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Making up for lost time: aspects of West German fiction in the 1950s and 1960s

University College of Swansea

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'Making up for lost time: aspects of West German fiction in the 1950s and 1960s'

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by

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MAKING UP FOR LOST TIME : ASPECTS OF WEST GERMAN FICTION IN THE 1950s and 1960s

Although I am the third incumbent of the Chair of German at University College, Swansea, following my distinguished predecessors Erich Heller and Morgan Waidson, I am the first to be returning to a town in which I spent most of my childhood and where I received my secondary education. Returning to the scene of former crimes is a curious experience: one is struck more by the small differences than by the overwhelming similarities of the place with which one was so familiar. But let me say from the outset what an enormous pleasure it is for me personally to return to Swansea; and let me take this opportunity of thanking the Principal and all my colleagues for making me and my wife so welcome. Inspired, no doubt, by my private homecoming, I thought it might be instructive to explore some of the delights and difficulties in the treatment of childhood in German fiction in the 1950s and 1960s, for it poses literary and historical problems which are peculiarly German.

The title of my lecture this evening is deliberately ambiguous: it suggests that post-war German fiction, after the enforced isolation of the Nazi period, had a lot of catching-up to do. The Nazis rejected modernist literature as 'entartete Kunst', 'degenerate art', and for the war years at least much British and American literature was simply unavailable, as was the considerable body of writing deemed left-wing or Jewish. The years after 1945 involved Germans in both the rediscovery of their own modernism, a revival of interest in Expressionism, for example, and the discovery of foreign literatures. But my title has a second meaning which is more central

to my lecture: namely, that for the generation of writers who were born in the late 1920s and consequently spent all their childhood and adolescence under National Socialism, that Proustian lost time of childhood is all the more difficult to evoke. In the case of the two writers whose work I shall be discussing, the problem is compounded by political and geographical factors. Siegfried Lenz was born in 1926 in Lyck in East Prussia, amid the lakes of what is now Polish Masuria; Günter Grass was born in 1927 in the Free City of Danzig, now Gdansk in Poland. Like millions of Germans of that generation, both writers are exiles; both reflect on their childhood with the peculiar wistfulness and poignancy which is that of exile, of loss. The loss is a double one: the world of childhood is, like Proust's, lost in time, but is also politically lost; it is located in the lost territories, in those parts of the Germany of 1937 which the redrawing of the political boundaries after 1945 consigned to Poland. My theme, then, is the making-up, the fictionalization, of the Proustian theme of the lost world of childhood. In selecting Lenz and Grass, I would not wish to suggest that the same problems do not occur in the work of their contemporaries, like Christa Wolf in East Germany, or in the work of a slightly older generation, Heinrich Boll and Alfred Andersch, simply that the problems of the literary treatment of the lost world of childhood are posed more urgently in their writing; and their solutions have, in their very different ways, proved extraordinarily popular with the West German reading public.

It has taken Siegfried Lenz many years to confront the problems of the past with all their ramifications. During a radio discussion in March 1979 he was suddenly inspired by a remark made by another participant about his childhood to the following reflection

(I translate): 'Is it not an extraordinary, a critical moment, when one has to give up one's sense of security, one's certainties, no longer share them with others, but experience for the first time that one is an individual .... Suddenly one discovers that one has dropped out of the community ('herausgefallen aus der Gemeinschaft'). Here, within the safe confines of someone else's reminiscences and sheltering behind an impersonal 'one', Lenz touches on an experience which must have been for him and thousands, if not millions, of his generation, a traumatic one. Characteristically, he presents it as a moment of existential insight, a moment of self-knowledge which comes to all men and women, when they forsake the securities of childhood for the ambiguities and uncertainties of adult life. But from Lenz's autobiographical sketch Ich zum Beispiel. Kennzeichen eines Jahrgangs ('Take me for example. The characteristics of a generation') of 1966 we know that this experience belonged in a specific historical context: the young Lenz's realization that the values of the National Socialist community were suspect, that obedience to the totalitarian collective did not preclude individual responsibility.

