

THE MIGRANT VISION IN GÜNTER GRASS'S *THE TIN DRUM*

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“The telling of stories, the real telling, must have been before my time. I never heard anyone tell stories.”

- Rainer Maria Rilke, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*

Salman Rushdie once claimed that Günter Grass “is a figure of central importance in the literature of migration” (277). However, Rushdie’s assertion—more than a quarter of a century old—has not yet been given the attention it deserves, and the role of migration in Grass’s works is yet to be explored more methodically. This article, with its focus on *The Tin Drum* (1959), seeks to alleviate this neglect by examining the distinctive “migrant’s vision” (Rushdie 280)—that is, the *Weltanschauung* or world-view—that Rushdie sees underlying Grass’s work in general, permeating every aspect of his novels’ thematic framework and formal design.

The work of Grass is deracinated historiography, history written by the uprooted and the displaced. Grass’s novels are populated by migrant characters and thus deal thematically with issues of rootlessness, exile, memory, and nostalgia. In general, the novels are preoccupied with the impurities and transformations of personal, national, and cultural identity, and these identities “happen” in a historical time primarily characterized as chaotic and catastrophic and in a territorial space defined by collisions, hybridities, and segmentations. On the formal level the migrant vision can be detected in the novels’ hybrid language as Grass mixes Polish, Cassubian, and German just as his characters often speak specific dialects of those languages (a feature not always manifest in the English translations). The Grassian heteroglossia plays an important role in the novels’ intercultural constitution: The different languages relativize each other, and together they make up a contrapuntal space of divergent worlds and world views. In addition, the overall narrative form can be characterized as an expression of what Georg Lukács termed “the transcendental homelessness of

the idea" (121)—that is, the underlying migrant vision entails a literary form that has a dynamic and fluid character because unable to find conclusive rest in a transcendental home (e.g. God, the nation, marriage, or love).

However, this article concentrates neither on language nor on overall narrative form but on the enunciatory strategies with specific regard to the narrator's position and point of view in *The Tin Drum*. The principal question that this article will pursue is how the narrator contributes to the migrant vision in Grass's novels, and it will do so by first setting up a theoretical framework comprising Walter Benjamin and Theodor W. Adorno's reflections on the storyteller and the narrator, second by introducing other novelists' narrative strategies and thereby situating Grass within the historical traditions of the novel, and, third, by analyzing key passages in *The Tin Drum*.

Benjamin believed that storytelling was coming to an end during the period of modernity. It seemed to him as if we no longer possessed the ability to exchange experiences, which was due to the fact that the value of experience had decreased. When Benjamin looked at the contemporary and the nineteenth-century literary landscape, his eyes fell on writers such as Gustave Flaubert, the demolisher of the (Goethean) *Bildungsroman*, and Rainer Maria Rilke, who never heard anyone tell a story. In that light what Benjamin wrote in the mid-1930s about storytelling's demise does not seem far-fetched. To him, the story (as opposed to the novel) is characterized by a particular usefulness and wisdom, something that the storyteller is able to pass on to the listener because he knows how to give a practical advice or a morale. In short, the storyteller knows how to counsel: he knows how to tell a story in which the listener is able to sense the contours of a universal truth—moral or practical. Benjamin did not believe that this specific potential of storytelling is part of the novel's constitutive features because it no longer seemed possible to communicate the kind of counselling that characterizes the story: "The earliest indication of a process whose end is the decline of storytelling is the rise of the novel at the beginning of modern times. [...] The art of storytelling is nearing its end because the epic side of truth—wisdom—is dying out. However, this is a process that has been going on for a long time" (146).

At first glance, Grass seems to fit Benjamin's analysis, since the very act of narrating is problematic in his novels—as it is in many twentieth-century novels from Marcel Proust to W. G. Sebald. In *The Tin Drum* in particular, the fictional universe is never presented to the reader in a neutral and trustworthy way, and this means, as John Reddick observes, that "the reader can never approach the narrative with the concrete categories of belief or disbelief, but only with the fluid one of doubt" (82-83). In that sense, narration in Grass is far removed from both Benjamin's idea of the storyteller's transmission of certainty and Flaubert's ideal of "cool writing" and the neutral observer. Admittedly, it could be argued that Oskar inherits a certain coolness and distance in perspective from Flaubert, but he is definitely not neutral. He is never liberated from the "common condition" that circumscribes the novel's

characters as he is himself part of the story he narrates, and he cannot be said to conquer the impersonality and the equanimity of Flaubert's de-anthropomorphized narrator-god. Whereas the latter is present everywhere and visible nowhere, Oskar is present everywhere and visible all the time. Impartiality and non-intervention are replaced by partiality and intervention.

