

**Günter Grass's *Unkenrufe***

**Telling German Hi/Stories –  
Who is telling them? And by whose authority?**

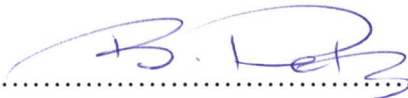
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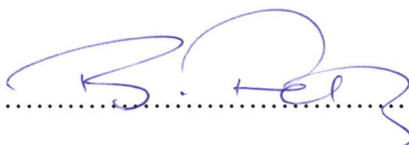
## DECLARATIONS

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material which has been accepted for a degree or diploma by the university or any other institution, except by way of background information and duly acknowledged in the thesis, and no material previously published or written by another person except where due acknowledgement is made in the text of the thesis.



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## ABSTRACT

Historical writing is a means of taking possession of the past in the interest of the present, and in turn, the future. The reunification of Germany provided the impetus and urgency for historiography to play an important role in influencing the kind of nation that would establish itself in the heart of Europe. With a crucial aspect of the nation's identity consisting in its relations with its neighbours, the prospect of reunification threw the spotlight on unresolved aspects of German-Polish relations, for at that time Germany's border with Poland had still not been recognized by the Federal Republic. To Günter Grass Germany's prevarication on this issue has long been a matter of deep concern. *Unkenrufe*, his first post-unification prose fiction work, is his response to the new urgency surrounding issues of German-Polish relations at the time of reunification. It is an important work which, to date, has not been accorded the recognition it deserves.

Employing two questions posed by Grass – ‘Wer erzählt hier? Und mit wessen Erlaubnis?’ – as its starting point, this thesis situates *Unkenrufe* securely within the traditions of Grass's complete oeuvre, while simultaneously demonstrating that the work represents a new departure in that most central aspect of Grass's prose fiction writing, namely the narrator figure. The two most significant changes which distinguish *Unkenrufe* from the work of the preceding decades are identified as, firstly, the shift in the narrator's location away from the position at the centre of the action characteristically occupied Grass's narrators, to a position on the edge of the action; and secondly, a move away from a concern with metafiction towards a concern with metahistory. The *Unkenrufe* narrator is

identified as an historian whose methodical treatment of historical documents as he struggles with the existential circumstances which brought the documents into his possession shows how historical obligation falls to those who were too young to have been perpetrators and victims, those whose age might imbue them with the cool distance of the 'Verdienst- und Schuldlosen'. At the same time, however, *Unkenrufe* represents a step towards the more direct confrontation of the issue of the German victims of Nazism which is seen a decade later in *Im Krebsgang*, and is a precursor to a broader, more considered approach to German history.



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## BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Wherever possible I have used the 1997 Steidl edition of Grass's works, *Günter Grass. Werkausgabe*, Göttingen: Steidl, 1997, edited by Volker Neuhaus and Daniela Hermes. The volumes and their individual editors are as follows:

1. *Gedichte und Kurzprosa* (eds. Volker Neuhaus and Daniela Hermes)
2. *Theaterspiele* (ed. Dieter Stolz)
3. *Die Blechtrommel* (ed. Volker Neuhaus)
4. *Katz und Maus* (ed. Volker Neuhaus)
5. *Hundejahre* (ed. Volker Neuhaus)
6. *örtlich betäubt* (ed. Volker Neuhaus)
7. *Aus dem Tagebuch einer Schnecke* (ed. Volker Neuhaus)
8. *Der Butt* (ed. Claudia Mayer-Iswandy)
9. *Das Treffen in Telgte* (ed. Claudia Mayer-Iswandy)
10. *Kopfgeburten oder Die Deutschen sterben aus* (ed. Volker Neuhaus and Daniela Hermes)
11. *Die Rättin* (ed. Volker Neuhaus)
12. *Unkenrufe* (ed. Daniela Hermes)
13. *Ein weites Feld* (ed. Daniela Hermes)
14. *Essays und Reden I 1955 – 1969* (ed. Daniela Hermes)
15. *Essays und Reden II 1970 – 1979* (ed. Daniela Hermes)
16. *Essays und Reden III 1980 – 1997* (ed. Daniela Hermes)

As the above edition does not include any interviews it has sometimes been necessary to cite from the 1987 Luchterhand edition, *Günter Grass. Werkausgabe*, Darmstadt und Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1987, edited by Volker Neuhaus. Volumes X, *Gespräche mit Günter Grass*, is edited by Klaus Stallbaum.

Volume numbers for all quotations follow the orthography used in the respective editions: arabic for the 1997 *Werkausgabe*, and roman for the 1987 Luchterhand *Werkausgabe*. To avoid confusion I will also cite references to the latter as WA 1987.

Ellipses in square brackets have been used to differentiate between the omission of parts of the original source in a quotation and Grass's frequent uses of ellipses in his fiction.

Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from the German are my own.

Nun wird es mir immer schwerer, von meinem Aufenthalt in Rom Rechenschaft zu geben; denn wie man die See immer tiefer findet, je weiter man hinien geht, so geht es mir in Betrachtung dieser Stadt.<sup>1</sup>

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In Germany Günter Grass is arguably the most maligned writer of his generation, but he is also the most highly decorated, with his numerous honours and awards crowned in 1999 with the Nobel Prize for Literature. In his acceptance speech for the Sonning Prize three years earlier, he posed the pair of interesting rhetorical questions which serve as a spring-board for this thesis. He was reflecting on the furore that had arisen over his work *Ein weites Feld* in the preceding year during which an unprecedented barrage of vitriol had been aimed at him. Reading the statements made by the fictitious characters in the work as utterances of the author's opinion, many of the critics fired their shots at the author, rather than at the work in question.<sup>2</sup> In his speech Grass told his Danish audience that he, as author, is certainly present in his characters, but only in minute particles, in such tiny crumbs as to be unrecognisable except perhaps for a few stylistic quirks. He presented his audience with the following pair of questions, saying, 'Vor diesem Vexierspiel ist lange zu rätseln':

Wer erzählt hier? Und mit wessen Erlaubnis?<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Goethes Werke* 11: 165.

<sup>2</sup> See Negt; and Oberhammer and Ostermann.

<sup>3</sup> 'Von der Überlebensfähigkeit der Ketzer' 16: 448.

So what does it mean when one of the last surviving representatives of the great German post-war fiction writers asks his listeners to consider, ‘Who is telling the story here? And with whose permission?’? The questions, of course, are fundamental to the critical evaluation of any stories heard or information received. In the context of the following examination of *Unkenrufe* and its place in Grass’s prose fiction writing as a whole, the questions suggest three related paths of inquiry. To follow the first two I shall be enlisting the help of narratologists, for, in a general literary sense, they have already done the ‘long puzzling’, and their answers to Grass’s first question form the underlying basis for much of this study. The third path of inquiry will involve the consideration of questions of authority, and authorization.

Grass’s own answer to the first of his questions is particularly interesting because it represents a distinct shift in his approach to the construction of his narrator figures. In the 1970s and 80s he had written a number of works in which he features himself – his family, his political activity, his travel, for example – rather more prominently than the above statement would lead us to expect. Yet in his speech Grass went on to say:

Man könnte hoffen, das Ich wäre weg, endlich, wäre nicht mehr zu treffen, zu verletzen, gäbe es nicht jene berufsnotorischen Spürnasen, die in jedem zweiten Nebensatz den Autor zu hören meinen und die dessen Ich schon längst aufgespießt und zwischen anderen Schmetterlingen in Kästchen gesperrt haben (16: 448).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Grass’s image of the author being treated like a specimen – exposed to the unfeeling gaze of science – is reminiscent of Sigg’s description of himself under the ‘wissenschaftlicher’ scrutiny of the psychologist Wolfgang Mackenroth in Siegfried Lenz’s *Deutschstunde*: ‘Wo hatte er mich

Grass's statement is quite a remarkable turnaround given that for the previous two decades his prose fiction works had been constructed so as to place the author's 'I' very prominently at their centre, both as subject and object of their narration. It suggests a shift, or turning point, in Grass's prose fiction that begs investigation and explanation. My second avenue of inquiry, therefore, must be the discovery of the factors that may have led to such a significant change.