Ich zum Beispiel, written over twenty years after the experiences which it describes, embodies Lenz's first tentative approach to the experience of National Socialism in an autobiographical, i.e. non-fictional mode. Significantly, it belongs in the period immediately before Lenz's first detailed literary treatment of the period in Deutschstunde (The German Lesson) of 1968, the first of his novels to be set unambiguously in a recognizable historical context of National Socialism. In his autobiographical sketch Lenz briefly recalls his East Prussian childhood, his period first as a

'Pimpf', than as full member of the Hitler Youth, his call-up to the Navy at the age of seventeen, his war experiences, his desertion, internment and release, and finally his progress via journalism to a literary career. What is striking about Lenz's evocation of childhood is what he elects to leave out. There are three cursory references to a grandmother as a source of Masurian folk-lore, but not a single reference to a mother and only one oblique reference to a father in the observation that 'civil servants, of which my father was one, had grown grey in their unthinking roles'. Family warmth, affection, love are conspicuously absent. If we turn to Lenz's short stories and novels, it becomes clear that his portrayal of family life is characterized by absence. His father-figures are stern, remote, laconic, frequently authoritarian. Father-son relationships are invariably problematic: fathers fail to offer the example which sons can follow, sons fail to live up to their fathers' expectations. If there is a need for approval or affection, it usually remains unspoken. The last lines of the novel Der Mann im Strom supply a striking illustration: 'I waited for you, father, said Timm; Yes, my boy, said the man. I'd like to come to meet you always, father. Yes, my boy, said the man. Yes.' As archetypal, existential figures, the man and the boy appear to share a simple affection, yet what the father does not, cannot, say; is that he has just been sacked, and that hence the boy will never again be able to meet him from work. The complex social realities underlying relationships are passed over in silence. What Lenz suppresses in his autobiographical essay is projected, consciously or unconsciously, into the disturbed father-son relationships in the fictional world.

Relations between the sexes, too, prove fallible in Lenz's world, indeed love is a rare commodity. Once again the autobiographical essay offers an illuminating instance, where Lenz recalls his first love, a relationship cemented by a common interest in sport and set against the background of the National Socialist youth movement. The relationship taught Lenz that there could be an affection prompted by duty, that the totalitarian experience invaded all spheres of life, even that of love. One of the consequences for Lenz's fictional world is that love, where it exists at all, can survive only in conflict with duty. Lenz offers the reverse side of a rigorous Kantian morality: for Kant, duty is only recognizable as such when it conflicts with inclination; for Lenz, reversing the scheme, inclination can only be recognized as such where it conflicts with duty. Marriage, by this radical definition, precludes love; love can only exist in conflict with duty, outside the rigid and restrictive framework of social responsibility. Social activity is presented as a threat to private fulfilment. In common with other post-war writers, Lenz responds to the experience of National Socialism by reversing its value-scheme, by praising the embattled individual rather than the collective, inclination rather than duty. In the novel Der Verlust ('The Loss') of 1981 the heroine, Nora, begins to commit herself to Uli when he is deprived of his speech after a stroke, when it is clear that he has been rejected by his family, by society. Uli's regression, through illness, to a child-like state is combined with an inability to communicate complex responses, and also with a new-found emotional richness. The totalitarian experience has made Lenz suspicious of social responsibility, of the duties of adult life, but the corollary of that view, namely that child-like experience alone is innocent, is fraught with problems, for Lenz's own childhood is

located not in innocence but in that very same National Socialist world of duty.

Given that Lenz associates that world of childhood with innocence, and hence must view adult life as a growing away from innocence, one might well expect him to be particularly concerned with the period of transition between childhood and adult status. His account, in his autobiographical sketch, of such a transition is especially informative: Lenz's early experiences of life in the navy were still charged with youthful enthusiasm, with total commitment to the values of the National Socialist community, with an unquestioning belief in the rightness of the cause. Retrospectively, at least, it is the Stauffenberg plot of 20 July 1944 which shatters this cosy world: 'I learned for the first time that someone had contradicted Hitler - and therefore the miracle of collective obedience ceased to exist. Here and there, people had ceased to trust him: all that seemed to me very significant.' This astonishing reaction strikes one as open and honest; its implications reinforce the impression that, for Lenz, the mere fact that one person does not accept the Fuhrer myth shatters the illusion and breaks the spell. The corollary is equally clear: if everyone had continued to accept Hitler's authority, then the stability of Lenz's world would have remained. The Generals' Plot hurls the young sailor out of his childhood, out of his child-like and childish belief in a world devoid of conflict, in which all share the same unquestioned values, into an adult world of moral decision, of responsibility, of ambivalence and ambiguity. Lenz never questioned at that stage the rightness or wrongness of National Socialist policies; he never contemplated opposition to them; he never, indeed, expressed even the vaguest misgivings. All he recalls is his

shocking realization that we do not live in a fairy-tale world of absolutes, but in a world of moral ambiguity and political choice. He does not, at that point, make a choice himself, but from that moment onwards, he knows that choices are possible, indeed unavoidable.