But narration in Grass is far removed from the technique of Rilke as well. It does in fact contradict Benjamin's diagnosis of the storyteller's demise. Oskar Matzerath is definitely a storyteller, although a problematic one, and stories are constantly being narrated in *The Tin Drum*: a storytelling narrator looks back upon the prewar years, the war years, and the postwar years, and despite the fact that Oskar's experiences have supposedly plunged into bottomlessness, he nonetheless attempts to communicate them to the reader. In spite of, or, perhaps rather because of, the fall of experience into bottomlessness, it is Grass's fervent belief that this experience must be saved. But it is, as we shall see, a salvation accomplished through other forms of expression and narrative modes than the ones Benjamin attaches to his concept of storytelling.

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In Adorno's essay on the narrator's position in the contemporary novel we come upon ideas close to Benjamin's: "The identity of experience in the form of a life that is articulated and possesses internal continuity—and that life was the only thing that made the narrator's stance possible—has disintegrated. [...] A narrative that presented itself as though the narrator had mastered this kind of experience would rightly meet with impatience and skepticism on the part of its audience" ("The Position of the Narrator" 30-31). If the narrator of the past (Benjamin's storyteller) was characterized by the ability to guide the listener, thereby presupposing the continuity and meaningfulness of his own life and life in general, the contemporary narrator's position seems to be impossible because of the general fragmentation of life. Adorno's analysis is based upon writers such as Franz Kafka, James Joyce, André Gide, Robert Musil, and the authors of the French *nouveau roman*. In that sense, Grass's novels could not be further removed from Adorno's description of the contemporary novel and the position of the narrator. The French *nouveau roman*, for example, is being candidly parodied by Grass in *The Tin Drum*, as we shall see.

Nevertheless, Adorno also provides us with the opening we need when he modifies Benjamin's complete separation of story and novel by actually granting the story a significant role in relation to the novel. He claims that the role of the narrator in the contemporary novel is above all characterized by a paradox: "it is no longer possible to tell a story, but the form of the novel requires narration" (Adorno, "The Position of the Narrator" 30). Adorno here admits to the crisis of traditional storytelling but at the same time stresses the necessity for narration's continuation, that is, for storytelling by other means. If we transplant this paradoxical narratorial situation to Grass, we observe that his narrators must narrate at any cost, and this in a most rambling and fabulating manner, often with guilt as their driving force. Telling stories becomes imperative, a life-saving and world-saving deed with moral implications, as this passage from the end of *Dog Years* (1963), Grass's second novel, exemplifies: "Keep going!

As long as we're telling stories, we're alive. As long as stories keep coming, with or without a point, dog stories, eel stories, scarecrow stories, rat stories, flood stories, recipe stories, stories full of lies and schoolbook stories, as long as stories have power to entertain us, no hell can take us in" (*Dog Years* 575).

The Grassian storyteller's counsel and advice clearly do not point towards any Benjaminian wisdom of certainty, though. The stories may have a point, but they may just as easily be without any point. So, instead of promoting Benjamin's wisdom of certainty, I will argue that Grass's narrators stage what Milan Kundera in regard to the genre of the novel has called "the wisdom of uncertainty" (*Art of the Novel* 7). To Kundera, this attribute is only apparently oxymoronic and self-contradictory; in fact, the wisdom of uncertainty represents nothing less than the highest value of the genre of the novel. In the case of Grass, Rushdie even sees a direct link between a propensity for an aesthetics of uncertainty and his personal experience of migration:

What Grass learned on his journey across the frontiers of history was Doubt. Now he distrusts all those who claim to possess absolute forms of knowledge; he suspects all total explanations, all systems of thought which purport to be complete. Amongst the world's great writers, he is quintessentially the artist of uncertainty, whose symbol might easily have been the question mark if it were not the Snail. To experience any form of migration is to get a lesson in the importance of tolerating other's points of view (Rushdie 280).

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Rushdie helps us to specify what the wisdom of uncertainty more concretely means when he speaks of doubt, tolerance, the question mark, and of the distrust of absolute forms of knowledge, total explanations, and complete systems.