Thirdly, the questions demand that matters of narratorial authority within the texts under consideration, as well as authorization outside the texts be addressed. When we ask, 'What gives the various narrators in the texts the right to tell the stories they tell?', we see that the answer changes with the identity of each narrator. Outside the text Günter Grass derives the authorization to tell the kinds of stories he does – stories which 'wound Germany's collective narcissism'<sup>5</sup> – from his belonging to a particular generation of Germans, namely the one,

die bei Kriegsende zu jung gewesen war, entweder Nazi oder Verfolger der Nazis gewesen zu sein. Dennoch waren sie alt genug, um aus der Sicht jugendlich distanzierter Zeugen berichten zu können. Diese bloß vom Jahrgang begünstigste Distanz, diese Kühle der Verdienst- und Schuldlosen [...] ('Der Stil der sechziger Jahre' 14:165).

Indeed, for Grass it is more than a right; it is an obligation to tell stories. All story tellers, whether they be of what we call fact, or of what we call fiction, or of the hybrid genre 'faction', are competing to fill a contested space. Here it is the space of German identity, or German self-understanding. In all of his works Grass

aufgespießt mit seinen Nadeln? Welche Ansicht bot ich sozusagen in ausgestopftem, getrocknetem, jedenfalls wissenschaftlich präpariertem Zustand?' (Lenz, 495).

<sup>5</sup> Negt, 19.

dramatizes the subjectivity of perception as well as the role of the individual as victim, contributor to, passive observer of, and recorder of, the events of history. It is the positioning of the narrator figure in each work which determines on which of these categories the main emphasis falls.

The changes in the way in which Grass has constructed his narrator figures over the decades, and the variations in his ironic play with them, make his above-cited questions especially apposite as a starting point for my close examination of *Unkenrufe* as a work which has ushered in a change of approach in Grass's fiction writing. This change, in turn, necessitates a re-examination of existing periodizations of his work. Grass's questions lead, as we have seen, to the discovery of a basic change in narratorial practice that distinguishes Grass's early post-*Wende* narrator figures from their predecessors. This is highly significant because Grass's narrator figures, both in their personal characteristics, and in the manner of their narration, are as significant for the meaning of the works in which they appear as the content of the tales themselves. As vehicles of the discursive strategies of his prose fiction works, his narrators belong to that aspect of the literary texts which distinguishes them from all other types of texts and makes them *literary*. As Patrick O'Neill explains in the introduction to his semiotic formalist exploration of a selection of twentieth-century German narratives, literary discourse is different from all other forms of social discourse – such as history, philosophy, and so on – because of its provocative potential for openness and debatability of meaning. Drawing on Seymour Chatman's distinction between the *discourse* and *story* aspects of narrative – 'the most fundamental and most powerful distinction of contemporary narratological theory', O'Neill asserts that



‘in a *literary* narrative, much traditional reading to the contrary, discourse is always necessarily primary, story always necessarily secondary’. What we see as readers, he observes, depends on what we are looking for, and where we are looking from (*Acts* 4-11).

When Grass’s prose fiction works are viewed from a vantage point that throws the spotlight on their *discourse* aspect, significant differences in the way Grass shapes his narrator figures can be observed from one period of post-war German history to the next. These differences are the result of paradigm changes that affect the dynamics of the narrators’ interactions with the stuff of history. The narrators of Grass’s *Danziger Trilogie*, especially the ubiquitous Oskar Matzerath, have excited sustained scholarly interest.<sup>6</sup> The volume of research pertaining to the works which followed the *Danziger Trilogie* is considerably smaller.<sup>7</sup> Auffenberg says of Grass scholarship:

Sie beschäftigt sich zwar immer wieder mit Perspektiven, Standorten und Funktionen des Erzählers, klammert aber Aspekte des Vorgangs, der Struktur und der Technik des Erzählens – und vor allem der immanenten Selbstreflexion des Erzählens – weitgehend aus (6).

This remark is, with the exception of his own work on *Die Blechtrommel* and *Die Rättin*, still valid. Studies of Grass’s narrator figures have tended to concentrate on

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<sup>6</sup> See, for example: Bruce, 1966; Bruce, 1971; Parry, 1967; Behrendt, 1968; Schwarz, 1969; Just, 1972; Botheroyd, 1976; Sera, 1977; Ryan, 1977; Caltvedt, 1978; Rohlf, 1978; Brode, 1980; Gerstenberg, 1980; Beyersdorf, 1980; Neuhaus, 1984; Krumme, 1985; McElroy, 1986; Schröder, 1986; Weber, 1986; O’Neill, 1996. The dates indicate the continuing relevance of this aspect of Grass’s work.

<sup>7</sup> e.g. Durrani, 1980; Jurgensen, 1980; Bauer Pickar, 1983; Wimmer, 1982; Neuhaus, 1984; Weber, 1986; Rohlf, 1987.

individual narrators rather than suggesting any kind of classification,<sup>8</sup> and I am not aware of any study which has sought to identify the commonalities and differences amongst all of Grass's narrator figures. There is, therefore, a need both for a longitudinal study as well as one which concentrates on Grass's later narrator figures, and their relationship to German history and identity.

This thesis is not a comprehensive longitudinal study, but a starting point. Its main focus is on the nameless narrator of Grass's 1992 *Erzählung Unkenrufe*. Unlike *Die Blechtrommel*, which 'has gradually assembled around itself an entire army of analysts, interpreters, and exegetes who have variously illuminated and occluded the object of their scrutiny according to their particular critical lights' (O'Neill, *Acts* 97), *Unkenrufe* has received very little attention to date. The narrator of *Unkenrufe* in particular has only been mentioned in passing. Yet, as I hope to demonstrate, *Unkenrufe* is a significant work, and marks a watershed in Grass's prose fiction oeuvre.

My focus on the tellers of Grass's tales, and my tracing of the 'genealogy' of the *Unkenrufe* narrator in Grass's earlier prose fiction works has led me to propose a new periodization of Grass's fiction writing from 1959 to 1995 based on fundamental changes in the way in which he constructs and uses his narrator figures. I identify three different creative phases with deep connections to the changing political and social climate in Germany at the times during which each

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<sup>8</sup> A notable exception is Hanspeter Brode's examination of *Die Blechtrommel*, *Aus dem Tagebuch einer Schnecke* and *Der Butt*, 'Kommunikationsstruktur'.

group of works was written. Grass's aesthetic response to historical phenomena, and to problems of German identity in particular, finds very clear expression in the strategies he adopts with regard to his narrator figures. While agreeing with Dieter Stolz's observation that, in Grass's 'labyrinth of signs', 'eindimensionale Interpretationsansätze oder starre Rezeptionsmodelle dem vielschichtigen Oeuvre des geschichtsbewußten Polyhistor und kunstvoll lügenden Dichters nicht gerecht werden' (Stolz, *Günter Grass* 9), I suggest that the most distinctive characteristic of Grass's early post-*Wende* prose fiction writing is his thematization, through the construction of his narrator figures, of the problems of formal historiography. While Grass's complete oeuvre has, from the beginning, been driven by his understanding of the imperatives of German history, his treatment of history in *Unkenrufe* (and *Ein weites Feld*) bears hallmarks that are peculiar to this period of his work. This study of *Unkenrufe* will show that the reunification of Germany has been the stimulus for a new phase in Grass's fiction writing to begin.

When we ask the questions: 'Wer erzählt hier? Und mit wessen Erlaubnis?' in relation to the narrators of these two post-*Wende* works we find not only significant overlaps, but also differences to the answers that the preceding works offer. In *Unkenrufe* the reader is confronted by a representation of history-writing in progress, and forced to consider the issues surrounding the question of the authorization of German histories and, in particular, the roles played by documents, as well as problems of memory and repression. Here, at a new intersection of history and fiction in Grass's work, Hayden White's work on the relevance of literary theory and practice to historical writing becomes illuminating. Much of the *Unkenrufe* narrator's activity as an historian can be seen

as a fictional illustration of some of White's observations, especially in regard to the kind of structures that are imposed in the narrativisation of historical events to make them tell a certain kind of story, with a beginning, a middle, and an end (*Metahistory* 6). In this section I shall also be drawing on Dorrit Cohn's *Distinction of Fiction*. The work of White and Cohn will be brought to bear in a complementary fashion, especially in the latter part of my analysis of *Unkenrufe*.

