

A black and white close-up portrait of Günter Grass. He is wearing glasses and has a prominent mustache. He is holding a pipe in his mouth, and a plume of smoke is rising from it on the right side of the frame. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the texture of his skin and the details of his facial features.

Siegfried Mews

GÜNTER GRASS AND HIS CRITICS

From The Tin Drum to Crabwalk

Günter Grass and His Critics

*Studies in German Literature, Linguistics, and Culture:
Literary Criticism in Perspective*

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Günter Grass and His Critics

From *The Tin Drum* to *Crabwalk*

Siegfried Mews

CAMDEN HOUSE
Rochester, New York

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Abbreviations

TITLES OF GRASS'S WORKS WILL ordinarily be cited in both German (when the reference is clearly to the original text) and English (when the reference is evidently to the English rendering). Quotations from Grass's writings will generally be given in English and, in comparatively rare instances (for example, for the sake of clarification) in German. The bibliographical details of the translations cited in the text are given below; the editions are listed in alphabetical order according to the abbreviations used. The first date of publication of the respective English translation has been added in square brackets.

- CaM* *Cat and Mouse*. [1963]. Translated by Ralph Manheim. New York: Signet Books, 1964.
- CT* *The Call of the Toad* [1992]. Translated by Ralph Manheim. San Diego: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1992.
- CW* *Crabwalk* [2003]. Translated by Krishna Winston. Orlando, FL: Harcourt, 2003.
- DS* *From the Diary of a Snail* [1973]. Translated by Ralph Manheim. New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1973.
- DY* *Dog Years* [1965]. Translated by Ralph Manheim. New York: Harvest Paperback, 1989.
- F* *The Flounder* [1978]. Translated by Ralph Manheim. New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1978.
- HB* *Headbirths, or the Germans Are Dying Out* [1982]. New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1982.
- LA* *Local Anaesthetic* [1970]. Translated by Ralph Manheim. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1970.
- MC* *My Century* [1999]. Translated by Michael Henry Heim. New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1999.
- MT* *The Meeting at Telgte* [1981]. Translated by Ralph Manheim. New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1981.

- NL* “To Be Continued . . .” Translated by Michael Henry Heim. *PMLA* 115 (2000): 292–300.
- PO* *Peeling the Onion* [2007]. Translated by Michael Henry Heim. Orlando, FL: Harcourt, 2007.
- R* *The Rat* [1987]. Translated by Ralph Manheim. San Diego: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1987.
- SYT* *Show Your Tongue* [1989]. Translated by John E. Woods. San Diego: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1989.
- TD* *The Tin Drum* [1963]. Translated by Ralph Manheim. New York: Pantheon, 1999.
- TFA* *Too Far Afield* [2000]. Translated by Krishna Winston. New York: Harcourt, 2000.

Quotations from Grass’s works in German refer to the following editions:

- W* *Werkausgabe in achtzehn Bänden*. 1997–2003. Ed. Volker Neuhaus and Daniela Hermes. Göttingen: Steidl.
- WA* *Werkausgabe in zehn Bänden*. 1987. Ed. Volker Neuhaus. Darmstadt: Luchterhand.

Introduction

ALTHOUGH GÜNTER GRASS (b. 1927) was not an entirely unknown entity in the postwar literary scene of the mid-1950s, in which the influential *Gruppe 47* played a significant role, it was the publication of his sensational *Die Blechtrommel* in 1959 (*The Tin Drum*, 1963; see ch. 1) that made him a household name in his native country as well as among literati abroad. The novel was both praised and reviled and has remained his best-known work; it was ultimately *Die Blechtrommel* for which Grass was awarded the 1999 Nobel Prize (Grass's numerous other prizes are listed in Mertens, Hermes, and Neuhaus) in recognition of a singular literary accomplishment after a catastrophic war with its devastating consequences for intellectual and cultural life: “[It] was as if German literature had been granted a new beginning after decades of linguistic and moral destruction” (Swedish Academy 1999). The year 1959 has often been declared to be the *annus mirabilis* of modern postwar (West) German literature, owing to the publication of three significant novels — in addition to *Die Blechtrommel*, Heinrich Böll's *Billiard um halbzehn* (*Billiards at Half Past Nine*, 1961), and Uwe Johnson's *Mutmaßungen über Jakob* (*Speculations about Jacob*, 1963) appeared in the same year. Böll (1917–85), who was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1972, and Johnson (1934–84) are no longer alive and hence do not generate the kind of publicity via the public appearances, interviews, readings, and the like that often precede and follow the publication of works of fiction, but the author of *Die Blechtrommel* has been in the limelight ever since his literary breakthrough. To be sure, the high degree of name recognition Grass can count on is not exclusively attributable to his achievements in the realm of fiction; a contributing factor to his reputation — or, some would say, notoriety — has been his unconventional engagement in grass-roots party politics on behalf of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), which began in earnest in the 1960s and, apart from intervals exclusively devoted to creative pursuits, has essentially continued until today. At the beginning of his literary career, Grass's literary focus was clearly on his hometown of Danzig, as *Die Blechtrommel* and the subsequent works incorporated in the *Danziger Trilogie* (*Danzig Trilogy*; see ch. 4), considered by many to be his crowning artistic achievement, attest. In his fiction he investigated the reasons for the irretrievable loss of Danzig, by exploring the Nazi past and its remnants in postwar West German society. Particularly during the

1980s, critics noted a distinct globalization of Grass's perspective that is evident, for example, in *Der Butt* (1977; *The Flounder*; 1978; see ch. 7) and *Kopfgeburt* (1980; *Headbirths*, 1980; see ch. 9) as well as in his public utterances. Grass's political and literary interventions elevated him to a position in the public sphere in his native country, but also beyond it, that few writers have attained. The entirely unexpected fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 and subsequent events refocused Grass's energies on German problems; notably his extraordinarily controversial novel *Ein weites Feld* (1995; *Too Far Afield*, 2000; see ch. 13) was — at least in West Germany — widely perceived as a reflection of his unpopular, strident critique of German (re)unification, a political event of major proportions that for many signified the end of the postwar period and the Cold War. But the (belated) award of the Nobel Prize confirmed his international standing and may be said to have had the effect of minimizing the re-cremations he was subject to on account of his nonconformist views about the new Germany.

It is, then, hardly an exaggeration to state that Grass has been engaged in a host of issues of public interest; a short, random list of causes during the last decade or so that induced him to intervene publicly includes his advocacy of the Sinti and Roma, his opposition to the reform of German orthography, his support for the compensation of those who were forced laborers during the Nazi period, his criticism of the policy regarding those seeking asylum in the Federal Republic, and his defense of Turkish novelist Yaşar Kemal, the 1997 recipient of the "Friedenspreis des Deutschen Buchhandels" (Peace Prize of the German Booksellers' Association), who faced oppressive Turkish government policies. All of these activities spring from Grass's self-definition as a democratic socialist and engaged intellectual who deliberately broke with the traditional separation of the spheres of *Geist* (intellect, mind) and *Macht* (power) and refuses to remain silent in the face of unresolved issues or undesirable developments in society at large.

The fact that for several decades his name has been prominently included in German surveys, opinion polls, and rankings of various kinds provides a further indication of Grass's public stature in his homeland. Whatever validity one may attribute to such rankings in general and those of intellectuals in particular, perhaps one should not entirely ignore the results of a listing in the April 2006 cover story of *Cicero*, a magazine for political culture, in which Grass was designated as the most influential intellectual in the German-speaking countries (see Anon. 2006a) — a designation that attests to both his celebrity status and his assumed influential position among his fellow countrymen and countrywomen. In this particular ranking, Grass was followed by late-night talk show host Harald Schmidt in second place; rather paradoxically, Grass's nemesis

among critics, Marcel Reich-Ranicki (see below), was ranked third. Ironically, only a few months later, in October 2006, Grass was, for all practical purposes, demoted when literary critics were asked by the editors of the same magazine to name their favorite living author, and Grass was assigned a comparatively lowly twelfth place (see Auffermann 2006).

What may appear as a sudden decline of Grass's fortunes in terms of his reputation among the literati (and the general public) is most likely attributable to the latest "scandal," the fierce debate that erupted in conjunction with the publication of his autobiography, *Beim Häuten der Zwiebel*, in August 2006 (*Peeling the Onion*, 2007; see Epilogue). In his autobiography (Grass dispenses with a generic clarification), the author publicly admitted for the first time that as a teenager, at the end of the Second World War, he had been a member of the *Waffen SS*, an organization of ill repute. The heated discussions that ensued as a consequence of this "confession" are, in a sense, a continuation of those in which the author has been engulfed for nearly five decades. But this particular controversy, which, at least initially, revolved around Grass's position as an allegedly self-appointed upholder of moral standards rather than the literary merits of the autobiography, once again brings into focus the fact that in the public's perception the author's biography is inextricably linked with his work; as a consequence, what in the beginning seemed to be a literary scandal soon evolved into personal attacks on the author. At any rate, the initial reception of *Die Blechtrommel*, today indisputably both Grass's most widely read and critically acclaimed work of prose fiction (see, for example, Baron 1999c), amply demonstrates the potential of Grass's writings to foment impassioned reactions. The heated response to Grass's first phenomenal literary success is indicative of a pattern that was to be repeated with minor variations for almost half a century whenever one of the author's major publications appeared or whenever he forcefully intervened in matters of public concern.

It is common knowledge that the multitalented Grass's artistic endeavors are not confined to purely literary pursuits. As Patrick O'Neill (1987b) puts it: "As well as being a novelist [he is] . . . also a poet, painter, sculptor, stage designer, script writer, dramatist, gourmet cook, one-time jazz musician, and . . . political orator and commentator" (2). Even though Grass has been and continues to be very much in the limelight, a state of affairs that tends to blur the boundaries between political and aesthetic concerns, it is incontrovertible that he is, for the most part, most closely identified with his literary activities in general and his demanding fiction in particular. It is his novels, novellas or *Novellen* (a distinct genre in German prose fiction, which, however, English-speaking critics often tend to erroneously categorize as novels), and narratives of somewhat indeterminate genre such as *Kopfgeburt* and *Zunge zeigen*

(1988; *Show Your Tongue*, 1989; see ch. 11) that have received the lion's share of critical attention, as evidenced by the established cottage industry of scholarly publications, which shows no sign of waning. By no means an ivory-tower recluse, the author has contributed vigorously to the marketing of his writings via public readings and other means (see the bibliography in Mertens, Hermes, and Neuhaus for sound storage media of Grass's works). The present work, a descriptive as well as analytical and evaluative overview of extant scholarship, seeks to cover the pertinent literature from approximately 1959 to 2005. Because of Grass's virtually constant presence in the public view, it is not only the traditional variety of criticism to be encountered in scholarly publications and literary journals that needs to be examined here; rather, additional sources such as the daily and weekly press provide valuable insights concerning the reception of Grass's works.