Benjamin may be partly right in proclaiming the end of the story and the storyteller—Flaubert, Rilke, and Kafka each in their own way support him—but he is also partly wrong, because the story and the storyteller seem to survive in different cloaks—Joseph Conrad, Karen Blixen, and Grass bear witness to this. Storytelling or no storytelling, we have moved from the story as the wisdom of certainty to the novel as the wisdom of uncertainty. The point is that the novel's wisdom of uncertainty is often generated through its storytelling potential and through the narrator as storyteller, and if the inter-war years generally can be said to mark a decline in storytelling and "traditional" narrative, it seems reasonable to speak of a return of the narrative during the second half of the twentieth century in authors such as Grass, Gabriel García Márquez, and Rushdie.

Kundera, whose novels frequently offer a narrative voice whose presence is strongly felt by the reader, has also reflected upon the relationship between story and novel. According to him, "narration as it exists since the dawn of time became the novel when the author was no longer content with a mere 'story' but opened the windows onto the world that stretched all around" (*The Curtain* 153). With the novel, the author thus becomes an architect who sets out to construct a building consisting of not one but several storylines, and of episodes, descriptions, observations, and reflections as well. This new and highly composite form is a result of the heterogeneity

and complexity of the material that confronts the author (Kundera sees this process inaugurated by Rabelais and Cervantes), and this is something that naturally emphasizes the novel's propensity for the wisdom of uncertainty. So, whereas Benjamin bemoaned modernity's complicity in the downfall of traditional storytelling, both Kundera and Lukács choose to celebrate modernity's role in bringing about the genre of the novel which they both characterize as the most adequate formal expression of modernity's fragmentary, restless, and ambiguous nature.

To Benjamin, the invention of the print caused the separation of the novel from its original affiliation with oral storytelling. The truth is that the novel has been persistently inspired and informed by an oral dimension. Along with Grass, I have already mentioned Conrad, Blixen, García Márquez, and Rushdie as twentieth-century "oral novelists," but authors such as Rabelais, Cervantes, Sterne, and Diderot prove, I believe, that the history of the novel includes storytellers and oral novelists. Seemingly in line with Benjamin, Peter Brooks has argued that the nineteenth-century novel appears to be "fully aware that it is a purely bookish phenomenon, dependent on the new industrial processes of printing and distribution" (Brooks 76). Here Brooks characterizes the nineteenth-century novel, by and large, by literacy as opposed to orality. Another way to put it is to say that the reader—instead of occupying the role of listener as in narratives with an oral quality—is transformed into a spectator. Consider, for example, Émile Zola's opening lines in *Germinal* (1885): "Over the open plain, beneath a starless sky as dark and thick as ink, a man walked alone along the highway from Marchiennes to Montsou, a straight paved road ten kilometers in length, intersecting the beetroot-fields" (1). Zola never questions the fact that Étienne and the world are "narratable." The narrator is unproblematically positioned outside the fictional universe and above the reader as a narrator-god, and as readers, we occupy the role of spectator—we do not so much hear what Zola's narrator says, as we see what he paints.

After World War I narration becomes more difficult, partly as a result of the growing tension within Lukács's constellation of problematic subject and contingent world, his formal abstraction in regard to the novel. But as Adorno claims in 1954, the novel quite simply requires narration. That also applied to the 1920s when the modernists set themselves the task of inventing alternative strategies of enunciation in order to meet the problems set by the new historical situation. The fictional universe was no longer narrated from outside and from above, but from within. The narrator-god was replaced by an immanent narrator who was situated inside the fictional universe and in its contingent flow of events. The authors of modernism came to the conclusion that no outside existed from which a story could be narrated, but at the same time, narrative still required a position from whence a story could be told. Technically, modernists such as Joyce and Virginia Woolf employed the stream of consciousness, which was a way of transmitting the narrator's inner thoughts, partly set off by outside stimuli. The stream of consciousness can be characterized as a one-to-one stream: what comes in, comes out.

In the French *nouveau roman*, the inner thoughts of the narrator were replaced by the camera's paratactic accumulation of events and details. However, the camera was not a transcendent outside, as one might think, but still a perspective immanent to the fictional universe; one thinks of Alain Robbe-Grillet's *Jealousy* (1957). However, with the modernist novel and the French *nouveau roman* we seem to be trapped in a dead end, because the consequence of the stream of consciousness and the camera's (supposedly) disinterested registration of events is, ultimately, the end of narrative: the worst-case scenario is that the one-to-one stream and the camera point of view result in nothing but an unfocused and metonymic cacophony.