Naturally, there is a problem here which applies to all autobiographical statements: there can be no guarantee that Lenz's reactions in 1944 actually took this precise form, except in his memory. What is beyond dispute is that in 1966 he elected to formulate his experiences thus, and that such a description conforms to a pattern which is implicitly present in his fictional work from its beginnings. The pattern is a timeless, existential one, predicated upon the assumption of natural childhood innocence and subsequent adult guilt. Such guilt is not associated with a specific crime; it is, for Lenz, built into the very order of existence itself. It must be sharply distinguished from historical responsibility for the crimes of National Socialism. Indeed, the existential pattern and the historical context in which it is set appear to be in direct conflict. The childhood world of Rousseauistic innocence coincides with the historical world of National Socialism, while the acquisition of guilt is contemporary with an awareness of opposition to National Socialism. Puzzling as this antinomy might seem, it nevertheless possesses a certain historical and psychological verisimilitude for that generation of which Lenz saw himself as representative. For many of this generation (which in turn constitutes at least a part of Lenz's readership), the acquisition of guilt, the awareness of guilt, was indeed retrospective: the enormity of the crimes of National Socialism became fully apparent only with the defeat of Germany. Nevertheless, Lenz's tendency to conflate existential and historical

guilt causes problems: the presentation of the innocence of an unreflecting National Socialist childhood and the association of opposition to totalitarianism with guilt beg some important questions.

The enormous success which Lenz achieved in 1968 with Deutschstunde (The German Lesson), in which he examined for the first time specific issues of National Socialism in a recognizable German setting, is not unconnected with Lenz's conflation of an existential pattern and a historical setting which it contradicts. Such a work is likely to strike a chord in the experience of a post-war generation of readers which has disturbed relationship with the Germany of its fathers. Indeed, it is tempting to speculate whether Deutschstunde could have been so successful, had it appeared any earlier than 1968. The generation problem and the attempt to come to terms with the Nazi past proved an irresistible combination, particularly to a younger generation which felt little or no personal guilt about the German past. Once again the existential pattern, a father-son conflict, and the historical setting are not strictly congruent. The hero, Siggi (the diminutive suggests an autobiographical relevance), is torn between two father-figures: the natural father Jepsen, the policeman and local instrument of totalitatian authority on the one hand, and the surrogate father, the artist Max Ludwig Nansen, on the other. Nansen is based on the Expressionist painter Emil Nolde, born Emil Hansen, but his name is a conflation of Hansen with those of two other Expressionists, Max Beckmann and Ernst Ludwig Kirchner. The choice for Siggi is not between one kind of politics and another, but between a Nazi disciplinarian and a humane artist. Once again, it is striking that for Siggi opposition to his father involves the acquisition of guilt, for

his father represents the law. Judged by existential, or Oedipal criteria, opposition to the father involves guilt, but by imposing on this framework a historical context, Lenz manages to suggest that opposition to National Socialism involves criminality. There is no hint of recognition that to oppose a criminal regime may involve a lesser guilt. Furthermore, by locating the alternative to National Socialism in art, Lenz crucially over-simplifies the issues. The humane values represented by Nansen are shown to be proof against the blandishments and the bullying of a totalitarian regime. The doubtful claim that artists are somehow more humane than ordinary mortals is, of course, rooted in the German tradition, stretching back at least to the Romantics. The assumption is that art represents a realm in which social, political and moral concerns have no place. Given this view of art, there can be no meaningful conflict between art and politics, for each belongs to a separate sphere. I am not suggesting here that Lenz himself rejects politics in favour of art. His own enthusiastic support in the 1960s for the SPD, for which he campaigned vigorously and eloquently, belies such an assumption. It is simply that, when he comes to present the dilemmas and compromises of life under a totalitarian regime, Lenz cannot face the issues squarely. The conflict between a policeman and an artist is hardly an effective vehicle for exploring such tension. The historical complexities might be more adequately revealed if a genuine moral dilemma were explored. Siggi is forced to choose between a heavy-handed policeman whom he fears and a sympathetic artist whom he admires. For him, there is no difficulty: he can choose to follow his emotions and make the right political choice. One is tempted to speculate what complexities might have emerged if Lenz had portrayed a policeman who opposed National Socialism, or a son who loved and

admired his National Socialist father, or a son who hated a father who was opposed to the regime.