The task of perusing the press reviews written in German has been facilitated by the collections edited by Gerd Loschütz (1968), which also offers brief excerpts of reviews from abroad, as well as by Heinz Ludwig Arnold and Franz Josef Görtz (1971), which documents Grass's political involvement, and two publications by Franz Josef Görtz: an anthology of reviews exclusively devoted to *Die Blechtrommel* (1984a) and reprinted contributions covering the entire spectrum of Grass's activities, including politics (1984b). As subsequent compilations of reviews of individual works such as *Ein weites Feld* or *Beim Häuten der Zwiebel* attest, the desire to document the journalistic reception of Grass's creative writing appears to continue unabated in the age of the Internet, with its vastly increased possibilities for instant communication and retrieval of information. At the same time, there has been a distinct tendency, by no means exclusively on the part of literary scholars, to take issue with the alleged failure on the part of those entrusted with serving as mediators between the author's works and the reading public to adequately address and explain Grass's prose fiction. In his exceedingly detailed study entitled *Günter Grass — Zur Pathogenese eines Markenbilds* (1978; On the Pathogenesis of a Brand Name), which includes an extensive bibliography of reviews of Grass's first four major prose narratives, Görtz investigated the reception of Grass's works from *Die Blechtrommel* to *Örtlich betäubt* (1969; *Local Anaesthetic*, 1970; see ch. 5) in the mass media by concentrating on prevalent clichés and stereotypes. Such commonly used clichés include blasphemy, cynicism, vitality, exuberance, and scatology; using a computer, Görtz determined their frequency and provided a valuable analysis of the writer's perception by the public.

In a more conventional vein, both Arnold (1997) and Timm Boßmann (1997) scrutinize the coverage of Grass's works by the German-language press and take the *Feuilleton* reviewers to task for having failed to ade-

quately address Grass's literary accomplishments. (Those sentiments, incidentally, are shared by Grass.) The title of Arnold's study (a cooperative venture with his students), *Blech getrommelt* — an obvious allusion to *Die Blechtrommel* — may be roughly translated as “drumming up nonsense.” Similarly, the title chosen by Boßmann, *Der Dichter im Schussfeld* (The Poet in the Line of Fire), provides a clear indication of the thrust of his argument. Both considerably more comprehensive and more moderate in his approach — if, despite a voluminous bibliography, less meticulously annotated than Arnold or Boßmann — Harro Zimmermann (2006) chronicles Grass's problematic fifty-year relationship (1955–2005) with Germany and the Germans in great detail and views the continuous media debate with and about the writer-cum-public-intellectual as an element that has significantly shaped the cultural and political history of postwar Germany or, more accurately, West Germany, the pre-unification Federal Republic. Grass reception in the GDR was exceedingly restricted (see Streul 1988, Wittmann 1991); ironically, the readers in the self-proclaimed “Leseland” (land of readers) of the GDR were only selectively permitted to peruse the writings of one of the most famous German writers (see Petzold 2003). This state of affairs changed only after (re)unification; owing largely to the debate about *Ein weites Feld*, Grass was perceived as the spokesperson of those East Germans who were suffering from the economic and social consequences of the demise of the GDR.

In the pre-unification as well as the present Federal Republic (or Berlin Republic) there was and is no dearth of readers of Grass's literary works, nor is there a lack of attention on the part of those charged with observing and commenting on developments in the cultural-literary scene in the *Feuilletons* of major dailies such as *Die Welt*, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, the *Frankfurter Rundschau*, and the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* — all of which will be fairly frequently cited in subsequent chapters. This array of influential print media with a nation-wide distribution has been supplemented with a host of less well-known (regional) papers as well as prominent, widely circulated weeklies such as *Die Zeit* and influential news magazines, notably *Der Spiegel*. *Der Spiegel* in particular devoted several cover stories to Grass, beginning with a review of *Hundejahre* (1963; *Dog Years*, 1965; see ch. 3) and (so far) extending to *Beim Häuten der Zwiebel*. There certainly is no dearth of coverage; in fact, the omnipresence of Grass is evident, for example, in the great number of articles devoted to him in the popular magazine *Stern*. But there is, as indicated, a tendency on the part of scholars such as Arnold, Boßmann, and others to charge reviewers with essentially failing in their task of informing and enlightening readers and instead engaging in polemics against the author. In particular, they single out one specific critic, that is, the aforementioned Reich-Ranicki (b. 1920). An extraordinarily influ-

ential arbiter in matters of literary taste, who eventually ascended to the position of the presumably infallible “pope” of literary criticism in the German-speaking countries, Reich-Ranicki reviewed virtually all of Grass’s works of prose fiction; these reviews have been republished separately (1992a; 2003) and document the decade-long ambivalent relationship between critic and author. From March 1988 to September 2001, Reich-Ranicki reached an impressive number of readers and spectators via *Das literarische Quartett* (The Literary Quartet), a TV show in which he presided over the discussion of new publications and pronounced his verdicts *ex cathedra* (see Wistoff 1996, 188). In the TV show, he was joined by regular hosts, who initially included journalists Sigrid Löffler and Hellmuth Karasek, as well as a number of guest critics. Despite Reich-Ranicki’s opening sentence at the beginning of the series, “Dies ist keine Talk Show” (“This is not a talk show”), opponents have charged that the TV medium served Reich-Ranicki as a vehicle for self-promotion and self-dramatization (see, for example, Boßmann, 6–7) — a *modus operandi* that tended to overemphasize the role of the critic at the expense of the author and to undermine an informed debate about the qualities of the respective literary work discussed.

Even if reviewers may have a propensity to neglect or ignore their chief task, that is, to serve as mediators between the literary text and the reader, it goes without saying that such reviews, particularly those published in print media with a national circulation, play a fairly important role in shaping readers’ initial opinions. Mostly penned by professional critics, fellow writers, or other literati such as Günter Blöcker, Joachim Kaiser, and Fritz Raddatz (who republished a number of his reviews of Grass’s works [2002a]), they sometimes provide the impetus for further, usually academic or scholarly, studies of a specific literary work; hence they constitute an important aspect of the reception process, which cannot be ignored in a study that seeks to provide a critical survey of the extant literature on Grass.

A multitude of literary studies soon followed the appraisals of individual works of Grass’s prose fiction in the *Fenilleton*. A few statistics may suffice to provide an indication of the wealth of secondary literature available. When Patrick O’Neill (1976) published his bibliography, which covers the twenty-year period from 1955 to 1975, he listed about twelve hundred entries relating to Grass’s entire oeuvre; approximately thirty years later, well-known Grass scholar Volker Neuhaus, in collaboration with Mathias Mertens and Daniela Hermes, presented a bibliography of more than six hundred and twenty items that were published from 1962 to 2004 (see Mertens, Hermes, and Neuhaus, n.d.). In view of the plethora of critical comment, selectivity becomes a necessity in attempting to provide an informed synopsis of pertinent criticism. As the title of this

study indicates, it is the reception of Grass's major prose works — which are, as is generally acknowledged, the best known part of his literary oeuvre — that will be analyzed here. Grass's standing as a widely translated (see, for example, Frielinghaus 2002), truly international writer (in their collection of translated and reprinted essays of 1990, Neuhaus and Hermes provide an indication of Grass's reception abroad) has resulted in a wealth of secondary literature in a variety of languages. Since the attempt to document the Grass reception via reviews on a worldwide scale would present virtually insurmountable linguistic as well as logistic problems, the current appraisal has essentially been limited to that in Germany (and the German-speaking countries), the English-speaking countries (primarily the United States, and, to a lesser extent, England), and, considerably less inclusively, France — a country that accorded *Ein weites Feld* an unusually wide-ranging reception. Unlike reviews, scholarly contributions tend to appeal to an international, if limited, audience; however, the same linguistic constraints are in effect here. Even though scholarly contributions written in German, English, or French most likely constitute the overwhelming majority of the worldwide critical appraisals devoted to Grass's writings, an all-inclusive coverage of (somewhat) pertinent secondary sources remains an elusive, if not unattainable goal; the lament that the literature on Grass has become exceedingly difficult to navigate has begun surfacing with increasing frequency in studies devoted to the writer's work.

In order to provide a broad, general review of the extant literature within the limitations outlined above, the individual chapters of this book seek to document the reception of each work, discussed by proceeding essentially chronologically; that is, I first comment on the critical reaction upon the publication of the German original — or, as the case may be, preceding its official publication — and then survey the reception of the English translation, and, finally, investigate the critical contributions by scholars, which are often informed by more or less clearly defined critical approaches and tend to adhere to specific methodological paradigms and preferences that reflect the ever changing modes of reading literary texts. In fact, one might argue that Grass's texts have been scrutinized using an array of analytical approaches that in their shifting emphases are indicative not only of the development of postwar literary criticism in (West) Germany, about which Boßmann (1997; 10–41) provides a brief sketch, but also of its evolution on an international scale. This evolution, which runs the gamut from sociologically oriented readings to Jungian and Freudian interpretations, from reader response theory to feminist critiques, from structuralism to poststructuralism, to mention only some modes of reading literary texts, may be perceived in terms of post-modernism and the heterogenous elements that it is thought to embrace.

While the critical literature addressing aspects of specific works of fiction will ordinarily be discussed in the individual chapters, in view of the considerable number of publications that deal with Grass's works in general, it is appropriate to provide in this introduction a somewhat cursory survey, in an attempt to outline the evolution of Grass criticism in very general terms.

Whereas sporadic critical notices about his work began to appear in the 1950s prior to the publication of *Die Blechtrommel*, it was the appearance of Grass's *magnum opus* that may be said to have opened the floodgates of comments and interpretations. Among the German-language publications, one of the first collections of essays entirely devoted to Grass was that by Heinz Ludwig Arnold (1963) in an issue of the periodical *Text + Kritik*. The issue has been frequently revised and updated and has stood the test of time. Other anthologies of scholarly writings addressing aspects of all or several of Grass's works in both German and English include those edited by A. Leslie Willson (1971), Manfred Jurgensen (1973), Rolf Geißler (1976), Ray Lewis White (1981) — a compilation of (excerpted) reviews published in the American press — Manfred Durzak (1985a), Rudolf Wolff (1985), Patrick O'Neill (1987c), who collected and edited both reviews and articles written in English, Gerd Labrousse and Dick van Stekelenburg (1992), Hans Adler and Jost Hermand (1996), and Hans Wisskirchen (2002). In addition, there are the anonymously edited conference proceedings from gatherings of Grass scholars in Poland (Anon., 1983; 1990) and a miscellany of articles in the journal *Sprache im technischen Zeitalter* (Ewert, et al. 1999) on the occasion of Grass having been awarded the Nobel Prize.