My aim is to demonstrate that *Unkenrufe* is a significant work in Grass's prose fiction oeuvre, not only because it is the first work to appear since German reunification, but also because of the way it shows Grass's response to the challenge of reunification in its content and narrative structure. My prime concern is with the changes in narrative technique by means of which Grass allows the effects of reunification to reverberate throughout the *Erzählung*. I will describe some of the features that *Unkenrufe* shares with Grass's earlier prose fiction, and elaborate how *Unkenrufe* is linked to the rest of Grass's oeuvre by means of intertextual reference, his characteristic treatment of time, the persistence of certain motifs and techniques, and the assimilation of Germany's literary, religious and cultural heritage. It is against the background of Grass's consistency in these matters that the significant differences which distinguish his first post-*Wende* narrative from the work of the preceding decades achieve their prominence. A major change has taken place in that the narrator of the work has moved to the edge of the action, away from the positions at the centre that Grass's narrators have characteristically occupied. The same must be said of the narrator collective of *Ein weites Feld*. Moreover, in their acts of writing these narrators simultaneously display a move away from a concern with metafiction towards a

concern with metahistory. My periodization of Grass's prose fiction works focussing on the narrators makes it possible to view most clearly how these shifts have been executed, and the consequences they have for reading Grass's writing.

In the second chapter of my thesis I shall explain the major terms used in my argument, and justify my periodization of Grass's prose fiction writing. In the third chapter I shall begin my study of *Unkenrufe* by outlining its reception, then move on to a description of some of the significant aspects of the work, the most important of which, for this study, is the narrator. Following this initial treatment of the narrator I shall look, in chapters four and five, at other aspects of *Unkenrufe* in order to provide a fuller picture of the work in terms of the historical relevance of its content, and its relationship to Grass's preceding works and to German cultural history and tradition. These chapters will demonstrate the literary richness of the work as well as providing the necessary background against which the detailed description of the narrator as an historian in Chapter 6 must be viewed.

Thus the fourth chapter of the thesis begins with a description of Alexander and Alexandra, the main protagonists – their names, their backgrounds, and the context of their project. This leads to an exploration of the significance of the title metaphor. Chapter 5 is an exploration of Grass's use of the Dance of Death motif and his play with numbers, the role of the church, and the relationship of *Unkenrufe* to Grass's other literary and non-literary works. Finally, in Chapter 6, I shall return to the narrator, to address in greater detail the significance of his reflections on his task of writing a formal history of the venture undertaken by his onetime classmate and hero. I will advance arguments for viewing the *Unkenrufe*

narrator as an historiographer, providing a detailed analysis of the strategies Grass has employed in the construction of this narrator figure, and linking these to Hayden White's work on the writing of history, and Dorrit Cohn's on narratology.

## 2. GÜNTER GRASS, HISTORY AND THE ‘TOOL SHED OF NARRATOLOGY’

There are many ways of exploring narrative texts. I will draw on a combination of the traditions of close reading and poststructuralist semiotic formalism. The results of my investigation, as Patrick O’Neill predicted for his work on Grass, are not so much about what the texts under analysis *are* about, as what they can productively be *read* as being about (*Acts* 10). It is from within this framework, which entails ‘visits to the tool shed of narratology’ (Hoesterey 9), that I will argue that the manner in which the story of Alexandra and Alexander is conveyed to the reader by the first-person narrator has as much meaning as the story itself, and therefore makes its own contribution to the *content* of the work. While it is certainly true that the story of Alexandra and Alexander’s project, and their wheeling and dealing with death and Deutschmarks forms a substantial component of *Unkenrufe*, it is the way the narrator tells their story, and the strategies he adopts in the process, that make the work so interesting.

When *Unkenrufe* is viewed from the perspective of its *discourse*, as manifested in the specific ways in which the narrator figure functions, the work can be read as a dramatization of the process of history writing. Grass constructs the narrator’s telling of Alexander and Alexandra’s tale in such a way as to point up important aspects of historiography both generally, and in their relationship to recent German history. Crucial to my analysis are the interface between history and fiction, and the terms *story* and *discourse*, narrator and first-person narration,

metafiction and metahistory, as well as periodization and its attendant difficulties. These I will address in turn after some remarks about Günter Grass and why history, especially German-Polish history, occupies such an important place in his literary works.

## **GRASS AND HISTORY**

History has been described as ‘Thema und Aufgabe’ of Grass’s literary work (Rothenberg 1), and there is a large volume of scholarly work on history as a critical category in his prose fiction writing.<sup>9</sup> Grass’s life coincides with one of the most turbulent eras of twentieth-century history, and in broad outline his experiences are those of a generation of Germans who, although too young to be directly implicated, have inherited the responsibility for dealing with the legacy of Hitler’s Germany.<sup>10</sup> Grass’s biography is important to the study of his work, because it is from his life experiences that he has developed the understanding of history that underlies his work. His life experience is the source of the moral authority that informs his political activity and his artistic endeavours in prose fiction, poetry, plays, sculpture, lithographies, drawings and paintings.

With very few exceptions, accounts of Grass’s biographical background begin with the assertion that his father was a grocer. This somewhat anachronistic convention of identifying people by the trade or profession practised by their

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<sup>9</sup> As a representative sample see, for example, Cepl-Kaufmann, 1975; Caltvedt; Thomas; Durzak, 1985; Frizen, 1988; Fischer; Bond and Preece; Hensing; Cepl-Kaufmann, 1996; Hell; Preece, 2001.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, “‘Mit solchem Gepäck’. Günter Grass in Selbstaussagen’, WA 1987, X: 434-459, and Neuhaus, *Schreiben gegen die verstreichende Zeit*.



fathers has led to the perpetuation of a distorted image of Grass's early life. Thus when Achim Roscher, seeking to contextualise Grass's work within his life experience, begins his interview with the standard 'der Vater war Kaufmann, die Mutter wohl seine hilfreiche Partnerin', Grass is obliged to correct him:

Zunächst eine Korrektur: Die dominierende Person war die Mutter, sie war auch die Eigenerin des kleinen Geschäfts, mein Vater versuchte ihr hilfreich zu sein, mit wechselndem Erfolg (8).

As well as being the 'bread winner' in the family, Helene Grass (1898-1954) exerted a powerful influence over her son's development through her love of the arts, her religious practice, her support for her son's creative aspirations, and also very importantly, her ethnic origin. As a member of a book club she stocked a glass-fronted bookcase full of books of all kinds which her son consumed avidly in preference to the Karl May books that occupied most boys at the time. Helene Grass stimulated an appreciation for the arts in her son. '[S]ie liebte das Schöne, lauschte dem Volksempfängerradio Opern und Operettenmelodien ab, hörte gern meine vielversprechenden Geschichten, ging oft ins Stadttheater und nahm mich manchmal mit' ('Fortsetzung folgt ... ' 3). She encouraged her son's creative talents in the face of her husband's opposition, and his expectation that his son should also become a grocer ('Schreiben nach Auschwitz' 16: 237). As Grass explained to Erhard Kluge in a radio interview: 'Hinzu kommt nun noch, daß ich von mütterlicher Seite mit mehreren Talenten ausgestattet wurde, nicht nur was das Schreiben betrifft, sondern eben auch das Zeichnen'. He went on to say how he feels enriched by his 'doppelte Vewurzelung'. Grass's first-hand experience of

the richness of ethnic diversity came by way of his mother's Cassubian background.<sup>11</sup> When he was thirteen years old he wrote his first piece of fiction in response to a competition run by the Hitlerjugend publication *Hilf mit!*. Written in a shop ledger he wheedled from his mother, the piece was entitled 'Die Kaschuben'. 'Geflieben sind die Kaschuben und ihr heidnisch-katholisches Unterfutter. Geflieben ist die Geschichte, die über sie hinwegging, ohne sie kleiner als klein machen zu können. Geflieben ist: Stoff genug' ('Nach Zwanzig Seiten waren alle Helden tot' 16: 426). The 'heidnisch-katholisches Unterfutter' that Grass speaks of is the peculiarly Polish branch of Catholicism that he experienced in the Danzig area during his childhood. Although his father was a protestant, Helene Grass insisted that her children be brought up as Catholics. Grass lost his faith and left the Church in his early teens, yet his experience of Polish Catholicism left a permanent impression on his psyche, and the activities of the Church's temporal representatives, and the behaviour of people in relation to matters of religion constitute a recurring motif throughout his work. His fond, emotional attachment to the Cassubian side of his family is in evidence in numerous phonetic renderings of the Cassubian dialect in his works, including *Unkenrufe*. With regard to *Unkenrufe* Hans-Werner Eroms observes, 'Das kaschubische erscheint damit als die wahre Grundsprache, wie Kaschubien ja den Nabel der slawisch-deutschen Welt darstellt' (Eroms, 38).