The German lesson which Lenz himself learns appears to be two-fold: that the adult world is a complex moral world, in which awkward choices have to be faced; and that man can rely only upon himself for such decisions. All models, all ideologies are suspect; the individual is alone. Deprived of comforting and comfortable ideologies, man must make his own way in the world, discovering as he goes along the code that governs his conduct. This severe code of individual self-reliance is an understandable reaction to the fallible ideology of the collective in National Socialism, and both accounts for, and is shaped by, the Hemingway-cult of the immediate post-war period in West Germany. Because submission to the national collective has proved so disastrous, the opposite policy seems to commend itself. The anti-ideological individualism, rife in the Adenauer era of restoration in the 1950s, is reflected in Lenz's work by the theme of the vain quest for a suitable father-figure, one worthy of emulation. This quest not only underlies Siggi's choice in Deutschstunde, but also informs the whole thematic complex of Das Vorbild (The Model), in which three fallible educationalists try in vain to find a story for a school text-book, depicting a 'Vorbild', a model life worthy of emulation by schoolchildren. The hard lesson which they (and the readers) learn, is that there are no reliable models. No values can be salvaged from the past, for with adulthood has come an awareness of guilt, a loss of childhood innocence.

The failure to salvage anything of value from the past is a further motif in Lenz's fictional world. In the early short story

Schwierige Trauer, the attempt to preserve the documents and values of the past for posterity is not only doomed to failure, but also specifically associated in Lenz's imagination with the acquisition of guilt. Henry Smolka wants to preserve the records of his Masurian home town from the invading Russians. There seems nothing reprehensible about such archivist dedication in itself, but Lenz associates that instinct with specific instances of inhumanity, as Henry Smolka makes space for his archives by leaving refugees behind. The existential pattern, for Lenz, involved, as I have said, the growing away from innocence; with it comes the impossibility of turning back the clock. Such an insight, Lenz would have us believe, is universally applicable, but when he comes to locate it in a particular historical context, Lenz feels constrained to link existential guilt with moral guilt. He makes Henry Smolka guilty of specific crimes of inhumanity and cruelty. It is clear that, for Lenz, any attempt to preserve the past, especially the Masurian homeland, is not merely an existential impossibility, but also morally culpable. The tension between what I have called the existential pattern and the historical context is the main theme of Heimatmuseum ('Folk-museum') of 1978. The complex of themes in this novel, guilt, innocence and the passage of time, is associated with a specific problem which the Federal Republic faced in the 1960s and 1970s, namely the question of the relationship with the Eastern Bloc. The Masurian world of Lenz's childhood is a timeless, fairy-tale world, not a political and social reality. Nostalgia for the lost world of childhood, the desire to commemorate in literature a German childhood in Masuria, must not mislead the reader into making the political judgement that the lost territories should be regained. The tone must remain an elegaic one. Put in the terminology which I have adopted, existential innocence

must be accepted as political guilt. The destruction of the Masurian folk-museum with which the novel begins and ends signals Lenz's awareness that this 'Heimat' cannot be preserved as a political reality. It may be safely conjured up only in literature, and even there disturbing political issues obtrude. The problematic nature of the homeland ('Heimat'), the dangers and delights of 'Heimatdichtung', is a recurrent motif in Lenz's writing and reveals once more the difficulties which he faces in attempting to locate his existential pattern in a concrete historical setting.

In his most recent volume of literary reflections and essays, entitled Elfenbeinturm und Barrikade ('Ivory Tower and Barricade') of 1983 Lenz operates, as his title suggests, with a series of contrasting word-pairs in an effort to define the nature and function of literature. He locates literature in a no-man's land between commitment and detachment, between political effectiveness and aesthetic ineffectualness, between the concrete historical situation and timeless, archetypal experiences. These unexceptional views offer another way of approaching Lenz's work and of defining its limitations. Lenz observes that art embodies both the concrete and universal, corresponding in his own fictional world to the specificity of the German past and the existential truths which in his view transcend it. Now, as we have seen, both these aspects are indeed found in Lenz's work, but it is less their presence than how they are presented which is at issue. The theory of the concrete universal, a commmonplace of literary theory, assumes a congruence of concrete and universal, the universal embodied within the concrete, the concrete symbolizing the universal. It is precisely this congruence which is missing from Lenz's work. Concrete and universal,

historical and existential, are merely juxtaposed; their implications run counter to each other.