These collections of essays have been augmented by what may be somewhat indiscriminately termed general assessments — again, both in German and English — which usually take into account both the author's biography and his work and endeavor to appeal to the scholar as well as the general public. To varying degrees, the monographs by Kurth Lothar Tank (1965; rev. ed. 1974; English translation 1969), Norris W. Yates (1967), W. Gordon Cunliffe (1969), Wilhelm Johannes Schwarz (1969, rev. ed. 1971), Irene Leonard (1974), Keith Miles (1975), Hanspeter Brode (1979), Noel L. Thomas (1982), Ronald Hayman (1985), Richard H. Lawson (1985), the repeatedly augmented and reissued biography by Heinrich Vormweg (1986), and the volumes by Michael Hollington (1987), Alan Frank Keele (1988), Polish Grass scholar Norbert Honsza (1989, 1997), Ute Brandes (1998), and Dieter Stolz (1999, rev. ed. 2005), the introductory and pedagogically oriented survey by Theodor Pelster (1999), the very valuable — especially for English-speaking readers — monographs by Patrick O'Neill (1999) and Julian Preece (2001), and the biographically oriented study of Per Øhrgaard (2005), a translation from the Danish,

offer a wealth of information. The eminently useful discussion of Grass's works by Volker Neuhaus (1979, rev. ed. 1992) and Sabine Moser's introduction to Grass's novels and other narratives, which examines readings of individual works by various scholars (2000), provide compact analyses. In addition to that of Vormweg, further biographies are those by Neuhaus (1997), Olivier Mannoni (2000), and the two volumes published on occasion of Grass's seventy-fifth birthday by Michael Jürgs (2002) and Claudia Mayer-Iswandy (2002). Whereas Mayer-Iswandy's *Günter Grass* privileges literary analysis intended for a general audience, Jürgs places his emphasis on Grass the citizen rather than on Grass the writer.

The collections of essays, biographies, and general studies began to be augmented by works addressing specific aspects of a significant part of Grass's literary oeuvre; a considerable number of these monographs originated as dissertations, of which only those published will be considered here. Among the first of these investigations is that by Gertrude Cegl-Kaufmann (1975), which addresses, perhaps not surprisingly, the relationship of literature and politics in Grass's work. On the whole, she views this relationship as problematic — owing, for example, to the postulated correspondence between the deficits of political substance exhibited on the part of the social strata depicted on the one hand and the author's lack of theoretical knowledge as well as antipathy to theory on the other. Without doubt, her apparently harsh verdict was inspired by the new orientation of literary criticism that began to assert itself during and after the German student movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Almost thirty years later, Sabine Moser (2002) analyzed Grass's *Deutschlandbild* (view of Germany): according to her analysis, Grass saw Germany as a political entity with a disastrous history, and this is what made him reject (re)unification so vehemently, especially, as pointed out before, in *Ein weites Feld*. Timm Niklas Pietsch (2006) takes a somewhat novel approach, rejecting the charge that Grass had a theoretical deficit; he posits that the texts of Grass's political interventions form a significant, independent part of his work, even if they are closely related to his oeuvre.

Although addresses, essays, and interviews devoted to politics constitute a significant part of Grass's output and have attracted considerable attention, other approaches have by no means been neglected. Angelika Hille-Sandvoß (1987) concentrates on the interconnection of verbal and graphic images (*Bildlichkeit*) such as the (in)famous eel episode in *Die Blechtrommel*. After Ann L. Mason had devoted a study to Grass's *Conception of the Artist* (1974), Klaus Stallbaum (1989) explored in great detail Grass's concept of art and his ambivalent portrayal of the artist as both a member of society and an asocial human being. Grass's prodigious innovations in terms of narrative modes and perspectives, structures of syntax, and graphic detail have been researched by Renate Gerstenberg

(1980) who detects in the various narrator-protagonists' stance a shift from individualism to social responsibility and a democratic orientation. Norbert Rempe-Thiemann (1992) goes beyond the general consensus that the texts of the *Danziger Trilogie* form a coherent entity and argues in favor of a unity, based on common motifs, characters, and images, that includes all works of prose fiction from *Die Blechtrommel* to *Die Rättin* (1986; *The Rat*, 1987; see ch. 10). A further, linguistically oriented, study of Grass's prose style is that by Thomas Angenendt (1995) who in his analysis deviates from common practice by assigning a central position to *Aus dem Tagebuch einer Schnecke* (1972; *From the Diary of a Snail*, 1973; see ch. 6) but does take into account stylistic aspects such as unusual word formations, the lengths of sentences and their structures, and various rhetorical devices in texts that range from *Die Blechtrommel* to *Zunge zeigen*. Dieter Stolz (1994) provides a comprehensive analysis of Grass's poetry and establishes links between it and Grass's prose fiction.

Obviously, studies of a linguistic and stylistic bent use Grass's original texts and are primarily addressed to the reader with a command of German. But Grass's success abroad cannot be entirely explained in terms of his verbal dexterity and astounding inventiveness in the original texts; for the foreign reader the quality of the translation of specific works is of prime importance. There are comparatively few systematic studies that address the linguistic, cultural, and other difficulties translators of Grass's notoriously challenging prose face; apart from the collection of essays edited by Frielinghaus (previously referred to), the analyses by Janina Gesche (2003) and Pernilla Rosell Steuer (2004) provide insight into the taxing business of literary translation.

Although there are no comprehensive investigations of the translations of Grass's works into English, the American reception especially of his novels, which began with *The Tin Drum*, is fairly well documented as the aforementioned compilations of reviews by White and O'Neill as well as the surveys by Sigrid Mayer (1978), Patrick O'Neill (1987c, 1992), Siegfried Mews (1989, 1999), and the less comprehensive studies by Walter Ziltener (1982) and Thomas Schaller (1988) suggest. Moreover, the statistical tabulations by Henrik D. K. Engel (1997) reveal that the number of books and dissertations on Grass originating in the United States (and Canada) from 1960 to 1989/90 is second only to those written and published in the German-speaking countries and exceeds the number of published results of scholarly diligence in Great Britain and France by a considerable margin. Similarly, the quantity of essays in scholarly journals of the respective countries that explore Grass's works show a similar statistical relationship: the German-speaking countries account for a total of one hundred and seventy-six contributions, the USA and Canada for sixty, Great Britain for twenty-three, and France for

ten (see Engel, 257–59). To be sure, a purely quantitative analysis has to be supplemented by an exploration of the reasons why a specific author or work succeeds or fails in a foreign linguistic, cultural, and political environment. With regard to Grass, O’Neill (1987c, 1992) has offered the intriguing thesis that the decisive difference between the author’s reception in the Federal Republic and the United States was, to a considerable extent, motivated by German objections of a political nature, whereas critics in the United States, less attuned to the specifics of (West) German politics, relatively quickly proceeded to promote Grass to the status of a “world author” unfettered and untroubled by the business of politics (O’Neill 1992c, 283; see also ch. 1) — in short, in the United States aesthetics supposedly triumphed over mundane matters such as public engagement.

True, the thesis seems persuasive with regard to the *Tin Drum* and, for that matter, with regard to the entire *Danzig Trilogy*. However, as I (1999) have argued, and as the following chapters will bear out, the dichotomous view expressed in the title of a 1977 Grass interview, “Im Ausland geschätzt — im Inland gehaßt” (WA 10:206–15; Appreciated Abroad — Hated at Home) does not take into account the gradually shifting perception of Grass on the part of the American press, which is attributable to factors such as the author’s increasingly negative view of official US policy, particularly during the Vietnam War, a view that found literary expression in *Örtlich betäubt*. The author’s propensity for expounding his negative assessments, which, he insistently reiterated, should not be confounded with Anti-Americanism, in American media or before American audiences during his fairly frequent visits to the United States did not contribute to improving his image.

A case in point is Grass’s appearance at the PEN congress in January 1986 in New York City, at which he sharply criticized American Nobel laureate Saul Bellow. Bellow had praised the concept of the “American Dream” and thereby, according to Grass, glossed over the social discrepancies in the United States by taking the side of the establishment. Grass’s attacks elicited sharp rebukes and were denounced as “decidedly unliterary denunciations of western capitalism and the American way of life” (Grove 1986). Although there are some parallels in the reception of Grass’s works in both Germany and the United States, it is ultimately the question of whether specific American concerns are addressed that provides a clue to the degree of acceptance or rejection of the German writer’s fiction. Thus Americans, who were generally favorably disposed towards German (re)unification, did not devote much attention to Grass’s pronounced opposition to this historical event; they were able to gather the author’s stance from a small volume of essays entitled *Two States — One Nation?* published in October 1990, after united Germany had

become a *fait accompli*. The volume included his lecture “Writing after Auschwitz” (1990), in which Grass argued that the legacy of Auschwitz precluded any desire to achieve national unity — a position that met with severe censure in Germany. This censure was exacerbated by the publication of the anti-unification novel *Ein weites Feld* in 1995; the unusually long-delayed publication of the translation, entitled *Too Far Afield* (2000), came too late to reignite the debate in the United States. But what may be called an officious American view asserted itself on occasion of the award of the Nobel Prize in 1999. Although commentators in both the *New York Times* (Atlas 1999) and the *Wall Street Journal* (Heilbrunn 1999) acknowledged the literary merits of *The Tin Drum*, they attributed the fact that Grass was honored to the left-leaning tendencies of the Nobel Prize committee. In essence then, these commentators promulgated the view that literature and its authors should stay clear of politics — a point of view that novelist John Updike, who reviewed several of Grass’s prose narratives, repeatedly articulated. Conversely, Grass was extravagantly praised by novelist John Irving, albeit in the context of Irving’s review of *Headbirths*, surely not one of Grass’s major fictional accomplishments. Despite Grass’s continuing disagreements with official US policy, such as his support for the Red/Green coalition government of Chancellor Gerhard Schröder (1998–2005), which did not support the Iraq War, it is to be assumed that Grass’s reputation as the author of a brilliant first novel, which has served many critics as the yardstick with which to measure his subsequent fiction, will not be significantly tarnished by his controversial political views.

