 'elucidation', or whether it is simply the reduction of a complex reality to abstract ideas. Grass's increasing political commitment has undoubtedly been to the detriment of Grass the writer. Whether this correlation is an inevitable one must remain an open question.

#### A. PRIMARY LITERATURE (1955-1972)

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##### 2. Plays, Ballads:

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The bibliography of primary literature (section A) attempts to be as exhaustive as possible, whilst the the bibliography of secondary literature (section B) is only selective. The primary material is grouped by the genre, and arranged chronologically. Secondary literature is arranged alphabetically by author within each sub-division.

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