Perhaps this tension in Lenz's writing can best be illustrated by his use of the symbol of the wreck. In the short story of that name, Das Wrack, as in Hemingway's After the Storm, which inspired it, the fisherman's discovery of the wreck prompts a series of increasingly desperate attempts to salvage the valuable cargo. Lenz's fisherman gambles his livelihood on the conviction that the wreck contains a fortune, only to discover that it was carrying horses; Hemingway's fisherman is equally obsessed, but beaten to the salvage by others. The wreck, then, symbolizes obsessive hopes which prove ill-founded, a universal meaning removed from any historical setting. In Die Wracks von Hamburg ('The Wrecks of Hamburg'), a group of radio features written in the 1950s and reissued in the 1970s, Lenz is more explicit about the universality of his symbol: the wrecks which litter the port of Hamburg after the war remind man of 'the loss of his works, once boldly conceived and destined to bear our hopes over the seas'. Again, Lenz opts for the universal meaning, but these particular symbols of man's hopes come to grief have another meaning: they are reminders of a specific historical situation. These wrecks, the same ones which figure in Der Mann im Strom, are visible reminders of the grandiose dreams of National Socialism. The universal image has a concrete historical meaning which is incompatible with it. The dreams of National Socialism were better sunk; their destruction is hardly a symbol of man's unfulfilled hopes. Existential meaning and historical significance diverge disturbingly.

The co-presence of the universal and the specifically historical in Lenz's work has undoubtedly conditioned its reception and contributed in no small degree to Lenz's enormous popularity. The fact that the two aspects of his work fail to coalesce may be a literary defect, but it has in no way inhibited his readers. On the contrary, they can enjoy the illusion that he is treating the thorny problems of the German past, whereas, as I hope I have shown, he employs the universal or existential aspect to divert attention from the historical, rather than to illuminate it. His work only seems to offer 'Vergangenheitsbewältigung', a coming to terms with the German past. But in another sense, mainly for Lenz as an individual, a reappraisal of the German past, of his personal past, gradually becomes possible. The patterns laid down in childhood are examined and found to be wanting. The notions of childhood innocence, an idyllic youth spent at one with the landscape of the Masurian lakes, is impossible to maintain in a context in which the temporal setting is National Socialist and the geographical setting a political issue of the 1950s and 1960s. All that Lenz can do, if he wants to preserve his idyll of an innocent childhood, is to invent surrogate, acceptable father-figures and a surrogate, unproblematic homeland, which he locates in Schleswig-Holstein, on the North Sea coast. Compelled to cling on to his notion of childhood innocence and adult guilt, Lenz is constrained to find a different, acceptable geographical setting in which such a scheme can be played out.

Gunter Grass's treatment of the theme of a lost childhood is radically different, though his own solution to the portrayal of such a childhood is conditioned by remarkably similar external factors. Grass was born of German-Polish parentage in what was then the Free

City of Danzig, under the protection of the League of Nations, in October 1927. He was a member of the Hitler Youth and was, in the last year of the War, conscripted into the army and wounded before being taken prisoner by the Americans. On his release he worked in a potash mine, and studied sculpture before embarking on a literary career with poems, plays and finally, in 1959, achieving his breakthrough to national and international fame with Die Blechtrommel (The Tin Drum). If I confine my remarks this evening to that novel, it is because it is arguably not only Grass's greatest achievement, but also one of the most remarkable works of West German fiction. In examining Grass's view of history, his image of childhood, his portrait of his own and his narrator's past, I shall argue that the complex narrative mode which he invents offers a means of dealing with the German past which eluded Siegfried Lenz. The German childhood between 1933 and 1945 poses extraordinary problems for the writer; only extraordinary solutions prove adequate to the task of evoking it. Like Lenz, Grass is a 'Heimatvertriebener', someone who has been expelled from his homeland. In West Germany, over the whole period of its existence, associations of 'Heimatvertriebene', such as Silesians, or East Prussians, have remained not only reminders of the German borders of 1937, keeping alive the customs, folk-lore, costumes and culture of their 'Heimat', but also political pressure-groups, which with varying degrees of success, forced the West German government at least to pay lip-service to the reunification of Germany within its 1937 borders. Such groups have tended to operate on the right of West German politics. The implications of The Tin Drum in 1959 ran counter to the policies of these groups, for while Grass undoubtedly succeeds in recapturing the atmosphere of pre-war Danzig, its sights, sounds, even smells,

his image of history prevents that evocation from becoming a political imperative.