Again we may ask how Grass fits into this picture. To return briefly to Brooks, it is actually his main purpose to demonstrate that the oral tradition survives in the literary culture of the nineteenth century: "I find it significant that the work of Balzac, the first novelist to be fully aware of the new conditions of an industrializing and commodified literature, very often stages situations of oral communication where the exchange and transmission of narrative is at issue" (Brooks 78-79). This is the way forward. In Zola, Joyce, and Robbe-Grillet—that is, in cases of both transcendent and immanent narrative perspectives—the reader is positioned as a spectator, not as a listener, and if the Cartesian, transcendent, and "objective" view from above and from outside is no longer a valid position in the twentieth century, the immanent perspective from within is no better, since it eventually leads to the destruction of narrative.

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In Grass, however, literacy is replaced by orality and the reader is transformed from spectator into listener. The point of view is anchored in a human narrator (who is also actively part of the events), that is, it is a view from within, but in opposition to the modernists Grass does not shy away from employing a narrative voice that supplements the paratactical and metonymical organization of outside stimuli with a hypotactical and metaphorical ordering of the fictional universe. As in Brooks's characterization of Balzac as an oral novelist, we can also say about Grass's novels that "situations of oral communication where the exchange and transmission of narrative is at issue" are constantly staged through framed tales, tales embedded within one another, and narrators addressing themselves to narratees and readers. Hence, the communicative act ("how" as opposed to "what")—what Roman Jakobson called the phatic and the conative functions of the text—is central in Grass's novels. As a result, the oral dimension of the novels is emphasized, and, at the same time, it is, potentially at least, also something that contributes to the "migratory" dynamism of the novels—that is, their particular wisdom of uncertainty.

This is illustrated in the famous opening line of *The Tin Drum*: "Granted: I am an inmate of a mental hospital" (1). Evidently, with the very first sentence Grass undermines the narrator's credibility and thereby creates a fundamental uncertainty and bewilderment in relation to the novel's form, truth character, and value system. Neither the specific enunciatory strategies nor the overall *Weltanschauung* can thus be referred to a transcendental component capable of guaranteeing ontological certainty or ideological coherence. As Keith Miles remarks, "Grass is at pains to present

a world of moral uncertainty in which no comforting constants exist” (140).

Besides confining his narrator to a mental institution, Grass adds to the novel’s atmosphere of uncertainty and openness by staging what Brooks calls “situations of oral communication where the exchange and transmission of narrative is at issue,” that is, metareflective passages that point to the text’s own constitutive principles. Grass does so in the scenes where Oskar and Bruno Münsterberg, Oskar’s caretaker at the asylum, talk about the progression of Oskar’s writings. Bruno thus functions as a narratee, and at one point he even gets to tell his side of the story. Although it is still through Oskar’s pen that Bruno’s story is transmitted, it is worth noticing that “The passage ascribed to Münsterberg is full of turns of language that undermines Oskar’s credibility” (Reddick 85). In addition to guaranteeing the narrator’s visibility and constant presence, these scenes also stage an intratextual counterpart to the extratextual relationship between author and reader. As is the case with Saleem and Padma in Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* (1981), the dialogic nature of Oskar and Bruno’s relationship—their discussions of style and method, Bruno’s role as a co-creating narratee, and his momentary transformation from narratee to narrator—adds to the novel’s semantic and formal openness.

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The metareflective dimension of the novel is not restricted to the relationship between Oskar and Bruno. It also shows when Oskar addresses the reader, as in this passage where he admits that he has not been entirely honest in the previous chapter:

I have just reread the last paragraph. I am not too well satisfied, but Oskar’s pen ought to be, for writing tersely and succinctly, it has managed, as terse, succinct accounts so often do, to exaggerate and mislead, if not to lie.

Wishing to stick to the truth, I shall try to circumvent Oskar’s pen and make a few corrections: [...] there is a little omission that needs filling in: No sooner had Jan and I left the storeroom for undeliverable mail at the behest of the Home Guards with their “Come outs,” their flashlights, and their rifles, than Oskar, concerned for his comfort and safety, made up to two Home Guards who struck him as good-natured, uncle-like souls, put on an imitation of pathetic sniveling, and pointed to Jan, his father, with accusing gestures which transformed the poor man into a villain who had dragged off an innocent child to the Polish Post Office to use him, with typically Polish inhumanity, as a buffer for enemy bullets (Grass, *The Tin Drum* 228).