Part 1
Danzig, Center of the Universe

1: *Die Blechtrommel / The Tin Drum*

From *Die Blechtrommel* to *The Tin Drum*

ATTRAKTION UND ÄRGERNIS (ATTRACTIVENESS AND NUISANCE), the subtitle of Franz Josef Görtz's 1984 anthology of reviews of *Die Blechtrommel*, which appeared on occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of its publication, aptly summarizes the wide divergence and contradictory nature of critical opinion that Grass's first novel elicited. Although *Die Blechtrommel* is today acknowledged as the major work of postwar German literature, its present-day canonical status tends to obscure the decidedly mixed reactions it initially received. True, *Gruppe 47*, that most influential gathering of postwar West German literati, awarded Grass their prepublication prize for reading two chapters from the manuscript of the novel at their 1958 meeting, and the same year critics such as Joachim Kaiser, Marcel Reich-Ranicki, and Hans Schwab-Felisch took notice of an emerging, forceful talent. Upon publication of the novel, reviewers eagerly welcomed a fresh voice that signaled the beginning of a new phase of literary development almost fifteen years after the end of a disastrous war. For example, one commentator, who is identified merely by initials, avers that the epic construct of *Die Blechtrommel* can be compared only to Thomas Mann's *Buddenbrooks*, a novel published in 1901 (hlg 1959). Conversely, among the more than 160 reviews, not all of which are included in Görtz's anthology, there are several that express an unrelentingly negative view. For instance, one physician-turned-critic engages in a pun to voice his disdain — he changes the *Blechtrommel* (tin drum) of the title to *Brechtrommel* (a drum that causes one to vomit) — and warns his readers against the supposedly inferior work because of its voyeuristic, obscene, and blasphemous ingredients (Müller-Eckhard 1959). One of the more conspicuous examples of explicit and officious disapproval of the novel was provided by the city of Bremen: in 1959 the Bremen Senate decided to override the unanimous recommendation of an appointed panel to award Grass the literary prize of the city. The entire affair is amply documented in Arnold and Görtz's *Günter Grass — Dokumente zur politischen Wirkung* (1971, 263–81). By 1965 Grass had been the defendant in some forty lawsuits brought against both *Die Blechtrommel* and *Katz und Maus*, and in the same year a religious youth organization in the Rhenish

city of Düsseldorf, the locale of book 3 of *Die Blechtrommel*, publicly burned the novel (O'Neill 1992, 278). These initiatives on the part of opponents demonstrate clearly that the novel was a phenomenon that could not be confined to the niche ordinarily reserved for literary matters; rather, it assumed considerable significance in public discourse.

The influential professor of literature Walter Höllerer (1922–2003), whom Grass was later to memorialize in *Im Krebsgang* (2002; *Crabwalk* 2003) as someone who “captivated the overflowing crowd in the lecture hall with his piercing birdlike voice” (CW, 27), tends to draw attention in his reviews (1959a; 1959b) to the strengths of *Die Blechtrommel* — as did other critics, including Kurt Lothar Tank (1959) — and pave the way for its subsequent favorable reception. Perhaps with the major exception of Günter Blöcker (1959), who in his review for the conservative *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* detects in the novel a program for a highly entertaining nihilism, perceptive critics point to the directions in which scholarship eventually was to proceed. For example, Joachim Kaiser (1959) in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* directs attention to Grass's depiction of the relationship between the lower middle class and the Nazi dictatorship (56), and Hans Magnus Enzensberger (1959) in his seminal, widely cited review emphasizes Grass's use of traditional elements of the classical *Entwicklungs-* and *Bildungsroman*, terms often used interchangeably. In addition, he notes as a positive feature the absence of the demonic — a category that precludes rational analysis — in the portrayal of Nazism (66) and perceptively observes that the precondition of the city of Danzig entering the realm of German literature was its irretrievable loss.

Despite Görtz's (1984a) laments that reviewers of *Die Blechtrommel* were at least partly to blame for the long-lived clichés about Grass as an author of unfettered imagination, unlimited story-telling skills, excruciating attention to detail, pronounced aversion to modernistic, experimental narrative forms, and preference for traditional narrative modes (10–13), there is no denying the fact that, as Görtz acknowledges (10), these reviewers helped shape the public's perception of an author who was going to dominate the postwar literary landscape. In his review of *Die Blechtrommel*, his first of a work by Grass, Marcel Reich-Ranicki (1960) singles out the author's alleged excessive garrulousness, tastelessness, and desire to shock his readers, but in a 1963 radio broadcast he partially retracted his negative assessment by blaming his errors of judgment on his stance as an “engaged” critic (in Görtz 1984a, 151–52) and admitted to his failure to grasp the significance of protagonist/narrator Oskar Matzerath — whose complexity he now reduced to an embodiment of “absolute inhumanity” (156).

Although the novel was not published in what was then the German Democratic Republic (GDR) until 1986, its first appearance did not go

entirely unnoticed there. In 1960 East German writer Hermann Kant hewed to aesthetic conservatism and declared the novel unfit to be called “art” on account of its depiction of repellent incidents. More than a quarter of a century later and approximately three years before the fall of the Berlin Wall, East German critic Ursula Reinhold (1986) took a somewhat more lenient view. She conceded that the novel had the potential to provoke the West German establishment but faulted Grass for harboring anticommunist prejudices and for parodying people’s serious quest for meaning because of his own inability to grasp historical processes. In looking back from the perspective of 1996 at the early West German reception of *Die Blechtrommel*, Jost Hermand (1996) observed that, owing to the prevailing postmodern condition of optional — or arbitrary — aesthetic standards in the 1990s, it was difficult to imagine that a literary work could have caused such a violent reaction — an observation that does not take into account that not all parts of the world had been affected by *fin-de-siècle* postmodernism. It can be seen that the reception of literary works depends to a considerable extent on the cultural context within which they are received. The fact that in the 1950s and early 1960s most members of the West German reading public were clinging to a comparatively stable and widely accepted aesthetic, adhering to conservative ideological norms and cherishing an interest in “high” culture, provides a partial explanation for the vehement response to Grass’s first major work.

The publication of *The Tin Drum*, in Ralph Manheim’s translation, in the United States in February 1963 was widely noticed on account of the acclaim and criticism that the novel had received in Europe. (Wilhelm Johannes Schwarz, 88–89 et passim, provides a brief survey of the initial reaction to the French translation in his 1969 study.) Among the critics who had informed American readers about the publication of the German original was Höllerer with his “Letter from Germany” (1960). The “flood of reviews” (O’Neill 1992, 279) was characterized by the same polarization of opinion that had greeted the German original. But, as the previously cited Patrick O’Neill indicates, there was one decisive difference not counting questions involving the quality of the translation: in the Federal Republic the objections raised were in part motivated by political reasons; reviewers in the United States, largely unfamiliar with the specific issues that German critics responded to, “very quickly elevated [Grass] to the essentially depoliticized status of a ‘world author’” (283).

The considerable scope of critical assessments of *The Tin Drum* is evident from Ray Lewis White’s compilation (1981). White provides excerpts from sixty-three reviews from publications ranging from those with a national circulation (for example, *Time*, *New York Times*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *Saturday Review*) on the one hand to newspapers with a

limited local appeal (such as the Hickory, NC, *Record*) on the other. White's anthology is more inclusive than Sigrid Mayer's 1978 survey of Grass's American reception, in which she refers to approximately two dozen reviews (151) of *The Tin Drum*, and more useful than either Walter Ziltener's (1982) or Thomas Schaller's (1988) narrowly focused and arbitrarily selective reception studies. In my article "Im Ausland geschätzt?"— Zur Grass-Rezeption in den USA" (1999), I trace Grass's fortunes in the United States and emphasize the central role of *Die Blechtrommel*; Orville Prescott, who reviewed the novel for the *New York Times*, voices both his appreciation ("brilliant") and censure ("very repulsive") of the "picaresque novel," as he called it. He judges the work in traditional terms and faults it for lacking a "modicum of restraint, selectivity and taste" (in White 1981, 3–4). Sigrid Mayer (1978) points out that, in contrast to some of the German comments mentioned above, the critical notices in American publications are rarely unrelentingly negative. However, American critics encounter difficulties in their attempts to define the novel. While the review of *The Tin Drum* together with Heinrich Böll's *Billiards at Half-Past Nine* and Uwe Johnson's *Speculations about Jacob*, which appeared in *Time* magazine (1963) under the title "The Guilt of the Lambs" (in White 1981, 2–3), establishes the thematic links of significant postwar works to the Nazi period, the search for stylistic criteria in and literary antecedents of Grass's novel proves to be more elusive. There is no unanimity as to whether the novel should be called fantastic, romantic, expressionistic, surrealistic, grotesque, absurd, realistic or quasi-naturalistic or, for that matter, whether it was inspired by Rabelais, Grimmelshausen, Goethe, Thomas Mann, Swift, Sterne, Melville, Joyce, Beckett, Nabokov, Faulkner, or Dos Passos (S. Mayer, 152). The considerable number of assumed literary progenitors, however, suggests that critics believed that with this, his first novel, Grass had arrived in the premiere league of fiction writers. In his 1963 review John Simon coins the phrase "The Drummer of Danzig," which emphasizes the importance of both protagonist/narrator Oskar and his Danzig environs as constitutive components of the novel and establishes *The Tin Drum* as the critical yardstick by which Grass's subsequent works are to be judged. Simon praises Grass's "linguistic superabundance," but he is critical of Manheim's translation (Sigrid Mayer also addresses the appropriateness of Manheim's English renderings in her 1976 essay). Furthermore, he calls the novel "a spectacular achievement" and a "German approximation" of that "quintessential modernist novel, James Joyce's *Ulysses*" (26). *The Tin Drum* remained on the bestseller list of the *New York Times* for three months and sold almost four hundred thousand copies during the years 1963 and 1964 (S. Mayer 1978, 153) — surely a propitious beginning for Grass's reception in the United States.

Oskar, “Enigma” and/or “Monster”

Reviews of the novel were gradually supplemented and replaced by more substantive and specialized scholarly articles and monographs as well as dissertations — many of which eventually found their way into print. Not surprisingly, critics tend to focus on the figure of Oskar because of his commanding presence in the events he retells via his drum and photo album. The considerable volume and range of critical opinion cannot be discussed exhaustively here; frequent reference to Oskar will be made in subsequent sections of this chapter. According to Volker Neuhaus (1982, rev. ed. 1988, 121), hardly any other figure in world literature has elicited as much venomous comment as Oskar. To be sure, the text of the novel provides support for condemning Oskar; for instance, Maria, incensed about Oskar’s approaching her with the seductive fizz powder shortly after he surprised her and his putative father Alfred Matzerath during their tryst on the living-room sofa, calls him a “loathsome pig, a vicious midget, a crazy gnome, that ought to be chucked in the nuthouse” (*TD*, 290). But in contrast to some reviewers’ unenthusiastic assessments, Hans Mayer’s exceedingly negative characterization of Oskar (1967) as a “wicked imp [who] presents himself to the reader in the guise of an ugly and awful villain” and lacks “human” qualities (in H. Mayer 1971, 195) is not motivated by moral condemnation; rather, Mayer intimates that the prevalence of “psychotics, fools, criminals, monsters, artists of all kinds” in the novel of the mid-twentieth century seems to “imply something about the condition of a society” (199). Theodore Ziolkowski (1969) elaborates on Mayer’s implication and states that Oskar, who begins his narrative with the unsettling admission: “GRANTED: I AM an inmate of a mental hospital” (*TD*, 15), embodies a trend in contemporaneous German literature. The protagonist, in the immediate postwar period most likely a returning soldier or *Heimkehrer* — as, for example, in the early fiction of Böll — has turned into a mental patient. By their choice of setting, such works as *Die Blechtrommel*, Friedrich Dürrenmatt’s *Die Physiker* (1962; *The Physicists*, 1964), and Peter Weiss’s *Die Verfolgung und Ermordung Jean Paul Marats* (1964; *The Persecution and Assassination of Jean-Paul Marat*, 1966) offer a troubling perspective, in that the insane asylum appears as normal and the outside world as abnormal. Ziolkowski acknowledges that *Die Blechtrommel* makes a valid contribution to the representation of history and credits Grass with a “brilliant move” in that he “has reversed the historical process: his hero moves symbolically back from the world of the grotesque through the madhouse to the everyday world” (357).