As my colleague John Reddick has demonstrated, in one of the earliest (and best) studies of Grass, the image of history which pervades Grass's writing is one of circularity. In the poem 'Zwischen Marathon und Athen' ('Between Marathon and Athens') he conjures up the image of a hen, sitting on a clutch of eggs, brooding on the subject of starts and finishes, reflecting, as it were, on the chicken-and-egg argument, of which she is providing a practical demonstration. While they can reflect on processes, Grass's characters (and his narrators) are still caught up in them. The circularity of the chicken-and egg argument becomes a recurrent motif of the novel, never more vividly, or bleakly, demonstrated than in the image of history as a merry-go-round. Inspired by the historical reality of the death of four thousand refugees fleeing eastwards in the last days of the war (an operation in which, incidentally, the young sailor Siegfried Lenz played a part), Grass creates a modern version of the Slaughter of the Innocents. I quote here from Ralph Manheim's translation for the benefit of those who do not speak German, though I shall have more to say about this translation later:

> I was riding a merry-go-round, I wanted to get off but I couldn't. I was one of many little children sitting in fire engines and hollowed-out swans, on dogs, cats, pigs, and stags, riding round and round. I wanted to get off but I wasn't allowed to. All the little children were crying, like me they wanted to get out of the fire engines and hollowed-out swans, down from the backs of the cats, dogs, pigs, and

> stags, they didn't want to ride on the merry-go-round any more, but they weren't allowed to get off. The Heavenly Father was standing beside the merry-go-round and every time it stopped, he paid for another turn. And we prayed: 'Oh, our Father who art in heaven, we know you have lots of loose change, we know you like to treat us to rides on the merry-go-round, we know you like to prove to us that this world is round. Please put your pocket-book away, say stop, finished, fertig, basta, stoi, closing time - we poor children are dizzy, they've brought us, four thousand of us, to Kasemark on the Vistula, but we can't get across, because your merry-go-round, your merry-go-round ....'

The circularity of movement within this very paragraph is echoed in the circularity of symbolism throughout the novel: the tin drum itself is round; the children, in their sinister games, dance round in a circle, before selecting one of their number for ritual elevation or equally ritual punishment. The language and lore of the schoolchildren of Danzig is brilliantly captured in the songs they sing: 'Saurer Hering, eins, zwei, drei', or 'Ist die Schwarze Köchin da?', or 'Ich sehe was, was du nicht siehst', or 'Glas, Glas, Glaschen/Zucker ohne Bier,/Frau Holle macht das Fenster auf/und spielt Klavier'; yet the structures of adult society, the choosing of a leader, the selection of victims, are simultaneously laid bare. There is nothing of Rousseauistic innocence about Grass's children: their ritualized behaviour exposes in unvarnished form the cruelties and aggressions of society at large. The 'Schwarze Kochin', the black witch of Oskar's childhood, chants will pursue him though the pages of the novel, like an avenging angel, to punish him for adult crimes.

Circularity is a feature of a further thematic complex in the novel: the culinary. Oskar's grandfather Koljaiczek presumably drowns in the river; his body feeds the fish on which his family in turn feeds. When Agnes, Oskar's mother, begins to eat fish compulsively, the cycle is complete. As Grass, in a parody of biblical language, expresses it: 'eel to eel'. The grim cycle of history informs both the themes and the structure of the novel.

But the notion of circularity poses a narrative dilemma. Where does one begin one's narrative? And where end it? At what point may the circularity of events be interrupted? This is a recurrent problem in all Grass's fiction. His narrators reflect on the processes which they have experienced, but they are also part of them, inextricably bound up in events. Grass's narrator in The Tin Drum is Oskar Matzerath, reflecting from the security of the lunatic asylum on the events which he helped to shape. The impetus for writing is guilt, a guilt deriving from that involvement. The motive for writing is expiation or exculpation. The unreliable narrator, a commonplace in fiction by the middle of the twentieth century, acquires in Grass's fiction a precise historical function, that of reflecting on the German past in the years from 1933 to 1945, and like that of so many of his fellow-countrymen, Oskar's memory proves to be remarkably defective.