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<sup>11</sup> The Cassubians are a Slavic minority group inhabiting the area west of Gdańsk whose dialect is now spoken by fewer than 150,000 people.

The city of Danzig, too, left its stamp on Grass. He calls Danzig/Gdańsk his ‘literarischer Fixpunkt, der spekulativ genug ist, um jegliches Weltgeschehen zu bündeln’ (‘Die Fremde als andauernde Erfahrung’ 16: 455). As well as being in a singular position at the hub of historical developments in the Second World War, and the site of his childhood adventures, it is the city in which Grass learnt to do as the adults did during the Nazi era, namely, look away when, ‘in the broad light of day’ the destruction of the Jewish community began, and when everywhere ‘posters and headlines proclaimed hatred’ (‘Wie sagen wir es den Kindern?’ 15: 503-517). It was the place where he saw that people simply disappeared, presumably into Stutthof concentration camp, with nobody asking questions about where they had gone, or why. ‘Das war ja unter anderem ein Zeichen der Zeit – und in dieser Mentalität war ich völlig eingemündet –, daß nicht nachgefragt wurde’ (Neuhaus, *Verstreichende Zeit* 313).

But Danzig has another, more positive side for Grass. With admiration he frequently refers to Gdańsk’s character before the First World War when it was defined by the richness of European diversity rather than a specific national character. Although under the throne of Poland for three hundred years, it had its own legislative assembly and was a state within a state but for short breaks during the partitions of Poland. The city was strongly influenced by German and Dutch art and culture, and it had an openness to the world evident in its belonging to the Hanseatic League, its acceptance of Huguenot, Mennonite, and Scottish refugees, and its resistance to unequivocal definition as either Polish or German. In Grass’s view, the diversity of culture the city has experienced in its long history dashes all national claims to primacy, whether Polish or German. For Grass Danzig/Gdańsk

and the surrounding area is neither ‘urpolnisch’ nor ‘urdeutsch’, as some on both sides of the Oder/Neisse-border continue to assert (‘Chodowiecki zum Beispiel’ 16: 314).<sup>12</sup>

In the ‘Es war einmal’ section of Liebenau’s ‘Liebesbriefe’ (the second ‘book’ of *Hundejahre*) the narrator says of Langfuhr, the Danzig suburb in which Grass himself grew up, that it was so big and so small that whatever happens, or could happen in the world, happened or could have happened there (5: 407). The concept that ‘gerade in der Provinz sich all das spiegelt und bricht, was weltweit – mit den verschiedenen Einfärbungen natürlich – sich auch ereignen könnte oder ereignet hat’ is repeated in an interview with Ekkehardt Rudolph, as one of the reasons why Grass has chosen to centre so much of his work on this area, which seems to him to be predestined for his fictional representations because of its mix of Polish and German people, its ‘weltoffene Lage’, and colourful history (‘Die Ambivalenz der Wahrheit zeigen’ WA 1987, X: 180). Danzig-Langfuhr is the ‘hub’, the anchor, of Grass’s existence, and it is from here that his sphere of interest expands, beginning with the history of his family, and extending to his neighbourhood, his province, and his nation, to embrace a concern for humanity as a whole. This concern finds expression not only in his controversial writings, both fictional and non-fictional, but also in such diverse activities as his creation of a foundation for Sinti and Roma, support for persecuted writers in other countries (Salman Rushdie, and Ken Saro-Wiwa, to name only two), support for gay rights,

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<sup>12</sup> See also ‘Rede vom Verlust’ 16: 373; and Roscher 8f.

his campaigning for *Gesamtschulen* as a desirable alternative to the traditional tiered German secondary school system, his support of asylum seekers, his funding of literary prizes for new writers, his donation of his country house at Wefelsfleth as a retreat for writers – to name but a few examples.

Grass's greatest driving force as a writer and as a public intellectual comes from the burden he bears as a result of two profound life events. The first is his alarming recognition that it was by no virtue of his own that he was not amongst the perpetrators of the crimes of the National Socialist era. In retrospect he can see how he had been swept along with the tide of German nationalism in his youth, never questioning its ideology, even when he was in danger of being executed by his own people, such as when, as a seventeen year old soldier, he was the lone survivor of a group of equally young men blown to pieces in a Russian attack. Even the knowledge that he was in danger of being taken for a deserter, and like so many others in every village and town, hung from a tree in a main street, did not shake his belief in the ideology (Neuhaus, *Verstreichende Zeit* 28-29). Soon after, as a prisoner of war, Grass was obliged to visit Dachau concentration camp as part of the American re-education campaign. He simply could not believe that Germans could have committed the atrocities in evidence at Dachau. It was not until his onetime *Reichsjugendführer*, Baldur von Schirach, admitted that he had known of the crimes that Grass's nightmare awakening began to take place.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> See, for example, 'Geschenkte Freiheit' 16: 141.

It is Grass's terrifying insight that, but for the accident of the year of his birth, he could have been guilty himself:

Es war mir nicht möglich, mich, wäre ich nur lächerliche fünf oder sieben Jahre älter gewesen, von der Teilnahme an dem großen Verbrechen auszuschließen, zumal mich (mit wachsender zeitlicher Distanz immer häufiger) Angstträume belasteten, in denen ich mich versagend, schuldig erlebte ('Wie sagen wir es den Kindern?' 15: 513).<sup>14</sup>

Grass insists that 'jede Geschichte, die heute in Deutschland handelt, schon vor Jahrhunderten begonnen hat, daß diese deutschen Geschichten mit ihren immer neuen Schuldverschreibungen nicht verjähren, nicht aufhören können' ('Wie sagen wir es den Kindern?' 15: 514).

The second of the two profound life events that motivate Grass's engagement as a writer and as a public intellectual is one he shares with millions of his countrymen, and that is the immeasurable grief suffered by the 'Vertriebenen' who lost their homelands in the east in the aftermath of the war. Decades after having been forced to leave his homeland, and despite his fame, he remains 'das unstet und ortlos gebliebene Flüchtlingskind' ('Überlebensfähigkeit' 16: 449). Unlike some, however, Grass insists that this loss is justified by what the Germans had done:

das heißt ein verbrecherisch geführter Krieg, der Völkermord an Juden und Zigeunern, Millionen ermordeter Kriegsgefangener und Zwangsarbeiter, das Verbrechen der Euthanasie, zudem das Leid, das wir als Okkupanten unseren Nachbarn, besonders dem polnischen Volk, zugefügt haben ('Rede vom Verlust' 16: 373).

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<sup>14</sup> Grass expresses similar sentiments in other public speeches including in 1983 'Vom Recht auf Widerstand' 16: 63-70; in 1985 'Geschenkte Freiheit' 16: 141-155; and in 1989 'Scham und Schande' 16: 217-220.

In fact, saying, ‘Verlust macht mich beredt’, Grass suggests that loss of one kind or another may well be a prerequisite for literature. The irrevocable loss of his eastern homeland is what challenges him to ‘call the lost object by name again and again until it answers’. He describes his work as an attempt to fit words together like fragments, and form them into something that makes the loss visible (‘Rede vom Verlust’ 16: 373). Although the words cannot compensate for the loss, there is the hope that they may prevent a repetition. For a long time Grass’s greatest fear has been that his countrymen are still capable of the same crimes, and that the only way to prevent a recurrence is to keep the memory alive. He considers it his civic duty, as ‘Citoyen’ of his problematic fatherland, ‘nicht als Gewissen der Nation’ (Roscher, 19)<sup>15</sup> to challenge the Germans to prove him wrong when he asserts, ‘Die Deutschen sind wieder zum Fürchten!’ (‘Rede über das Selbstverständliche’ 14: 162).