The previous chapter’s account of Jan’s death and Oskar’s subsequent modification and explanation of the events become an exemplary image of the novel’s “migratory” form: fictional micro-universes consisting of specific events, moods, opinions, values, and atmospheres are constructed only to be questioned, modified, corrected, or maybe even transformed into new micro-universes later on by a self-correcting, self-doubting, partial, and unreliable narrative voice. Oskar’s confession of the exaggerations and misleadings of the previous chapter only reinforces the reader’s assumption of the fragility of the novel’s truth character, because even though Oskar corrects his own mistakes, we are not convinced that this is always his procedure and intention. Oskar is too much part of the events he narrates for us not to notice the

idiosyncratic predispositions of his perspective.

Another example of metafictional narration worth mentioning is the following passage where Grass and Oskar reflect upon the organization and construction of the novel:

You can begin a story in the middle and create confusion by striking out boldly, backward and forward. You can be modern, put aside all mention of time and distance and [...] proclaim [...] that you have finally, at the last moment, solved the space-time problem. Or you can declare at the very start that it's impossible to write a novel now-days, but then, behind your own back so to speak, give birth to a whopper, a novel to end all novels. I have also been told that it makes a good impression, [...] if you begin by saying that a novel can't have a hero any more because there are no more individualists, because individuality is a thing of the past, because man—each man and all men together—is alone in his loneliness and no one is entitled to individual loneliness, and all men lumped together make up a “lonely mass” without names and without heroes. All this may be true. But as far as I and Bruno my keeper are concerned, I beg leave to say that we are both heroes, very different heroes, he on his side of the peephole, and I on my side; and even when he opens the door, the two of us, with all our friendship and loneliness, are still far from being a nameless, heroless mass (Grass, *The Tin Drum* 3).

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Here Grass makes allusions to a variety of contemporary novelistic practices only to reject them right away. He thus positions himself as a recycler of novelistic traditions—that is, instead of professing to a linear literary history that progressively moves towards greater precision and truth (e.g. Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis* and its pledge to realism) or to a binary understanding of the novels history *à la* the ancients and the moderns (e.g. René Girard's *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque*), Grass's novels belong to and testify to a literary history in which past methods are constantly recycled.

The metafictional passage above contains references to both the French *nouveau roman*—in particular Robbe-Grillet's poetics, formulated in essays during the 1950s and later collected in *Pour un nouveau roman* (1963)—and to David Riesman's influential sociological work *The Lonely Crowd* (1950). In addition, Grass mocks some of the more general tendencies in the literature of modernism and the avantgarde; for example, the modernist novel's liberation from the former anthropocentric framework that had disintegrated because of the collapse of the unitary individual. In opposition to such general tendencies, Oskar is not afraid to use the personal pronoun “I” and to admit that he is in fact a subject with a name. He even admits to be the hero of the novel. Furthermore, in Grass's novels time is always history and space is always place, that is, the abstract concepts of time and space are continually concretized in their past and present *hic et nunc*. As to narrative technique, Oskar narrates his story more or less chronologically, although digressions and metafictional passages occasionally disturb the chronology of the novel. Finally, Oskar admits that he is writing a novel, thereby explicitly rejecting the alleged death of the genre.

All this points to what Franco Moretti has described as the restoration of the link between technique and anthropocentrism (see Moretti 235). He traces this develop-

ment back to García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1968), but I would argue that it happens as early as 1959 with Grass's *The Tin Drum*. But what does Moretti mean by restoration, anthropocentric turn, and technique? To mention one example, Moretti believes that the novel's polyphonic aptitude sometimes suffers in the stream of consciousness technique because the (potentially infinite) metonymic addition of stimuli and details results in a flatness of perspective, in the ever-present foreground's unfocusedness, and, ultimately, in meaninglessness. Moretti's point is that polyphony—and thus meaning—is re-motivated in García Marquez and Rushdie by the restored link between technique and anthropocentrism, that is, by a narrative that reinstates the storyteller and the human being.

164 A similar restoration of the link between technique and anthropocentrism takes place in Grass. Here the re-motivation of polyphony happens specifically through a narrating subject with demiurgical powers and a power to centripetalize a potential chaotic world. Together with García Márquez and Rushdie, Grass thereby helps to "Set modernism's feet back on the ground. And then, heal 'the great divide' (Adorno) between modernism and mass culture. It is the 'return of narrative,' as people would say in the sixties of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*: an avant-garde work, but with a gripping story" (Moretti 235). The return of narrative can to a large degree be explained by another return, namely the return of non-contemporaneity: the past in its broadest sense is made present again as legend, myth, universal history, and national narrative re-enter the novel as fundamental components (see Moretti 239). Grass's own word for this interweaving of different temporal strands is *Vergegenkunft*, a contraction of *Vergangenheit* (past), *Gegenwart* (present), and *Zukunft* (future).