Alan F. Bance (1967) considers Oskar an “enigma” who has the potential of becoming “a new archetype of Western fiction” (147). Oskar’s

“dwarf stature reflects the immaturity and dwarfed morality of society” (151), and his attempt to grow in the chapter “Should I or Shouldn’t I?” (book 2) parallels the fate of Germany, a country that, after engaging in destructive “games,” is forced to face the reality of the postwar years (Bance expresses similar opinions in his 1980 contribution on *Die Blechtrommel*). Bance’s view of Oskar as a representative character — albeit not an allegorical figure — appears to anticipate Robert Maurer’s early warning (1968) against “equating Oskar totally with either a resurrected Christ or a contemporary Germany; with either the Artist as Young Dwarf or modern man pursued by Satanic forces and guilt” (102) because such one-sided explanations, albeit not entirely without merit, can hardly do justice to the complex figure of Oskar.

But for W. Gordon Cunliffe (1969) Oskar “serves as a substitute for Hitler” (76), and critic Peter Michelsen (1972) perceives Oskar as a quasi-mythological, virtually inhuman “monster.” Irene Leonard (1974) implicitly ignores such readings and states that the Oskar of books 1 and 2 “represents a sane element in a crippled society” (13). She continues: “Oskar’s resumed growth possibly symbolizes Germany’s coming of age” but cautions that Oskar’s “diseased back” may “signal the resurgence of tendencies opposed to a genuine German liberation” (17). In a more encompassing vein, Keith Miles (1975) posits that Oskar, “the satirist, the clown, the picaro, the innocent, the secular Messiah, the practitioner of black arts, the folklore dwarf and the autobiographical figure,” is essentially a “historian” whose “challenging task” consists of writing “a report on the character and history of the German people in the twentieth century” (82). John Reddick (1975), who devotes an entire chapter of his book on the *Danzig Trilogy* to “the Meaning of Oskar,” reiterates that “the figure of Oskar Matzerath . . . is unquestionably paramount in the novel,” because he not only “combines the two outward roles as narrator-cum-protagonist, but is also compounded inwardly of two distinct personae” (58). These two personae are that of the “principled, cerebral, and, above all, detached” picaro (63) and that of what Reddick calls the “Tears’ Persona” (63). The latter begins to assert itself “soon after Oskar’s recommencement of growth” (73) and expresses itself in “Oskar’s forlorn attachment to his mother, [and] his vain longing to have his love for Maria returned” as well as in his pervasive sense of guilt, a “recurrent motif” (77). Reddick also addresses the question of Oskar’s credibility, especially in view of the latter’s contradictory explanations concerning the key episodes of his jump or fall into the cellar in the chapter “Smash a Little Windowpane” (book 1) and his similarly voluntary/involuntary leap into Alfred Matzerath’s grave in the chapter “Should I or Shouldn’t I?” (book 2). In the end, Reddick suggests, Oskar’s behavior displays a “characteristic note of uncertainty and openness” (86).

Whereas Michael Hollington (1980) credits Oskar with being a “virtuoso exponent of multiple, complex personae” (45), H. E. Beyersdorf (1980) expands on Oskar’s unreliability as a narrator in that he “alters reality to suit his subjective conceptions of the moment” (130). Beyersdorf establishes various categories for Oskar’s artful deceit but does not reach any overarching conclusion. Reddick’s discovery in 1970 of the so-called *Urtrommel* versions in a closet of the Paris flat in which Grass composed *Die Blechtrommel* has spawned several publications on the genesis of the novel by Silke Jendrowiak (1979b), Reddick himself (1981), Detlef Krumme (1986, 19–27), Werner Frizen (1987a, 1987b), and Jochen Wittmann (1989). Most of these have had only a limited impact on the assessments of Oskar. Frizen (1991) points out that the *Urtrommel* does not support conclusions as to the precise origins of or model(s) for the figure of Oskar, because in the course of preparing the final, published version Grass radically changed his concept. He imposed, for example, a numerical symmetry on the novel that accentuates the analogy of personal story and general history. Thus Oskar’s narrated life span revolves around the beginning of the Second World War on 1 September 1939. Born at the beginning of September 1924, Oskar is fifteen at the outbreak of the war and ends his narration fifteen years later in 1952.

Neuhaus (1979, rev. ed. 1992), perhaps the most consistent defender of Oskar, uses Oskar’s own definition of genuine humanity, “childlike, curious, complex, and immoral” (*TD*, 80), to declare him to be one of the most humane characters in *Die Blechtrommel* because of his solidarity with the victims of society, notably Jewish toy merchant Sigismund Markus (56). Although the memorable figure of Oskar has lately been less intensely scrutinized than in the 1960s, events such as the production and screening of the film version of *Die Blechtrommel* and the publication of John Irving’s novel *A Prayer for Owen Meany* (1989) have served to revive scholarly debate, which, however, is not likely to result in a consensus. Despite a host of interpretations, there remains the possibility that Oskar will continue to remain somewhat of an enigma. As one critic puts it: “It remains a moot point whether the dwarfish ‘hero’ . . . should be regarded as a mirror of his times or an abnormal, distorted caricature, or both” (Ireland 1990, 341–42).

In her investigation of the image of childhood in “literary presentations” (30) of the Third Reich, Debbie Pinfold (2001) proposes that Grass has joined the trend set by others, not only destroying the myth of the good child but also creating a new myth embodied by the “Kind-Dämon” or “Anti-Kind” who exhibits a distinctly hostile view of the adult world. Oskar is then evil, because he is a “pseudo-child with many adult attributes . . . whose very childish, self-centred attitudes parody those of contemporary adults” (90). The “pseudo-child” Oskar represents the

“idea of the innocent delinquent”; he assumes the “apparent ignorance [and innocence] of childhood” in order to strike a pose of detachment from events that happen around him or in which he is involved, such as the *Reichskristallnacht* or the occurrences at the “The Polish Post Office” depicted in book 2, ch. 2. Therefore he is able to disclaim “*all* knowledge and responsibility” (147; my italics) — a categorical statement that would require some modification in view of Oskar’s genuine lament about Sigismund Markus’s death in “Faith, Hope, Love,” the last chapter of book 1 (see also Brode 1976). Although Pinfold concedes that Oskar does not function as “an embodiment of Nazi values” (148) — after all, he is in danger of becoming a victim of euthanasia — he certainly cannot (and does not) claim to be a resistance fighter (see Neuhaus 1982), and his motivation for disrupting the Nazi rally is of an “aesthetic” rather than a political nature (Pinfold, 149). In conclusion, Pinfold poses the question of why Oskar, in his function as narrator “an extremely elusive entity” (151), goes to such great lengths “to blacken his childhood persona” (153) and speculates that it is perhaps a strategy to invoke sympathy for Oskar, the (adult) narrator — even though Oskar the child is hardly the “monster” portrayed by other critics.

Bildungsroman, Picaresque Novel, *Künstlerroman*?

From the very beginning, Grass criticism clearly had an international dimension, in that the publication of *The Tin Drum*, as indicated above, was a literary event that attracted considerable notice outside the German-speaking countries. One of the first scholarly endeavors, by William P. Hanson (1963), explores the relationship between “Oskar, Rasputin and Goethe.” This relationship, in the words of Oskar a “conflicting harmony . . . [that] was to shape or influence my whole life” (*TD*, 90), is one of the key elements seized upon by those critics eager to relate the novel to the tradition of the *Bildungsroman*. Hanson identifies “Rasputinism” as a central feature that served Grass as the object of social criticism, and he concludes unconvincingly that *The Tin Drum* constitutes an “effort to harmonize violent opposites which is such a characteristic feature of German literature as a whole” (32). Henri Plard (1963) in his spirited, essayistic “defense” of *Die Blechtrommel*, in which he takes issue with previous critics’ assumed misperceptions, implicitly modifies Hanson’s thesis. He argues that, despite his wavering between Rasputin and Goethe, Oskar’s desire for harmony is undermined by his prevalent black humor, which parodies the classical *Bildungsroman* in the tradition of Goethe. In this tradition, the harmonious, humanistic development of the youthful protagonist is of central significance. The “copiously illustrated thick volume entitled *Rasputin and Women*” (*TD*, 90), from which Oskar

derived his notions about the primitive monk and “athletic faith healer” (*TD*, 92) at the czar’s court, has been identified by Jean-Marie Valentin (1982) as *Der heilige Teufel: Rasputin und die Frauen* (1927; *Rasputin, the Holy Devil*, 1928) by René Fülöp-Miller (that is, Philipp Jakob Müller). Eberhard Mannack (1982) goes beyond Hanson in maintaining that Fülöp-Miller’s widely read book encouraged an uncritical reception that catered to the irrational tendencies in the lower middle class to which the Nazis appealed. At the same time, Oskar may have derived the notion of the reincarnation of the savior — in the case of Rasputin a primitive, but mesmerizing seducer — from Fülöp-Miller. This reincarnation was not confined to the religious realm as in Oskar’s trying to pass himself off as Jesus; rather, in assuming a religious role, Oskar merely mimicked another seducer who claimed to be a savior, that is, Adolf Hitler. The apparent dualism between Rasputin and Goethe, “the man of the Enlightenment” (*TD*, 91), is less conclusive than Oskar initially avers: death, fear, and superstition are also to be found in Goethe’s *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* (1809; *Elective Affinities*, 1963), another text that Oskar cites frequently.