Indeed the title ‘Gewissen der Nation’ is not necessarily a title he would have chosen for himself, and there are times when he finds being ‘Gegenstand dieser Öffentlichkeit’ rather difficult (*Zunge zeigen* 9). The term, as it is used in connection with Grass (or Böll), seems to be a convenient means of disparaging unwelcome political views by insinuating that the writers have set themselves on a pedestal above their countrymen and women. As a successful writer, it is accepted that Grass has the right to speak with authority on literary matters. However, when

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. also, from 1969, ‘Mich hat die selbstgefällige Art, im nachherein [...] in regelmäßigen Abständen als Gewissen der Nation aufzutreten ziemlich angeödet’. (‘Unser Grundübel ist der Idealismus’ 14: 472).

he addresses the public on political matters, 'mit Hilfe des zuerst lästigen, dann immer langweiliger werdenden Ruhmes' ('Unser Grundübel' 14: 472), he encounters resentment, especially when he does not confirm prevailing opinions. Grass, however, derives his authority to speak out about political and social matters from the two fundamentally German, generational experiences described above, namely the experience of having been blinded by an ideology, and that of irreparable loss. These insights are reflected in the autobiographical preamble with which he frequently begins his speeches and lectures, as well as in his consistent use of the first-person plural: 'wir Deutschen'.

Since the early sixties Grass has campaigned consistently for public policy to take account of the factors which led to the 'Zerschlagung des Reiches, zur Minderung des Reichsgebietes, und zur Teilung des restlichen Landes' ('Die kommunizierende Mehrzahl' 14: 245). He has continued to argue against the unification of Germany into one nation on the grounds that in the past, whether imperial, or national socialist, strong, united German states have caused immeasurable harm to their neighbours and themselves. Instead he advocates a politically pluralistic confederation of the post-war German *Länder*, premised on the renunciation of all attempts to resurrect the borders of the German Reich as it was in 1937, that is to say, premised on the recognition of the Oder-Neisse border between Poland and Germany.

The other consequence of the German defeat of 1945 is the loss of the country's eastern provinces. Grass's heartache at the dispossession suffered by himself and so many others, and at its cause (namely, the unconditional moral surrender of 30



January, 1930<sup>16</sup>), has been expressed consistently over the years, but with renewed intensity since the fall of the Berlin Wall. In *Unkenrufe* he evokes not only the victims of the Nazi genocide, but also those victims of criminal nationalism who have not entered public memory, namely the expellees, as a reminder that it is not only ‘others’, but Germans themselves who became victims of their own country’s policies. With the same, or even greater passion than that with which he once declared, ‘Niemals hätten, nie haben Deutsche so etwas getan’, Grass now insists, in relation to the crimes he once could not believe, ‘Das wird nicht aufhören, gegenwärtig zu bleiben. Unsere Schande wird sich weder verdrängen noch bewältigen lassen’ (‘Schreiben nach Auschwitz’ 16: 236).

The earliest manifestation of Grass’s awareness that the National Socialist era had created a caesura in German history, a ‘Zivilisationsbruch’, although it was not articulated as such at the time, is his reaction to the first history lesson that he attended after the war. He had joined a motley group of students of all ages who were trying to catch up on the education that had been so rudely interrupted by the war. He could cope with the first class. That was Latin. The second was History. The history teacher picked up the course at the very place at which Grass’s old history teacher had left off in 1943, with a ‘Thema aus dem deutschnationalen Legendenschatz’, the Ems Telegramme. The young Grass’s recognition that history was being taught as if the horror of the intervening years had never taken

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<sup>16</sup> See, for example, ‘Geschenkte Freiheit’ 16: 141.

place drove him from school on that day, and he never returned to complete his *Abitur* (Neuhaus, *Verstreichende Zeit* 39).

In 1971 Grass diagnosed in the younger generation of Germans a tendency towards ‘Geschichtslosigkeit oder zur Flucht aus der Geschichte heraus’, a tendency which he saw as dangerous insofar as it reduced the individual’s ability to take account of the experiences of previous generations (Cepl-Kaufmann, ‘Verlust’ 84). He also became concerned about the related problem of the way history is written, or, more specifically, who the recorders of historical events are, what goes into historical writing, and what is left out. In 1977 he remarked ‘wie sehr unsere Geschichtsschreibung, die sich als authentisch ausgibt, weil sie auf Dokumentation fußt, Fiktion ist: nicht zugegebene Fiktion’ (Arnold 31).<sup>17</sup> At that time his concern was with the tendentious nature of surviving historical documents, as well as with the fact that the documents that provided the raw material for histories had only survived by chance. A decade later, in June 1986, in a speech at the International Pen Congress in Hamburg Grass once again made it clear that in his view official historiography only records ‘politische Machtverschiebungen, [...] militärische Siege, Verträge und Vertragsbrüche, [...] Daten und regierungsamtliche Dokumente’ (‘Als Schriftsteller immer Zeitgenosse’ 16: 178).

Solche Geschichtsschreibung geht über den einzelnen in der Masse der Leidenden hinweg. Übersichtlich ordnet sie, was vorgestern noch chaotisch zuhauf lag. Der Blick von unten bleibt ausgespart. Die Unterlegenen hinterlassen in der Regel

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<sup>17</sup> For Grass’s ‘hostility’ towards conventional historiography see also Jenkinson.

nur wenige Dokumente ('Als Schriftsteller immer Zeitgenosse'  
16: 178f.).

In Grass's view the inability of the surviving documents to reveal the whole story can be compensated for by the fiction writer, whose task is to fill the gaps left by conventional historiography, 'genauere Fakten zu erfinden, als die, die uns angeblich authentisch überliefert wurden' (Arnold 31). Moreover, as a contemporary, who is experiencing historical events as they happen, the writer is able to retain in his/her writing the absurdity of the historical process, to bury the large dates under a thousand smaller ones, to give so-called heroes human dimensions that recognise fear, cowardice and defeat. Rather than impose artificial order onto the chaos of history, the fiction writer retains a sense of its absurdity ('Als Schriftsteller immer auch Zeitgenosse' 16: 179).

With the reunification of Germany, Grass felt that it was more necessary than ever that Germans not only look to their history, but that they be on guard against ways of looking at history that seek to remove blame, or suggest that the past is no longer relevant, such as had been espoused by some participants in the *Historikerstreit* of the late eighties.<sup>18</sup> The acrimonious 'War of the German Historians' began with Jürgen Habermas's response to what he saw as 'Apologetic tendencies in current German historical writing' in the work of leading historians, Andreas Hillgruber (Cologne), Ernst Nolte (FU Berlin), and Michael Stürmer (Erlangen).<sup>19</sup> He accused them – in Hillgruber's case unfairly, in Gordon Craig's

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<sup>18</sup> See, for example, *Historikerstreit*.

<sup>19</sup> Habermas, 'Schadensabwicklung'.

view ('The War') – of trying to trivialize what had happened under the Nazi regime, and in Nolte's case, of seeking to justify the genocide because of a perceived Bolshevik threat. Habermas saw their work as a threat to Enlightenment values and the pluralistic historiography that Germany has achieved in the meantime. Within days historians around Germany were mobilised in a debate that raged not only in *Die Zeit*, but also in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, *Der Spiegel*, *Merkur*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, and *Frankfurter Rundschau*, and lasted till the end of the year.

As David Roberts (following Hans-Ulrich Wehler) points out, what was really at issue in the Historians' Debate, this 'controversy concerning the uniqueness of the National Socialist' extermination of the Jews', was 'the *historical* interpretation and *political* significance of recent German history,' for Germany today (33. Original emphasis). In their respective struggles to determine the present and future identity, or self-understanding, of Germany the contenders on both sides of the debate were acting out a process that Hayden White has observed with regard to 'most professional historians of the nineteenth century, [who,] although they specialized in political history, tended to regard their work as a contribution less to a science of politics than to the political lore of national communities' (*Content* 30). Michael Stürmer is well aware of the *sinnstiftende* function of historians: 'Wer aber meint, daß alles dies [Nostalgie nach alten Zeiten] auf Politik und Zukunft keine Wirkung habe, der ignoriert, daß im geschichtslosem Land die Zukunft gewinnt, wer die Erinnerung füllt, die Begriffe prägt und die Vergangenheit deutet' (36). The polemics were about *which* understanding of German history should determine the present identity of Germany. While the

conservative side argued for a view of the past which would allow them to feel pride rather than shame for their past, Habermas insisted on seeing Auschwitz as the defining moment of German identity, an 'irreversible caesura' in German history. In this view 'the loss of national history and identity must be preserved as loss', and a reflexive 'self-understanding must take the place of national identity' (Roberts 34).