A very important aspect of Oskar's position as a narrator in regard to Rushdie's idea of migrant vision is Grass's construction of a mobile, infantile, and detached perspective from below. The seeds to this perspective are to be found in an unsuccessful poem that Grass wrote in 1952 during a stay in France. In the poem Oskar Matzerath featured as a stylite before he actually became Oskar (see Grass 1987). The poem is of generic importance to *The Tin Drum* because it represents the first step towards Grass's creation of a displaced perspective. The poem was about a young existentialist bricklayer who became disillusioned with worldly developments, and his reaction was to build a pillar in the centre of his small town, subsequently chaining himself to the top of the pillar. With this idea, Grass had established a distance in perspective, but Grass still felt that the elevated perspective was too static.

On his way home from France, Grass passed through Switzerland, and one afternoon he spotted a three-year-old boy with a tin drum: "What struck me and stayed with me was the three-year-old's self-forgetful concentration on his instrument, his disregard of the world around him" ("*The Tin Drum* in Retrospect" 26). However, it was not until three years later when working on the manuscript that eventually was to become *The Tin Drum* that Grass recalled the little drummer. Grass's recollection led to the replacement of the elevated, aloof young bricklayer by the little child, whose perspective is also distanced, but now from below, and no longer static but

mobile.

A distanced, detached, and mobile point of view. The unsuccessful poem and the accidental encounter with the boy drummer are two concrete sources and palpable reasons behind these characteristics. Another reason, and a much more substantial and essential one, is the connection between Grass's experience of forced uprooting and voluntary exile on the one side, and his search for a proper perspective on the other. The voluntary exile in Paris between 1956 and 1960 provided Grass with a (spatial, temporal, physical, and spiritual) distance from the Danzig material and the post-war German society, and it was a detachment that was absolutely necessary in order for him to embark on the megalomaniac project that the trilogy turned out to be: "the distance from Germany enabled me to find the language and the breath to write down in fifteen hundred pages what was necessary for me to write" ("Writing after Auschwitz" 112), says Grass.

As to forced migration, Grass's uprooting from Danzig and his past most certainly infused him with a propensity for mobile and unsettled perspectives on the world. The loss of hometown was indisputably a painful experience, but Grass is not only occupied with rendering this kind of loss; he is also extremely concerned with the insights that can be gained through loss. The epistemology of exile is the topic of Edward Said's essay "Reflections on Exile" (1984): on the one hand, Said refuses to see exile as a privileged access to what he calls a certain kind of humanism, because such an approach ignores the paralyzing effects of estrangement; on the other hand, he admits to exile's appeal by asking: "But if true exile is a condition of terminal loss, why has it been transformed so easily into a potent, even enriching, motif of modern culture?" (Said 173). Said's answer is that the exile's dislocated perspective enables him or her to produce alternative versions to what Adorno called the "administered" modern world. It is exactly because of the loss of home, traditions, family, and language that the world presents itself to the migrant and the exile in an almost virginal state.

Oskar embodies the exilic position and perspective. His physical appearance and his mental disposition consign him to the periphery of society and its institutional frameworks. This is underlined by his rejection of the family business and school, but also by his disruption of the Nazi rally at the Maiwiese, his vandalization of the Church of the Sacred Heart, and his shattering of the windows in the Municipal Theater, three "institutions" of great symbolic value and with actual political, religious, and cultural power. The uprooting from or rejection of this institutional framework that traditionally anchors a human being makes Oskar a disoriented person. Said claims that the exile compensates for his disorientation by creating a new world to rule: "Willfulness, exaggeration, overstatement: these are the characteristic styles of being an exile, methods for compelling the world to accept your vision" (182). This is true of Oskar, who can be considered a demiurge attempting to impose his own fictional version of the world on the reader. The epistemological point is that Oskar's version, no matter how unnatural, exaggerated, and fictional it

may seem, offers the reader an alternative version of a world that is otherwise trapped in ready-made forms.

Said goes on to explain the exile's isolationistic urge by a "narcissistic masochism that resists all efforts at amelioration, acculturation, and community. At this extreme the exile can make a fetish of exile, a practice that distances him or her from all connections and commitments" (183). Oskar can also be said to make a fetish of exile, as he consciously and strategically chooses to live his life on the margins. Oskar's exilic position is not only characterized by isolation and detachment, though, it is supplemented with a perspective from below. This makes Oskar a *picaro*—that is, "an inveterate vagabond" (Alter 84). The *picaro* detaches himself through an ironic stance from the social order and puts his trust in himself as the only valid center of the world, because he sees what others do not see: the disintegration of a whole society.