Some critics allude to or specifically mention the fact that *Die Blechtrommel* conforms in several respects to the generic characteristics of the picaresque novel, which had emerged as a distinct genre in sixteenth-century Spain following the fame of the anonymous *La vida de Lazarillo de Tormes* (ca. 1554; *The Life of Lazarillo de Tormes*, 1908) and had found imitators in many European countries, among them Alain-René Lesage’s *Histoire de Gil Blas de Santillane* (1715–35; *The Adventures of Gil Blas*, 1807), Hans Jakob Christoffel von Grimmelshausen’s *Der abenteuerliche Simplicissimus* (1669; *The Adventures of a Simpleton*, 1912), and Henry Fielding’s *The History of Tom Jones, A Foundling* (1749). In a November 1970 interview with Heinz Ludwig Arnold, Grass explicitly acknowledged his indebtedness to the European tradition of the picaresque novel in general and to Grimmelshausen in particular (in H. L. Arnold 1963, 5th ed. 1978, 6). The first, fairly comprehensive attempt to analyze *Die Blechtrommel* in terms of the picaresque novel is Willy Schumann’s 1966 article on the return of the picaresque, in which he cites Thomas Mann’s *Bekenntnisse des Hochstaplers Felix Krull* (1954; *Confessions of Felix Krull, Confidence Man*, 1955) as another conspicuous example of the revival of the genre in postwar German letters. Schumann deals with a number of traits to demonstrate Oskar’s affinity to the picaresque tradition, notably his status as a conspicuous outsider — a status that is emphasized by his confinement in a mental hospital — who tells his life story (including his prenatal existence) by looking back from the vantage point of his “white-enameled, metal hospital bed” (*TD*, 15). Further picaresque traits include Oskar’s voyeurism and the bawdiness of his depictions of sexual en-

counters; disapprovingly Schumann remarks that this practice borders on the pornographic (472). Schumann concedes that despite Oskar's travels to France with Bebra's theater troupe in the chapters "Bebra's Theater at the Front" and "Inspection of Concrete" (book 2), he does not entirely meet the requirements of a picaresque "peripatetic antihero" (469), since his existence until the end of the Second World War is firmly rooted in Danzig. The limits of Schumann's approach become evident when he interprets Oskar's use of the fiber rug (see Just 1972) and his assumption of the role of Christ (see Friedrichsmeyer 1965) primarily as efforts to disguise himself. Schumann's conclusion that the return of the picaresque novel, in which Oskar is assigned the function of passive recorder of events, can be attributed to the general lack of religious and ideological (*weltanschaulich*) direction after a devastating war lacks specificity concerning the novel's appeal. To be sure, in 1966 Schumann could not have known that Grass was going to return to Grimmelshausen twenty years after *Die Blechtrommel* and establish an explicit parallel between the end of the Thirty Years' War and that of the Second World War in *Das Treffen in Telgte* (1979; *The Meeting at Telgte*, 1981; see ch. 8).

In a slender volume Wilfried van der Will (1967) follows in Schumann's footsteps and analyzes the metamorphoses of the picaresque in works of Thomas Mann, Alfred Döblin, Bertolt Brecht, and Grass. In his short segment on *Die Blechtrommel*, van der Will stresses in particular Bebra's role as mentor. Bebra not only initiates Oskar via a ritualistic kiss on his forehead in the scene at the circus (*TD*, 115); he also serves as Oskar's companion during the latter's foray into the world during his engagement entertaining the troops in France. As a "modern iconoclast" (66), Oskar is impervious to ideologies; as he remarks about his disruption of the Nazi rally, depicted in the often-quoted chapter "The Rostrum" (book 1), he also created turmoil at gatherings of "Reds and Blacks" and even "Boy Scouts" because "it was not only demonstrations of a brown hue that I attacked with my drumming" (*TD*, 124). Van der Will attributes to Oskar the desire for innocence that transcends both his own disillusionment and his disillusioning comments. Ultimately, van der Will ascribes the social satire in *Die Blechtrommel* to the partial identity of author and narrator, a claim contested by other critics, and the fact that Grass productively uses his own biography in a fictional text.

As early as 1967, Hans Mayer, here cited in translation (1971), dismissed the debate about the generic status of *Die Blechtrommel* as irrelevant; he declares Oskar to be a "grotesque artifice" (186) and "monstrosity" (194) fit for "neither the *Bildungsroman* nor the picaresque novel" (187). Mayer then engages in the "confrontation of two borderline cases" that represent the "highest sociability of the irresistible confidence man [Felix Krull] and the extreme lack of socialness [Oskar]"

(188). Their common bond is their existence as artists, evidenced by the “criminal and innate artistry of Felix Krull” (194) on the one hand, and Oskar’s tin-drumming (and, one might add, glass-shattering) activities on the other. H. Mayer’s cautionary note about the efforts to pin down *Die Blechtrommel* in traditional generic terms did not deter subsequent critics. Dietrich Droste (1969) offers suggestions for approaching Grimmelshausen’s *Der abenteuerliche Simplicissimus* and *Die Blechtrommel* in the classroom, and Rainer Diederichs (1971) characterizes both Oskar and Felix Krull as examples of the modern picaresque. Diederichs notes that Oskar is essentially a loner (*Einzelgänger*) who hails from the social milieu of the lower middle class and refuses to become a member of society (in books 1 and 2). He insists on his personal freedom, a freedom that he is able to enjoy under the guise of an ostensibly naïve but actually very clever three-year-old child, and rejects adherence to any and all ideologies. Oskar’s self-chosen position allows him to view his environment and the world of adults, their foibles, and their susceptibility to political slogans with a critical eye. Conversely, Oskar’s retarded growth prevents him from establishing meaningful relationships and gaining a foothold in middle-class life. Diederichs appears to be echoing Schumann when he seeks to establish the close relationship between the picaresque novel and the spiritual malaise of the postwar years. This malaise does not allow Oskar to hope for better times; he resigns himself to the meaningless repetitiveness of life. Even if Oskar does not formulate a moral in the traditional vein of the picaresque novel, Diederich’s claim that Oskar does not articulate the question of guilt is hardly valid in view of Oskar’s overpowering fear of the “Schwarze Köchin” (literally: black cook; translated by Manheim as “Black Witch”) at the end of the novel. Although the episodic character of the picaresque novel is less pronounced in *Die Blechtrommel*, the fact that the narrative is presented as a fictive autobiography may lend some credence to Diederich’s cautiously formulated conclusion that the presence of other generic patterns does not invalidate the claim that we are dealing with a modern specimen of an established novelistic genre.

Manfred Kremer (1973), who bases his article on the work of Schumann, van der Will, and other genre studies from the late 1960s and early 1970s, reiterates that one common element shared by Grimmelshausen’s and Grass’s novels is that they were written after destructive wars. He goes beyond his predecessors in pointing out that *Die Blechtrommel* tends to parody the picaresque novel rather than to naively imitate it (390). G. Richard Dimler (1975) analyses the picaresque novel tradition from a religious perspective. He sees the protagonists in Grimmelshausen’s and Grass’s works as “alienated heroes” in a triple sense: they are alienated from their environment, from themselves, and from

God. Surprisingly, Dimler surmises that Oskar overcomes his alienation and is united with Jesus at the scene of his arrest in Paris simply because he introduces himself to the detectives as Jesus in three languages (*TD*, 587).

The genre studies continued into the 1980s. Jürgen Jacobs (1983) opines that Grass's work is the most important example of the resurgence of the picaresque novel in postwar German literature and rejects attempts to classify it as either a *Bildungsroman*, a *Künstlerroman*, or a novel that shows the development of an artistically inclined individual who struggles to prevail against his bourgeois environment. In a speculative essay, Laurence A. Rickels (1985–86) situates Grass's work between the *Bildungsroman* and the picaresque novel and attempts to demonstrate the influence of Nietzsche. Hans Wagener (1988) bases his brief remarks about Oskar as a picaro primarily on Kremer (1973). Although the efforts to establish the literary predecessors of Oskar and to define the generic criteria of *Die Blechtrommel* are meritorious, perhaps they fall short in not sufficiently acknowledging, as Helmut Koopmann (1977) notes, Oskar's motivation in remaining a small child: to unmask the pronounced infantilism of an entire epoch (175).

Oskar's relationship to art and his status as an artist have been widely noticed. In her fairly detailed study, *The Skeptical Muse* (1974), Ann L. Mason considers Grass's "acute" problem to be how to define the "nature of the German artist and the form of his relationship to his society" (10), a problem that concerns not only Grass's "artist-figures" but the author himself — who has been attempting to suggest "parodic reevaluations" (10) of, for example, the genius cult. For Alexander Gelley (1967), Oskar is the "abstracted consciousness" of the novel and its "paradoxical, opaque, terrifying" spokesman, who, however, is not only the "teller of the tale but also its victim" (115, 122). In his 1967 essay, Idris Parry implicitly agrees with Gelley about Oskar's role as the "narrating consciousness" and the "arbiter of events." Specifically, Gelley perceives Oskar as an artist figure; without elaborating, he posits that the "nature of art itself" is "one of the most consistently elaborated themes" in the novel (122). Wesley V. Blomster (1969c) offers an intriguing glance at Oskar's artistic preferences. While critics usually praise Grass's attention to detail and historical accuracy, Blomster provides a corrective comment on an episode in the chapter "The Stockturn: Long-Distance Song Effects" (book 1), and, in a somewhat positivistic manner, faults Grass for not adhering to the actual date of the production of Richard Wagner's *Der fliegende Holländer* (1843; *The Flying Dutchman*, 1982) in 1939 as well as for taking considerable liberties with its libretto on occasion of the Matzeraths' and Jan Bronski's visit to the Opera-in-the-Woods at Zoppot, the "Bayreuth of the North," in the vicinity of Danzig. But Blomster credibly shows that the visit to Zoppot — which owing to

Oskar's glass-shattering intervention ends in utter chaos — serves Grass both to poke fun at bombastic grand opera and to parody Hitler's favorite composer by having the Wagner episode take place in “the summer of '33” (*TD*, 109), the year that marks the beginning of Nazi rule in Germany — albeit not yet in the Free City of Danzig.

While Oskar's rejection of Wagner is quite unambiguous, he is more equivocal about Wagner's contemporary Felix Dahn, whose monumental and immensely popular historical novel *Ein Kampf um Rom* (*A Struggle for Rome*, 1878) appeared in 1876, the same year in which the Bayreuth Festival opened, with the first production of Wagner's complete tetralogy, *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (1853; *The Ring of the Nibelung*, 1976). Oskar fondly calls Dahn's novel one of his “old standard works” (*TD*, 169) and identifies with the Byzantine general Narses, who defeated the Ostrogoths, because Narses was “undersized, a dwarf, a gnome, a midget” (*TD*, 319). It is then this identification that provides the main impetus for Oskar's critique of the death-defying nationalistic ideology that *Ein Kampf um Rom* conveys.