Although he was away in India for much of the time during the Historians' Debate, Grass clearly shares Habermas's view that 'Auschwitz' is an incontestable source of national identity. In his 1990 lecture, 'Schreiben nach Auschwitz', in the Frankfurt 'Lectures on Poetics' series, he made it very clear that it is everything that is subsumed under the metaphor 'Auschwitz' that tells the Germans who they are: 'Jetzt endlich kennen wir uns' (16: 256).<sup>20</sup> He counters implicitly the arguments put forward during the *Historikerstreit* by saying that despite the best efforts of some historians to compare Auschwitz with other crimes against humanity, or to pass it off as an unfortunate period of German history, the fact remains that there is no comparison, and because admissions of guilt cannot change it, it will always remain so incomprehensible that the events of history can be dated as having occurred before or after Auschwitz (16: 236).

The geographical changes to Germany after 1945 are a physical reminder of this. The political division of Germany into two states is frequently characterized as an

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<sup>20</sup> The relationship between this important lecture and *Unkenrufe* will be addressed in Chapter 4 below, under the heading 'Die Idee, die bleibt rein? Selbst anfangs nicht rein'.

‘open wound’,<sup>21</sup> a painful lesion that served as a daily reminder to the Germans of what they were capable of. However, it is doubtful that the division of Germany had such significance for Germans in both German states who were born after the war, and who identified with only one of the two ideologically opposed states as their German fatherland. Hans-Georg Betz provides convincing evidence that as West German society gradually adopted its own distinct ‘post-conventional’ identity, it gradually drifted away from the notion that it comprised a common nation with the east, and its citizens became increasingly indifferent to Germans on the other side of the border.<sup>22</sup>

In Grass’s view a united Germany was a danger to its neighbours, and to the rest of the world – a view which the elites of other European countries initially shared.<sup>23</sup> Rather than political unity, Grass embraces Herder’s concept of a national identity which is founded in a national culture (*Kulturnation*), above and beyond the political nation state. As Peitsch points out, before reunification the *Kulturnation* position, which held that the two German states were united by one single literature, was the most popular of three distinct positions adopted by West German writers in response to the ‘German question’ (*West German Reflections*

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<sup>21</sup> For a discussion on the possible interpretations of the ‘open wound’ metaphor see Brockmann 186ff and 223.

<sup>22</sup> Stephen Brockmann cites several writers who testify to the fact that ‘the other Germany’ was less significant for them than other countries further away and without a shared heritage (163). Hans-Georg Betz notes that by the early 1980s, unification had virtually disappeared as an important societal and political issue (48).

<sup>23</sup> Jarausch also notes that popular opinion in Europe and the United States was at odds with that of the elites in that the majority of the people favoured German reunification. Not surprisingly, the Poles, with 64% against German reunification, constitute an exception (*Rush* 82).

157-58).<sup>24</sup> For Grass Auschwitz is a 'bleibendes Brandmal' of history that sets Germany apart from other nations, making political unity an irresponsible act ('Schreiben nach Auschwitz' 16: 256).

With the reunification of Germany on the third day of October 1990 the most enduring outwards signs of what had been, at least initially, the most painful monument to the defeat of 'Greater Germany' in 1945 were formally removed. Thus reunification could also be seen as the event that finally gave the sign that the time of 'sack-cloth and ashes', of mourning and penance for the 'crimes against humanity' was over, and that the new German state need not refer to 'Auschwitz' as the fixed point of its identity.

With the closure of the 'open wound' the citizens of the new Germany could at last stride out of the shadows which the guilt and shame of racism and aggressive nationalism had cast over their country, and formally redefine their identity, both as Germans and as Europeans. If the crimes of the past could be relativized, if they can be understood and surmounted, then it would be possible to read the reunification of Germany as a closing of the door on the past, and an opening of the door to a new future in which German particularity may be celebrated without shame. It gave a kind of formal legitimacy to the aspirations of those sections of the community who wanted to have done with the past. The 'normalcy' to which these sections of the German community had aspired in the preceding years was

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<sup>24</sup> The other positions Peitsch identifies are the 'Federal Republican position' (which held that the state which had been irrevocably destroyed in 1945 had been replaced not only by two states, but by two nations with quite different cultures), and the 'reunification rhetoric position'.

now complemented with 'normalcy' in terms of the outward political structure of their state. As a country no longer divided, Germany might at last be able to understand itself as a nation which had finally outgrown the label 'die verspätete Nation'.<sup>25</sup>

Konrad Jarausch has suggested that, with the end of the division indicating German blame, unification 'has provided a new point of departure suggestive of a drama of guilt, atonement, and redemption' ('Normalization' 23). For Grass, however, unification has not provided a new point of departure, but rather an intensification of the old problems. For him there is only one point of departure, one against which all other mooted points of departure are measured and found to be inadequate, and that point is the unspeakable horror that is subsumed under the name Auschwitz. If there is any redemption at all, it is only a conditional redemption, and only to be accessed through the recognition of German *Schuld*, and the shouldering of its burden by successive generations. Grass likens this debt to the case of a person who inherits a house that has a mortgage. That person inherits the mortgage as well as the house. Grass includes as part of this legacy the unconditional acceptance of the territorial losses inflicted upon Germany after the war, and the need for constant vigilance to ensure that the circumstances out of which National Socialism and its crimes arose do not occur again. It is his personal experience of loss, survival, and debt that authorises him to adopt the position he does, and to speak out so insistently and vehemently. As he wrote to

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<sup>25</sup> I.e., 'the delayed, or late nation'. It is commonly used denote the late arrival of the German lands as a nation-state on the international scene.



his Japanese colleague Kenzaburo Oe, 'Wir Alten, die wir zufällig überlebt haben, die der Krieg launenhaft gespart hat und denen die Zufälligkeit ihrer Existenz bewußt wurde, wir sind weiterhin verantwortlich [...]'. The survivor, as Volker Neuhaus puts it, 'gerät in die Situation der Boten Hiobs' (Neuhaus, *Verstreichende Zeit* 28). Grass's *Hiobsbotschaft* is:

daß die Deutschen – und das mag eine moralische Position sein, aber die bejahe ich – mit ihrer Schuldfrage nicht fertig geworden sind. In den fünfziger, sechziger Jahren gab es den sicher gutgemeinten Begriff von der 'Bewältigung der Vergangenheit'; heute zeigt sich, und das stelle ich auch bei mir fest, daß die Vergangenheit nicht zu bewältigen ist (Grass and Giroud 26).

Grass reacted to the fall of the Wall by warning with great urgency against the revival of a 'Zero Hour' or *Stunde Null* understanding of German history, the idea that one could begin afresh, as if nothing had gone before. Speaking in relation to *Unkenrufe*, Grass made his view quite clear: 'In jeder Geschichte, die heute in Deutschland oder Polen spielt und in ihren Beziehungen zueinander steht, gibt es einen Hintergrund, der im Vergangenen liegt, für das es keine Stunde Null gibt' (Roscher 26). Here Grass is reiterating a position he has expressed consistently over the years in his speeches, essays and literary writing.

In his speech entitled 'Geschenkte Freiheit', delivered on the 8th of May 1985, Grass equates the term *Stunde Null* with other euphemisms in common use at the time. He says that the Germans like to avoid such expressions as 'bedingungslos' for example, preferring to use words that cover over, rather than reveal what really happened – words such as 'Zusammenbruch', 'Katastrophe' or 'Kriegsende'.