166 However, as Reddick observes, Oskar's detachment and irony are complemented by opposite traits, those of involvement and affectivity: "there is a relationship marked by skepticism, detachment, independence, superiority, the operation of mind; and there is a relationship marked by involvement, dependence, vulnerability and impotence, the operation of feeling" (Reddick 58). In other words, the picaresque mode alone is insufficient in articulating an adequate sense of uprooting because it operates by detached reflection. In order to capture the full extent of the processes and consequences of dislocation it is necessary that Oskar also suffers reality: "So long as Oskar is a complete, self-sufficient, static being, so long as he genuinely needs nothing from those he so peremptorily rejects [...] and so long as his inner activity does not go beyond the operation of eye and mind, he is in a supreme position. As soon as he *feels* and *wants*, thus joining after all in the normal order of existence, then the fact that he is a lone outsider with no links to his family works radically to his disadvantage" (Reddick 65). Reddick speaks here of Oskar's detachment as a mode of stasis, whereas I have claimed that Oskar may be regarded as a migrant. Robert Alter seems to support my claim, though, when he speaks of the *picaro* as a vagabond, and Grass himself has pointed to Oskar's mobility as opposed to the original conception of the *stylite*. How are we to respond to this seeming inconsistency? The solution lies in distinguishing between Oskar's perspective and his personal identity. When Oskar acts in the picaresque mode, mobility relates primarily to his point of view and to his vagabonding through society, which gives the reader the impression of shifts and movement, whereas his inner self is left partly unaffected. Oskar's inner self is then the preserve of his vulnerable mode in which he suffers mental dislocations and disruptions. Hence, we have self-chosen exile and sovereign *picaro* on the one side, and forced migration and wretched victimhood on the other, a paradoxical structure that assures an inconclusive and oscillatory movement between poles.

Reddick points to the episode in which Oskar resumes his growth (in concurrence with his actual emigration from Danzig to Germany) as the most obvious example of a shift from the picaresque to the affective mode. Oskar's relationships with Agnes,

Maria, Bebra, Roswitha, Sigismund Markus, and Herbert Truczinski are also marked by the affective mode of the vulnerable Oskar. His feeling of guilt in connection with the deaths of Agnes, Alfred, and Jan are examples of his ethical awareness and compassion, which at times lead him to self-examination whereby he no longer occupies the role of (superior) subject but rather that of (suffering) object.

The following examines more closely what the exilic point of view from below means for the novel's supposedly underlying migrant vision. When Oskar meets Bebra for the first time he is warned not to be content with a spectator's position in front of podiums; instead, the lilliputs should populate and conquer the podiums. It is with this advice from his master himself that Oskar sets out for one of the Nazi rallies at Maiwiese. However, when on his way to Maiwiese, Oskar chooses an alternative route in order to avoid being spotted by the increasing number of party supporters (he is in danger of falling victim to the euthanasia programme); he enters the open area from a different angle and sees the podium from behind:

Have you ever seen a rostrum from behind? All men and women—if I may make a suggestion—should be familiarized with the rear view of a rostrum before being called upon to gather in front of one. Everyone who has ever taken a good look at a rostrum from behind will be immunized ipso facto against any magic practiced in any form whatsoever on rostrums. Pretty much the same applies to rear views of church altars; but that is another subject (Grass, *The Tin Drum* 104).

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Because of his viewpoint from behind the scenes, Oskar is immunized against the particular Nazi art of seduction as well as any form of demagogical sorcery. The passage emblematically demonstrates the subversive power of Oskar's perspective: the capacity to break open the surfaces of the adult world from below; to see through any kind of hypocrisy; to expose the illusions that society rest upon; and to profane anything sacred, clerical or secular (Catholic or Nazi).

At the Maiwiese rally Oskar cannot find a seat on the podium as Bebra had urged him to, and instead he finds himself a spot under the podium from where he transforms the official march music into a waltz and subsequently into a charleston using his tin drum. As a consequence, the crowd of people—instead of supporting the symmetric perfection and martial order of the Nazi arrangement, submitting themselves uniformly to the march music and the propaganda speeches—starts to behave in an increasingly unrestrained and wild manner and ends up circulating the streets of Danzig while dancing. Oskar's ability to see what goes on behind the scenes means that his perspective functions like a subversive differential point of view, and he can be characterized as a symmetry-smasher constantly unsettling the reader with his idiosyncratic, childish descriptions of everyday events in the adult world. As Theodore Ziolkowski remarks, "Oskar's dwarfish perspective utterly defamiliarizes the material" (21).