Manfred Durzak (1971b) rejects both the label of *Bildungsroman*, because Oskar's intellectual capacities are fully developed at birth, and that of picaresque novel, because Oskar leads a comparatively sheltered existence in the Matzerath family. To his family he appears as a three-year-old whose development has been arrested; actually, he is an “allegorical construction” (263) whose narrative is characterized by a high degree of reflexivity. Rather than dwelling on Oskar as an artist figure, Durzak discusses Oskar's teacher and mentor Bebra, a character who is not usually at the center of scholars' interest. Despite his warning about the advent of the Nazis when he first encounters Oskar in the circus, during the Second World War Bebra makes arrangements with them and entertains the German troops in France. He succeeds in continuing his career in postwar Germany and becomes boss of the West Concert Bureau that employs Oskar after he has resumed his drumming. After Bebra's death, Oskar inherits his business — but also the latter's guilt about remaining passive in the face of evil. Bernd Neumann (1985) endeavors to augment Durzak's approach by concentrating on those features that relate *Die Blechtrommel* to the subgenre of *Künstlerroman*. Neumann largely ignores books 1 and 2; instead he focuses on the postwar period and identifies Oskar as a representative of the “existentialist, skeptical” generation that came to the fore in the 1950s and, primarily via aesthetic means and via a quasi-Bohemian life style, expressed their unfocused opposition to the then emerging *Wirtschaftswunder* or “economic miracle” and its attendant materialistic orientation (49). As an artist and Bohemian Oskar both belongs to and opposes bourgeois society; as Bebra did before him, he experiences the problematic relationship between artist and

society. In making available his art to the postwar public for “the pure, resounding gold of the postwar period” (*TD*, 551), Oskar becomes dependent on the economic structure that sustains the production and distribution of art; as a result, his oppositional impulses are stifled.

Coming to Terms with the Nazi Past; the Role of History

Dirk Grathoff (1970) contends that scholars have tended to concentrate on formal and aesthetic aspects of the novel. Yet in his short and rather general article Derek van Abbé (1969–70) is one of the first critics to establish an explicit connection between the novel and the so-called *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, the postwar endeavors to come to terms with the Nazi past. These endeavors he attributes to the beginning preoccupation with both the literary and political past by a younger generation of writers and intellectuals. Indeed, the 1970s saw the appearance of a number of studies of *Die Blechtrommel* that reflected the new orientation of literary criticism promoted by members of the post-Nazi generation who had been exposed to or participated in the (West) German student movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s. The students’ efforts to reform both academia and society at large eventually affected the institution of literary criticism, which in the first two decades of the postwar period had been dominated by the methodological approach of the close readings of texts — a method termed *werkimmanent*. This critical practice tended to regard texts as aesthetic constructs that were divorced from the various facets of their social context, especially their modes of production, distribution, and reception. In a radical departure from traditional modes of literary interpretation, in the late 1960s younger critics began to view literary works in a fashion that stressed the dependency of cultural systems and products on social structures and on socioeconomic conditions. As a corollary of this development, critical emphasis shifted from the producer of literary works and the texts’ intrinsic structures to their communicative value and their recipients.

One of the first works written under the auspices of reception theory (*Rezeptionsästhetik*) is that by Georg Just (1972; see also Just 1973). Just bases his study of *Die Blechtrommel* on the work of reception theorists Hans Robert Jauß and Wolfgang Iser as well as that of Jan Mukarowski, a structuralist and member of the Prague School, and analyzes the problem of the novel’s intended critical effect. Just sees the contrast between Oskar and the world of adults in the novel as the principle that is also operative in the constellation of reader and work, that is, the novel’s portrayal of the pervasive mentality of the lower middle class. The prevailing attitude

among the novel's readers constitutes, in Jauß's terminology, their horizon of expectations (*Erwartungshorizont*). The readers' horizon of expectations conflicts, however, with Oskar's narrative stance (which Just discusses in considerable detail), which has the function of criticizing and unmasking the world he describes. Furthermore, although Oskar structures his narrative according to the criteria of the *Bildungsroman*, he is basically a *Kunstfigur* (75), an artifice, and does not invite reader identification. In order to define Oskar's chief function, Just adopts the term *Verfremdung* (76), a key term of Brecht's theory of epic theater, that is variously translated as "alienation," "estrangement," or, in Russian formalist Viktor Shklovskii's use, "defamiliarization." In *Die Blechtrommel*, *Verfremdung* signifies the author's critical distance from his figure precisely because of Oskar's strangeness, a strangeness that invites a process of reflection on the part of the reader.

While Oskar is the major vehicle on the level of the aesthetics of effect (*Wirkungsästhetik*), Just chooses a two-pronged approach in analyzing those aspects of the novel that pertain to the aesthetics of representation (*Darstellungsästhetik*). He examines rhetorical devices, metaphors, symbols, leitmotifs, and, especially, objective correlatives such as the central motifs of the drum and Oskar's activity of drumming and the fiber rug in the chapter "On the Fiber Rug" (book 3), fizz powder in the chapter "Fizz Powder" (book 2), and the notorious eel episode in the chapter "Good Friday Fare" (book 1). The term "objective correlative" as coined by T. S. Eliot denotes a verbal formula referring to an object or sign that evokes a specific state of emotion at its occurrence and constitutes a complete congruence between object and emotion. Thus the fiber rug (re)kindles Oskar's desire for Sister Dorothea; similarly, the fizz powder is instrumental in Oskar's seduction of Maria Truczinski. In his extraordinary attention to *Dinge* (objects) that he endows with powers of their own (118), Grass radicalizes Eliot's concept. At the same time, the elevation of ordinary, trivial objects (fiber rug and fizz powder) to agents in sexual encounters, Just argues, denies the reader the sensation of titillation — hence the charge of obscenity, which presupposes the intent to titillate, is moot. The eel episode, which eventually leads to the death of Oskar's mother Agnes Matzerath, is more complex than the two other instances mentioned, but it is likewise indicative of Grass's arbitrary and startling use of objective correlatives. Since objective correlatives also function in the mediation of events from the political sphere, Just concludes that *Die Blechtrommel* is indeed a work that engages in social criticism.

However, Just assumed that Grass changed his authorial intent while writing the novel, with a resulting rupture in its structure. For this reason, in contrast to most other critics, he largely excludes book 3 from his discussion. He ultimately rejects the "existentialist" reading of Heinz Ide

(1968), which centers on the terrifying Black Witch, whose imminent arrival Oskar expects with great trepidation when the novel concludes. But Just concedes that there is a basic weakness in his analysis, in that his model of the aesthetics of effect in *Die Blechtrommel* is not applicable in the case of readers who ignore its ethical and critical function and prefer to regard it as a purely aesthetic construct.

Robert Leroy's book-length study of *Die Blechtrommel* (1973) is only marginally concerned with the aesthetics of effect and essentially provides a textual analysis in terms of the intrinsic approach suggested by Roman Ingarden's *Das literarische Kunstwerk* (1931; *The Literary Work of Art*, 1973). Nevertheless, Leroy acknowledges that the social background at the time of the novel's composition informs *Die Blechtrommel*, and he sharply rejects the hypothesis that book 3 is less successful or even superfluous. He singles out Oskar as the medium through which Grass articulates his criticism — a criticism that is directed against both pre- and post-1945 society. As the title of his 1975 essay indicates, Jürgen Rothenberg (see also Rothenberg 1976a) considers *Zeitgeschichte* (contemporary history) to be the constitutive element of the novel. He identifies Oskar's drumming as a sign of protest against the outbreak of the barbarism that becomes fully evident during the events of the organized burning of synagogues and looting of businesses owned by Jews on 9 November 1938 — euphemistically called the *Reichskristallnacht* (Crystal Night or Night of Broken Glass) — and he cites the case of trumpeter Meyn as an example of the perversion of values that was taking place with the ascent of Nazism. Meyn, who had turned from a communist sympathizer and a drunk into an SA man “of rigorous sobriety” (*TD*, 199), was charged with “inhuman cruelty to animals” because he tried to kill his four cats and was finally expelled from the SA “for conduct unbecoming a storm trooper.” Oskar sardonically remarks that even Meyn's efforts to redeem himself, his acts of “conspicuous bravery” (*TD*, 201) during *Kristallnacht*, could not save him from disgrace. Meyn's case serves to underline the corruption of the moral value system that punishes cruelty to animals but condones and encourages violence against fellow human beings, in this instance the Jews. According to Rothenberg, Oskar does not confine himself to acoustic protests; inasmuch as he regards his two putative fathers responsible for the political choices they made, he does not allow them to escape the consequences of their decisions but plays an instrumental role in their respective deaths. The fathers are, then, representative of an entire generation's failure to weigh the consequences of their political options. Rather than depicting a private rivalry between father(s) and son, Oskar's deeds underline the political dimension of the novel. In Rothenberg's persuasive reading, Oskar's decision to grow at the end of the war and his unsuccessful endeavor to assume the responsi-

bilities of an adult follows logically from the defeat of Nazi Germany. But the German people do not fully grasp the chance that *Stunde Null*, the zero hour, offers for a new beginning. In fact, Düsseldorf, the Rhenish metropolis where the Matzeraths find refuge (in book 3) after their expulsion from Danzig, epitomizes the business mentality of the “economic miracle” with its emphasis on material reconstruction and consumerism at the expense of probing the past, as Neuhaus (1991b) has shown.

In partial disagreement with Just (1972), Irmela Schneider (1975) stresses the mediation in narrative form of a specific historical-political context and focuses in sometimes heavy-handed Marxist diction on the structure of the novel: it encompasses the period from 1899 to 1953 — a period that in Schneider’s view is dominated by Nazism/Fascism. Thus book 1 (1899–1938) deals with the time before the advent of Fascism, which on account of Danzig’s status as a Free City did not hold full sway until the first major orchestrated eruption of violence against Jews during *Kristallnacht*. Book 2 covers the Second World War and the demise of Fascism (1939–45), and book 3 depicts the post-fascist era in postwar West Germany and the Federal Republic (1945–53). The importance Schneider attributes to the historical-political context is also evident from the fact that she “confronts” the fictive world of the novel with the ideology of Fascism and *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* as well as other background elements. Rather than trying to determine the novel’s adherence to strict mimetic principles, her aim is to explore the aesthetic structuring of the novel’s lower-middle-class personnel, their socio-economic status, their political and cultural activities, and so on. Only after elucidating these aspects does she discuss the narrative perspective that is determined by Oskar. Despite her disavowal of Just’s reception model, in the final analysis she also acknowledges that Oskar’s narration provides important impulses for the novel’s reception. For example, in her analysis of Oskar and Jan Bronski’s interaction in the chapter “The Polish Post Office” (book 2), Schneider skillfully points to the interdependence of private relations and politically significant events — in this instance the beginning of the Second World War.