One of Oskar's functions, then, is to explore and explain a past of which he was an observer, but in which he was also a participant, a duality of perspective which Grass captures through his oscillation between a first and third person narrative. But Oskar is also intended to encapsulate the spirit of Danzig. His parentage is

uncertain: he is the son of Agnes, whose mother's Kashubian background suggests a link with the population of the region in prehistory; his father is either the 'Reichsdeutscher' Matzerath, signalling Danzig's links with the German Reich, or, as Oskar himself fondly believes, Jan Bronski, who is Polish. Through Oskar the dual heritage of Germany and Poland, together with a link to an ancient population which inhabited the area well before the existence of national boundaries is presented. Culturally, too, Oskar is heir to two traditions, the Germanic and the Slav, represented by Goethe and Rasputin respectively. But Oskar is also unusual in that he has ceased to grow: throughout the early part of the novel he remains the size of a three-year-old. This ingenious device enables Grass to present the experiences of National Socialism from a child's perspective, viewing events from below. Oskar can be present at central events, like the siege of the Polish Post Office, or the arrival in Danzig of the Red Army, but not be called to account for his involvement. The perspective of the three-year-old Oskar permits a maximum of reflection and observation, with a minimum of personal responsibility. But if Oskar lays claim to being a picaresque hero, fully aware at all times, choosing consciously to cease growing by throwing himself down the cellar steps, he is also unreliable, and evasive: perhaps, indeed, he fell. Oskar's guilt, in the early part of the novel, is patent: it is he who is responsible for Jan Bronski's presence in the siege at the Polish Post Office; it is he who gives Matzerath the Nazi party badge when the Russians arrive, which prompts Matzerath to swallow it, with fatal consequences, in his desperate desire to prevent its discovery.

Reflecting on a childhood spent in Danzig between 1933 and 1945, Grass succeeds with his narrative strategy in avoiding the incongruity of value-schemes which bedevils Siegfried Lenz's recollection of the past. Grass depicts Danzig with realistic precision; he worked, as we know, from street maps of the city. He conjures up the atmosphere of the place, conveying what it must have been like to be alive in a specific place at a specific time. All this is offered with the confident assurance of a nineteenth-century realist novelist. But through his narrator, Grass presents not only the cool, detached, realist perspective of the sovereign picaresque hero, but also a participant's retrospective evasions and excuses, for Oskar is writing the novel from the vantage-point of post-war West Germany. It is interesting that Siegfried Lenz in The German Lesson should have elected to imitate the narrative strategy employed by Grass in The Tin Drum. Lenz's Siggi Jepsen similarly recalls his past, writes it down, in a prison cell, under the eye of a warder. But Siggi's memories are presented, formally, as unproblematic. He knows what he experienced and offers it to the reader as an authentic recollection in the first person. To this unproblematic mode corresponds, as I have tried to show in the first part of my lecture, an unproblematic set of moral choices. Grass's more complex narrative drums up the past, but simultaneously consigns it to the realm of unreliable fiction; the reader is constrained to accept its tangible, sensuous reality, but simultaneously to take delight in its imaginative exaggerations and fantasies.

For Grass, the past of his childhood is irredeemably lost as a political and social reality. It can be conjured up in fiction, but that process itself becomes the subject of unsettling narrative games.

That the theme of the lost world of childhood is so central to Grass's concern, and so problematic, emerges in the splendid litany which concludes the eighth section of the novel. For reasons which will emerge shortly, I should like to ask your forbearance to quote it first in German:

> . . . muss er auch gleichzeitig das Land der Polen suchen. Sucht es womit? Er sucht es mit seinen Trommelstöcken. Sucht er das Land der Polen auch mit seiner Seele? Mit allen Organen sucht er, aber die Seele ist kein Organ.
>
> Und ich suche das Land der Polen, das verloren ist, das noch nicht verloren ist. Andere sagen: bald verloren, schon verloren, wieder verloren. Hierzulande sucht man das Land der Polen neuerdings mit Krediten, mit der Leica, mit dem Kompass, mit Radar, Wünschelruten und Delegierten mit Humanismus, Oppositionsführern und Trachten einmottenden Landsmannschaften. Während man hierzulande das Land der Polen mit der Seele sucht - halb mit Chopin, halb mit Revanche im Herzen - während sie hier die erste bis zur vierten Teilung verwerfen und die fünfte Teilung Polens schon planen, während sie mit Air France nach Warschau fliegen, und an jener Stelle bedauernd ein Kränzchen hinterlegen, wo einst das Ghetto stand, während man von hier auf das Land der Polen mit Raketen suchen wird, suche ich Polen auf meiner Trommel und trommle: Verloren, noch nicht verloren, schon wieder verloren, an wen verloren, bad verloren, bereits verloren, Polen verloren, alles verloren, noch ist Polen nicht verloren.