Oskar makes another remarkable observation worth mentioning. During the "Kristallnacht," Sigismund Markus, the Jewish supplier of tin drums, receives an unexpected visit from Nazis who demolish his toy shop, indicating the end of child-

hood innocence and play. When Oskar finds Sigismund dead in his office with an empty bottle by his side, his first thought is that Sigismund must have felt thirsty. What Oskar thinks is water, the reader knows is poison—but the actual content of the bottle is never explicitly revealed. This perspective of innocence and naïvety demonstrates the barbarity and absurdity of the world in the most effective manner. However, the novel never openly states such characteristics because a direct description would not be adequate. Instead, Grass proves his originality through the creation of Oskar's inimitable point of view which is capable of pinning down the unsayable—or what I previously called the experience of the negativity of experience—more effectively than any explicit designation. Grass achieves this effect by subtly exploiting the gap between the historical consciousness of the reader and Oskar's naïve perception, that is, the ironic contrast between an extratextual/contextual element and an intratextual strategy.

168 Grass's technique, then, does not comply with Freud's idea of art as "the mild narcosis" (Freud 81) that temporarily makes us forget the tormentous nature of life. Rather, in Grass's works art is formally—to use Adorno's words—a "mimesis of the hardened and alienated" (*Aesthetic Theory* 21)—that is, it does not sedate its reader but sharpens his or her sensibility towards life and its cruelties. And with Lukács, we can say that the novel as a genre is defined by its capacity to incorporate "the fragmentary nature of the world's structure into the world of forms. [...] All the fissures and rents which are inherent in the historical situation must be drawn into the form-giving process and cannot nor should be disguised by compositional means" (Lukács 39, 60). The very form of the novel, of Grass's novels, expresses this immanent tension of conflicting elements that never allows the novelistic form to dwell properly in itself.

To bring this article to a conclusion I want to return for a brief moment to Adorno's essay on the narrator in which he identifies two crucial transformations in the history of the novel related to the role of the narrator: the one is the entry of reflection, the other, which is a consequence of the first, is the destruction of illusion:

The traditional novel [...] can be compared to the three-walled stage of a bourgeois theater. This technique was one of illusion. The narrator raises a curtain: the reader is to take part in what occurs as though he were physically present. [...] There is a heavy taboo on reflection: it becomes the cardinal sin against objective purity. Today this taboo, along with the illusionary character of what is represented, is losing strength. [...] The new reflection takes a stand against the lie of representation, actually against the narrator himself, who tries, as an extra-alert commentator on events, to correct his unavoidable way of proceeding. This destruction of form is inherent in the very meaning of form (Adorno, "The Position of the Narrator" 33-34).

It is authors such as Balzac, Flaubert, and Zola that Adorno refers to when he speaks of the traditional novel. As we have already mentioned, Flaubert's ideal was precisely the invisibility of the narrator, that is, a narrator who refrains from illusion-shattering reflections and who transforms the reader into a spectator.

In Grass, the opposite happens. Here, and in accordance with Adorno, the fictional universe is no longer allowed to uphold its illusionary effect. The reader is awakened from his or her slumber as a consequence of the narrator's self-reflectiveness that "takes a stand against the lie of representation" and against the narrator himself. The self-reflectiveness thus functions as little pin-pricks puncturing the balloon of illusion at the same time as it keeps the story and the narrator in a perpetual process of self-correction. In addition, the metafictional dimension of the novel is emphasized through its oral quality and through the stagings of communicative acts where narrator address the reader or the narratee. The overall narrative form of the novel becomes fluid and migratory, among other things because form comprises its own destruction and re-construction.

The element of intratextual self-reflection—legitimized by Lukács because the form of the novel is not supposed to hide the fragmentation and the abysses of the world (irony as the self-correction of the abstract form) and by Adorno because it functions as the crushing hammerstroke against the mirror of representation that the novelistic form demands in order to reach behind or below the surfaces—this intratextual self-reflection suggests a means of escape in relation to Benjamin's skeptical view of the genre as it points to the novel's alternative wisdom, namely the wisdom of uncertainty. And as we have seen, Grass "is quintessentially the artist of uncertainty," and he is so partly because of his experience of migration and his subsequent creation of a migrant vision.

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