In his brief essay, Josef Schnell (1975) states that *Die Blechtrommel* helps to enlarge and sharpen the perception of readers with regard to the historical period depicted, because the novel attacks their preconceived conceptions. Hanspeter Brode (1976; see also Brode 1977; 1979, 66–83) reads *Die Blechtrommel* as social history in fictional guise. While noting that the structure of the novel, in which the Second World War, flanked by the prewar and postwar periods, functions as the focal point, serves to emphasize the novel’s sociohistorical and sociopolitical aspects, Brode points out that it is not the only factor; he cites a number of other examples that reflect the interrelatedness of events in the domestic sphere

and at the front. Thus Oskar's luring Jan Bronski into the Polish Post Office corresponds to the beginning of the war, Oskar's seduction of Maria with the help of fizz powder signifies the occupation of France by German troops, his "bedroom triumphs" (*TD*, 306) in Mrs. Greff's flat are accompanied by the German invasion of the Soviet Union, and Alfred Matzerath's death signals the end of the Second World War. Oskar is then, according to Brode, an "allegory of the Nazi period" (88). At the same time, Brode turns Oskar into a "caricature of Hitler" (91) primarily on account of his drumming. Hitler was named "the drummer" because of his propagandistic skills and ability to influence the masses, but, as Neuhaus (1982, rev. ed. 1988, 51–53) justifiably objects, Oskar also uses his drum to disrupt Nazi rallies — even if he does not claim to be a "resistance fighter" (*TD*, 124). In addition, Oskar's special relationship with Sigismund Markus reminds him that he too is vulnerable, a potential victim of the Nazis' euthanasia program: "When they took away his [Oskar's] toy merchant and ransacked the shop, he suspected that hard times were in the offing for gnome-like drummers like himself" (*TD*, 203). Brode's reading is more convincing when he characterizes *Die Blechtrommel* as having been written to counteract the widespread tendency during the 1950s to indulge in a kind of amnesia and to suppress guilt feelings about the past and past complicity. It is thus the postwar (West) German reader — implied rather than actual — who is reluctant to remember the past that the novel addresses. Because Oskar does not participate in this general forgetfulness, Brode suggests that society has isolated him and declared him to be mentally incompetent. Such a contention is rather dubious in view of the fact that Oskar was confined because of his falsely assumed involvement in the murder of Sister Dorothea and that he will be released from the mental asylum at the end of the novel.

Brode — in contrast to Just (1972) — sees Maria, who has successfully suppressed all memories of the past and has become the quintessential representative of postwar consumerism during the "economic miracle" in the Federal Republic, as an embodiment of the type of reader whom the novel attempts to reach. It follows that Brode considers book 3 absolutely essential in that it provides an integral part of the narrative framing device. Oskar tells his story from his hospital bed as a warning against the pervasive inability to mourn that Alexander and Margarethe Mitscherlich decried in their *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern* (1967; *The Inability to Mourn*, 1975). In the "Onion Cellar" chapter of book 3, Grass satirically draws attention to this perceived emotional and affective deficit of postwar society (see also Sabine Richter 2004). Hence, according to Brode, *Zeitgeschichte* provides the focal point of *Die Blechtrommel*; it follows, he claims, that approaches concentrating on elements of the picaresque novel are ultimately wanting.

Less interested in the overt manifestations of *Zeitgeschichte*, Lore Ferguson in her 1976 interpretation, originally a 1967 dissertation, provides specific insights by means of elucidating the function of objects. These objects range from the skirts of Oskar's grandmother to his drum and include a host of other inconspicuous, insignificant "things" that, beyond their purpose to serve as illustrative details of everyday life, have the capacity to cause emotional responses but also highlight the characters' conscious or unwitting involvement in politics and history — as in the scene in which Alfred Matzerath tries to swallow the "party pin" (*TD*, 394). Heinz Hillmann (1976) poses the rarely articulated methodological problem of how literary scholarship, which prefers readings that at first glance seem *werkimmanent* but actually are dependent on implicit, psychologically, historically, and sociologically grounded comparisons, can test the veracity or probability of representations of "reality" in literary texts. Hillmann suggests the "confrontation" of literary text and the corresponding segment of reality via a comparison of literary text and social-science text. The latter presumably entails a higher degree of objectivity than the experience of "reality" as mediated via individual subjects. When compared to more encompassing analyses of Fascism, such as that by Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch, Grass reduces the motivation of members of the lower middle class — notably Alfred Matzerath and trumpeter Meyn — to join the Nazis to their frustration with a rather meaningless existence and their compensatory desire. Despite this apparently deficient and reductive procedure, Grass's choice of Oskar as narrator signifies a selective, subjective perspective that is circumscribed by his petit-bourgeois-cum-artist's horizon and does not aim at an inclusive representation of his world. In his emphasis on the assumption that literary texts "interpret" social reality (25) and in his tendency to privilege sociological investigations, Hillmann offers a prime example of the methodological shift that was taking place in the 1970s.

Elisabeth Pflanz's 1976 dissertation on the sexuality and sexual ideology of the first-person narrator in *Die Blechtrommel* is a forerunner of the feminist studies of the 1980s and 1990s on Grass's works by critics such as Barbara Garde (1988) and Claudia Mayer-Iswandy (1991). Pflanz suggests that, in contrast to the explicit or implicit assumptions of several reviewers, Grass's violation of bourgeois sexual norms and disregard of sexual taboos is not intended to establish emancipatory sexual practices that gradually evolved as a consequence of the student movement. Rather, Pflanz reasons, Grass's 1968 defense against the charges of blasphemy and pornography in the "Affaire Ziesel" (documented in Arnold and Görtz 1971, 303–27) and his invocation of the mimetic principle essentially serve to preserve patriarchal sexual morality. Despite engaging in some abnormal and even pathological features and practices, Oskar essentially

conforms to accepted moral norms. In contrast to Just's (1972) categorical rejection of Oskar as an identification figure, Pflanz stresses the "normalcy" of Oskar's sexual practices, which allows (male) reader identification. Yet in agreement with Walter Schönau's psychoanalytical approach (1974), Pflanz concludes that the reader has several options: morally condemning Oskar, emphasizing the aesthetic qualities of the novel, or acknowledging the existence of infantile sexual fantasies in him- or herself and seeking to come to terms with them.

Gegenwartsliteratur und Drittes Reich (Contemporary Literature and the Third Reich), the title of a collection of essays edited by Hans Wagener (1977), had clearly become a topic of interest even in mainstream Germanistik by the 1970s. In a substantial and repeatedly reprinted article Helmut Koopmann (1977) ignores reception theory and the construction of the reader. Instead he concentrates on Grass's achievement with regard to the literary analysis of Nazism in *Die Blechtrommel*: that is, his encompassing portrayal of the lower middle class as the social stratum that supported Hitler. Unlike Thomas Mann and other exiled writers, Grass dispensed with the demonization of Nazism or the suggestion of the German people's innate propensity for Nazi ideology — an argument that was about twenty years later insistently but unconvincingly advanced by Daniel Jonah Goldhagen in his *Hitler's Willing Executioners* (1996). Rather, Grass shows how Alfred Matzerath, fellow traveler par excellence "who espoused the forces of order at a relatively early date" (*TD*, 115), gradually succumbs to the lure of Nazi propaganda and the spectacle of the Nazi Sunday demonstrations in which he actively participates. Conversely, Oskar, as he explains in the chapter "The Rostrum" (book 1), has seen the rear of the rostrum and has become "immunized . . . against any magic practiced in any form whatsoever on rostrums" (*TD*, 119). Yet Oskar's sober observation and description of the rise of Nazism in Danzig does not induce him to seek an explanation for the causes of the Nazis' success beyond the world of the little people — both followers and eventual victims — that he so masterfully evokes. Although Grass tends to confine himself to the description of historical processes — rather than offering an explanation of their causes — in the milieu of shopkeepers and their ilk, he is, Koopmann argues, vitally interested in the legacy of Nazism and its potential for survival in the postwar period. This potential threat has continued to haunt Grass in subsequent works — and he did not always escape the temptation to use the topic of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in the service of party politics also in his fiction (see, for example, ch. 6).

In what amounts to a revisionist stance, Silke Jendrowiak (1979a) foregrounds the artistic qualities of the novel. She proceeds from the hypothesis that *Die Blechtrommel* served Grass as an aesthetically complex

vehicle for clarifying his own artistic and social views. Grass had begun developing these views in the late 1950s in an attempt to come to grips with his position as a then largely unrecognized artist, with his origins in the Danzig milieu of the lower middle class, and with his experience of National Socialism. Protagonist Oskar presents himself as an autonomous artist but instead turns out to be a complacent member of the lower middle class. His “hubris” is evident from the fact that his assumed autonomy is merely a peculiar form of conformity, and in his autobiography his actions appear governed by childlike play in book 1, youthful puberty in book 2, and the abortive endeavor to become a mature adult in book 3 (214). According to Jendrowiak, then, it is not a question of discovering parallels between author Grass and first-person narrator Oskar; rather, *Die Blechtrommel* constitutes Grass’s process of self-examination, which results in his bidding farewell to the dream of the autonomous artist who transcends his lowly origins (217). In doing so, Grass, in parodistic fashion, takes issue with postwar works that, in the manner of the *Künstlerroman* and, notably, Thomas Mann’s *Doktor Faustus* (1947; *Doctor Faustus*, 1948), tend to both demonize Nazism and extol the artist in the classical-romantic mold. Furthermore, Jendrowiak identifies Gottfried Benn as another of Grass’s targets. Benn, after his beginnings as an expressionist poet and a brief dalliance with Nazism followed by a kind of “inner emigration,” was celebrated in the postwar period as a supreme artist who strove for absolute values (see also ch. 14). She further asserts that the dominant ideology of *Gruppe 47*, generally credited with playing a decisive role in the rebirth of literature after the Second World War, turned out to be a hindrance to Grass’s development. After an abortive initiative to formulate a political agenda, many members reverted to the time-honored concept of the artist who proclaims universal truths from the ivory tower of individualism and intellectual elitism. Jendrowiak deviates from critics such as Just (1972) and Brode (1976) in postulating that Grass ultimately fails to provide a convincing socio-psychological explanation that would support his moral appeal to his German readers and enable them to productively reexamine their concept of art and history, because the model he provides — the close interrelationship between middle-class mentality and the artist on the one hand and middle-class mentality and Nazism on the other — proves to be insufficient.

Without referring to Jendrowiak (1979a) and without concerning herself with the problematics of the *Künstlerroman*, Judith Ryan (1983) engages in a fairly extended comparison of *Doctor Faustus* and *The Tin Drum*. She acknowledges Henry Hatfield’s 1967 “amusing parenthetical comment” about the “analogy” (Hatfield, 125) between the two novels and conceives of Grass’s work as “an answer” to that of Thomas Mann.