And now the same passage in Ralph Manheim's translation:

> . . . he cannot help looking for Poland at the same time. How does he look for it? With his drumsticks. Does he also look for Poland with his soul? He looks for it with every organ of his being, but the soul is not an organ.
>
> I look for the land of the Poles that is lost to the Germans, for the moment at least. Nowadays the Germans have started searching for Poland with credits, Leicas, and compasses, with radar, divining rods, delegations, and moth-eaten provincial students' associations in costume. Some carry Chopin in their hearts, others thought of revenge. Condemning the first four partitions of Poland they are busily planning a fifth; in the meantime flying to Warsaw via Air France in order to deposit, with appropriate remorse, a wreath on the spot that was once the ghetto. One of these days they will go searching for Poland with rockets. I, meanwhile, conjure up Poland on my drum. And this is what I drum: Poland's lost, but not forever, all's lost, but not for ever, Poland's not lost forever.

Grass's point, in German at least, is that the term 'lost', 'verloren' is of such importance that he rehearses it in a whole variety of syntactical contexts, stressing thereby that one's idea of loss is relative, that the sheer physical reality of a place remains, that loss depends on one's vantage-point, both politically and in time. He opens his recitation with a locus classicus of exile. It is Goethe's Iphigenie, who, in exile in Taurus, stands upon the shore 'das Land

der Griechen mit der Seele suchend', ('searching for the land of the Greeks with her soul'). The soul, it transpires from Grass's scheme of things, is rather an imprecise instrument for such fine political discrimations. You will note that Manheim is ill-at-ease with Grass's strategy. Grass goes to extraordinary pains to relativize the loss in question; Manheim suggests that Poland is 'lost to the Germans for the moment at least', which suggests to me that Manheim thinks that the Germans are going to get it back again. Not content with cutting out the relativizing litany on loss and transforming it into a veiled threat wholly alien to Grass's sentiment, Manheim unaccountably omits all reference to 'humanism' and 'opposition leaders' and changes the pressure groups from the lost territories, the 'Landsmannschaften' into more harmless sounding students' associations. Nor does he try to capture the sense of 'Hierzulande', 'hier', 'von hier aus', 'Here', 'in this part of the world', i.e. West Germany, the vantage-point from which the speech is written, the exile which is Grass's own. When Grass returns, at the end of the paragraph to his variations on the theme of loss - in so doing he supplies within the structure of a single paragraph an example of that circularity which is his theme - the German actually runs: 'lost, not yet lost, lost again, lost to whom, soon lost, already lost, Poland lost, everything lost, Poland is not yet lost'. Manheim again turns it into a cold-war threat, which his American readers might find inspiring but which displays a cruel misunderstanding of Grass's whole concern: 'Poland's lost, but not forever, all's lost but not forever, Poland's not lost forever.' The last phrase 'Noch ist Polen nicht verloren' is admittedly difficult to translate. It is the Polish National Anthem, first sung by the Polish Legion in Italy under Napoleon in 1796. It has come to mean, as a German idiom, precisely what Manheim says: 'don't give up, all is not

yet lost'. But Grass is rehearsing all the possible associations and variations on 'Polen' and 'verloren'; it is clear that he rejects any vengeful notion of restoring the pre-1937 frontiers of Germany. He goes out of his way to put the word 'verloren' into every possible context in order to advertise its relativity. For Grass, the childhood world of Danzig is lost; it can be drummed up in fiction, but that attempt will also involve anew a confrontation with the guilt with which it is bound up. That point emerges clearly from Grass's Die Blechtrommel; whether it emerges anything like as clearly from Ralph Manheim's The Tin Drum is a moot point.

Inaugural lectures, as a genre, tend to offer a broad often theoretical justification of their subject. I have opted to give instead a practical demonstration of the kind of question which literary critics, especially perhaps non-German critics, tend to ask when they confront post-war German literature. If I need at all to defend the teaching of post-war German literature, let me remind you that Grass's Die Blechtrommel first appeared in 1959, before the present generation of undergraduates was born. Its meanings need to be teased out; its social, political and historical implications explored and made accessible to English and Welsh readers who thankfully experience no profound political uncertainties in looking at their own childhood. And, as I hope I have shown, we need students who can achieve the highest standards of German, high enough to be aware of more of the meaning than even an adequate translation can convey. If German departments can achieve this goal, then we are fulfilling simultaneously our linguistic and our academic functions, and all is not yet lost.