Und noch immer im Umlauf befindet sich die schillernde Umschreibung "Stunde Null". Wem schlug sie? Den Toten nicht also den Überlebenden? Den Herren Flick und Krupp etwa, die nach nur kurzer Unterbrechung weitermachten, wie vor und

nach dreiunddreißig, als sie sich ihren Hitler mit Methoden finanzierten, denen keine Stunde Null angezeigt war [...]? (16: 143).

Yet Grass is very much aware of the seductive nature of the *Stunde Null* concept, and its promise of a new beginning unencumbered by a shaming past:

Es stimmt: Viele, auch ich, hingen damals die Illusion an, es werde – und zwar hier wie dort – etwas Neues entstehen, es solle nie wieder das Kapital oder der Staat oder eine einzige Partei alleine die Macht haben, es dürfe nicht abermals das Gewehr in die Hand genommen werden, es gelte, die Stunde Null zu nützen (16: 143).<sup>26</sup>

In Grass's view Konrad Adenauer and Walter Ulbricht made a 'fiction' of the *Stunde Null* with their respective policies, including rearmament (16:143). The *Stunde Null* is a 'Schwindel oder Illusion (16:144). Grass has adhered firmly to the view expressed in his earlier speech, 'Rede vom Verlust': 'Wer gegenwärtig über Deutschland nachdenkt und Antworten auf die deutsche Frage sucht, muß Auschwitz mitdenken' (16: 364).

In the early 1970s Grass was able for the first time to find a satisfactory description of his role as a writer. As he explains it to his children in *Aus dem Tagebuch einer Schnecke*: 'Ein Schriftsteller, Kinder, ist jemand, der gegen die verstreichende Zeit schreibt' (7: 148). With this often cited definition he meant that as a writer he could try to anticipate the future, which will all too soon become the past, and try to shape it, before it disappears.<sup>27</sup> This intention has been

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<sup>26</sup> Grass uses the same metaphor on a number of occasions. Cf. also 'Keine Stunde Null schlug uns', in 'Kein Schlußwort' 16: 531.

<sup>27</sup> See Cepl-Kaufmann, 'Gegner' 99.

a constant in his work ever since. The shape of his creations is determined by his understanding of the past.

*Unkenrufe* is a call to readers to avoid a new calamity by grasping the present and future in their relationship with the past. The specific focus is on Germany's neighbour Poland, not only Grass's *Heimat* in geographical terms, but also the country which arguably suffered the greatest losses as a consequence of the war,<sup>28</sup> and the only country whose post-war borders had not yet been recognized by the Federal Republic when the prospect of reunification presented itself as a real possibility. The difficult relationship between Poland and Germany has been a consistent theme in Grass's work. In *Die Rättin* he depicts it in terms of a rat parable in which the baby rats ask the mother, 'Was sind Polen? Was sind Deutsche?' (11: 102). The she-rat answers:

Selbst heute darf, aus Angst vor Empfindlichkeit, nur halblaut gesagt werden, daß jene aus deutscher Menschensicht polnisch anmutende Wirtschaft auch der polnischen Ratte eingefleischt ist. Weshalb es zwischen Polen und Deutschen, obgleich sie nicht merklich verschieden aussahen, immer wieder zu Spannungen, sogar zu Feindseligkeiten kommen mußte; desgleichen zwischen deutschen und polnischen Ratten: Dieser Haß, soviel verschmähte Liebe (11: 103).

The precarious social, political and economic conditions in Poland at the beginning of the nineties was the result of a combination of circumstances in which the Germans, because of the way in which they have shared the same area of the earth, are inextricably involved. The issues Grass raises in *Unkenrufe* are complex and in the text Grass suggests no cut and dried solutions, only

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<sup>28</sup> See Davies 32.

possibilities. From his extra literary writing, however, his attitude towards Poland is unequivocal:

Polen braucht Hilfe, unsere Hilfe, denn wir sind immer noch in Polens Schuld. Hilfe freilich, die nicht Bedingungen diktiert, die nicht der polnischen Schwäche deutsche Stärke zu kosten gibt, die nicht auftrumpft mit schändlichen Reden, wie kürzlich der bayrischer Politiker Theo Waigel gehalten hat. [...] Wer Polens Westgrenze in Frage stellt, ruft zum Vertragsbruch auf. Wer so redet, heute so redet, noch immer so redet, handelt schamlos und macht uns Schande ('Scham und Schande' 16: 220).

With reunification Germany and its neighbours moved into a new phase of history. Grass's response in his literary work is to explore yet another aspect of history writing, as well as addressing the tasks, described above, namely: keeping the memory of German history alive; filling the gaps left by conventional history; and changing the perspective from one which is only concerned with great political events and the decisive battles of history, in order to give a voice to the vanquished, the frightened and the cowardly whose everyday lives are 'unter der Fuchtel herrschender Meinung' ('Als Schriftsteller immer Zeitgenosse' 16: 179). These tasks can be seen as compensating for the shortcomings of official historiography. In his first two post-*Wende* works Grass examines the actual process of official historiography. He does this in *Unkenrufe* by portraying the creation of an historical report. In *Ein weites Feld* the activities of archivists, that is to say the official keepers of historical documents, are subjected to Grass's ironical scrutiny as he makes them, as a narrator collective, the readers' access to the fictional world.

## THE NARRATOR

As we are dealing here with fictional worlds, that is, those worlds created by

literature as *representations* of the real world, I will begin this section with Grass's definition of literature – one which is in keeping with Patrick O'Neill's view cited in the introduction to this thesis:

Literatur hat mit Kunst zu tun, es ist eine Kunstform und in erster Linie ästhetischen Gesetzen verpflichtet. Dieses Produkt der Kunst lebt davon, daß er vieldeutig ist, doppelbödig ist und eine Menge von Interpretationen zulassen kann. Es muß erst einmal respektiert werden, daß der, der auf ein Bild, auf ein Buch reagiert, etwas für ihn Wichtiges erlebt ('Von morgens bis abends' 183).

In turning now to the specifically *literary* I shall begin by articulating my understanding of some of the terms I will be using in my study of *Unkenrufe*.

Every statement presupposes the existence of a person who makes that statement. The generic characteristic of narrative texts is that the reality of the fictional world is 'mediated' (Stanzel) or 'transmitted' (Chatman) to the reader by some kind of narrating instance. Stanzel, for example, describes 'mediacy as the generic characteristic of the narrative text' (*Theory* 6.) The 'mediating' or 'transmitting' instance is called the narrator. The term *narrator* in relation to works of fiction refers 'neither [to] the original creators of narrative texts, the flesh-and-blood authors, nor [to] the principle of invention in the text that we call the implied author, but [to] someone or something in the text who or which is conceived as presenting (or transmitting) the set of signs that constitute it' (Chatman, *Coming* 116). It follows logically that if the text is a work of fiction, then the narrator, who is 'in the text' must be a part of that fiction, and therefore a fictional creation. Sometimes, particularly in reviews of Grass's fiction, for example, the distinction between the real living author and the fictitious construct which tells the story is blurred or ignored, much to the detriment of the reader's interpretation of the work

at hand.<sup>29</sup> The maintenance of the distinction between the author and the fictional construct that tells the story within the text is vitally important to the interpretation of the works under consideration, because if the distinction is blurred interpretive possibilities that arise from the manner in which the fictional reality is mediated, and from the relationship between the telling and the tale, are missed.

However, some texts, including some under consideration in this thesis, consciously blur the distinction between author and narrator by engaging in a kind of play which invites the reader to continually renegotiate the relationship between the two entities. Dorrit Cohn discusses the markers of some such ambivalent texts, or texts where the reader does not know how closely to identify the narrator with the author, in her work *The Distinction of Fiction*. She points out that although the tendency towards taking a narrative told in the first-person at its face value, and confusing the narrator's consciousness with that of the author, must be both acknowledged and frowned upon, it does show that 'the distance separating author and narrator in any given first-person novel is not a given and fixed quantity, but a variable, subject to the reader's evaluation' (33). But even in such cases, it is still possible to draw a distinction between the narrator in a work of fiction and the real, living author.

Play with different kinds of mediation (or narration) within and between works is a hallmark of Grass's fiction writing. This play is especially important with regard

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<sup>29</sup> Amongst those who have drawn attention to the practice in relation to Grass's work are Neuhaus (*Günter Grass* 1), Negt (10) and Frizen (Review 264).

to the clear intention of certain of his works to minimize then stretch the distance between narrator and the real author. *Der Butt* is a good example of this practice. We recognise the real Günter Grass in his house at Wewelsfleth, and identify Ilsebill with Veronika Schröter, his partner at the time, and Ulla Witzlaff with Ute, his wife-to-be. There are points in the novel where the distance between the fictional narrator and Grass in his troubled relationship are minimal. But again and again Grass frees the narrator from his real self, giving him multiple historical identities. This play, as well as the significant shifts in Grass's practice with his narrators, can only be appreciated if the distinction between author and narrator is maintained, for it is precisely the manipulation of this distinction that distinguishes the works of the second period of his prose fiction writing from the works which precede and follow it. As Brauxel, one of the narrators of Grass's *Hundejahre* puts it: 'Spieltrieb und Pedanterie diktieren und widersprechen sich nicht' (5: 7). Sklovskij's observation of Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, one of Grass's models,<sup>30</sup> is equally pertinent to Grass's work: 'Indeed, the more important part of the plot lies in the narrative act itself, and this narrative act dramatizes the mediacy in a quite astonishing manner' (Qtd. in Stanzel, *Theory* 6).<sup>31</sup> Grass's play with his narrators, and the way they perform their functions within the works is

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<sup>30</sup> See discussion under the heading 'Metafiction and Metahistory' in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

<sup>31</sup> I have adjusted this citation slightly to bring it closer to the German: 'Tatsächlich liegt der wichtigere Teil der Handlung im Erzählakt selbst, und dieser Erzählakt dramatisiert Mittelbarkeit in ganz unerhörte Weise'. (Stanzel, *Theorie* 18). Stanzel has revised his original work (*Die typischen Erzahlsituationen im Roman*, Wien: Braumüller, 1955) under cognisance of various criticisms which were directed at it, and his subsequent work, *Theorie des Erzählens*, Orig. 1979 also underwent revisions between the three editions. I use the English translation of the 2nd revised edition of the work (*A Theory of Narrative*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984).

facilitated by considering the constitutive elements of the fictional text – *story* and *discourse*.

## STORY AND DISCOURSE

Seymour Chatman terms the two major constitutive elements of narrative *story* and *discourse*. In order to view the dramatization of narrative transmission, or the ‘mediation’ of the fictional reality, it is necessary to distinguish between the manner in which a story is conveyed to the reader, and the story itself. Only then can we concentrate on the work’s narrative strategy, and appreciate the ‘mediation’ of the fictional world. To do so is to be concerned ‘[...] with form, rather than content, or with content when it is expressible as form’ (*Story* 10). *Story* and *discourse* correspond to the terms *das Erzählte* and *das Erzählen* respectively, and denote what is arguably the most important distinction promoted by theorists of narrative structure (O’Neill, *Acts* 5).<sup>32</sup> *Das Erzählte*, or the story itself, exists only at an abstract level, whereas *das Erzählen*, or the telling of it, or its manifestation in whatever genre may be chosen, entails the selection and arrangement performed by the discourse. The *story* is the content of the narrative, or *what* the narrative depicts. The *discourse* is the means by which, or *how* the story is communicated (Chatman, *Story* 37; 19). The fictional narrator, regardless of the degree of his/her/its involvement *in* the narrative, is the vehicle for its *discourse* aspect. Grass’s narrator figures function in ways that contribute substantially to the texts in which they appear. The peculiarities of these narrators,

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<sup>32</sup> For a comparison with the terminology used by other narrative theorists for these ‘levels’ of narrative see O’Neill, *Fictions* 20f.



and the manner in which they tell their stories – that is, the discursive strategies which Grass makes use of through his narrators – vary over time, and make a significant contribution to the meanings of the works as a whole.

## **FIRST-PERSON NARRATION**

Narrators can be realized in the text in a number of ways, ranging from their being all but invisible to the reader, at one end of the spectrum, to their portrayal of their own role in the rendering of the narrative, on the other. Narrators are also distinguished on the basis of whether they tell their stories from within the world of the characters of the novel, or from a position outside of the fictional world that is being narrated, as is the case with traditional, omniscient narrators. This binary opposition (internal/external) has been variously termed *homodiegetic/heterodiegetic* (Genette), *character-bound narration /external narration* (Bal 122) and *first-person* and *authorial/third person narrators* (Stanzel, *Theory*). Stanzel has devised a ‘typological circle’ of ‘narrative situations’ (ES = Erzählsituationen) to represent the possible combinations of attributes that can be associated with each of his ‘ideal types’ of narrator, which also includes a third category of narrator, which he terms *reflector*. In his view the ‘ideal types’ of narrators are not simple binary oppositions. He represents his narrative situations as a continuum both between, and within, each of the ‘ideal types’. For my study of *Unkenrufe* it is Stanzel’s description of first-person

narration that is of primary interest, as it offers valuable insights into Grass's narrative works.<sup>33</sup>

For Stanzel, the fundamental difference between the 'ideal types' of first- and third-person narrators is the identity, or non-identity of their respective realms of existence with the world of the characters (*Theory* 87). The first-person narrator's realm of existence is identical to that of the characters in the story which he/she is telling (*Theory* 48). That is to say, first-person narrators are defined in the first instance by their ontological status as existing in the world of the characters in the novel that they are narrating. Third-person narrators on the other hand, exist in an ontological sphere that is not identical to the world of their characters. They narrate from a position outside the world of their characters.

Because first-person narrators exist in the world of the characters in the novel, who are 'embodied', the narrators, too, are 'embodied'. It is in the 'embodiment or lack of such bodily determination' that Stanzel sees the most important difference in the *motivation* of first- and third-person narrators to write:

For an embodied narrator the motivation to write is existential; it is directly connected with his practical experiences, with the joys and sorrows he has experienced, with his moods and needs. The act of narration can thus take on something compulsive, fateful, inevitable [...]. The narrative process and the narrator's experience form an entity (*Theory* 93).

In other words, some aspect of the narrator's existence compels him/her to tell the story. As Stanzel goes on to say: 'The consummation of the life of a first-person

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<sup>33</sup> For a commentary on Stanzel's theory of narrative, especially in relation to that proposed by Genette, see Cohn, 'Encirclement'.

narrator is only attained with the completion of the narrative act' (*Theory* 93). In contrast, the third person narrator's motivation to write is 'literary-aesthetic' (*Theory* 93). Stanzel explains that while the narrator of *Der Zauberberg*, for instance, can sympathize with the fate of his hero, feel affection for him, or antipathy towards him, this may influence the narrative process, but it does *not* motivate the narrator to narrate in an existential sense (*Theory* 93). On the other hand, the corporeality, or embodiment, of a first-person narrator 'signals an existential connection between the experience of the protagonist and the narrative process, between the experiencing and the narrating self' (*Theory* 91). In an authorial narration the kind of self-characterization that is performed in the text by the first-person narrator 'would remain an autobiographical flourish pointing to a vacuum' (*Theory* 91).

Stanzel goes beyond these distinctions between narrator types to observe distinctions within the various 'ideal types'. Thus there are several 'stages' of embodiment. The least embodied version of the first-person narrator is the one who acts as a fictional editor, or publisher of a manuscript. This kind of first-person narrator is closest to the third-person narrator. The next stage of embodiment is seen when this kind of narrator takes a more strongly marked personal role in the fictional world, asserting his/her presence in the narrated world. Narrators who are observers, chroniclers or witnesses of narrated events belong to this medium stage. Such narrators are different from those at the final stage of embodiment – that of the quasi-autobiographical narrator – in that they stand at the periphery of events, and do not take part. The quasi-autobiographical narrator, representing the highest stage of embodiment, is the hero of his/her own

story (*Theory* 20).

While most Grass scholars agree that Grass's narrators are all first-person narrators, that view is not held universally. Cepl-Kaufmann, for example, notes, 'erzählt wird auktorial aus der historischen Distanz' ('Verlust' 61); Susan Anderson refers to the narrator of *Die Rättin* as an 'authorial narrator' (106); and Roehm identifies three narrators in *Die Rättin*, one of whom he also describes as authorial (63). Sometimes Grass's first-person narrators do indeed talk about themselves in the third-person. This aspect of Grass's work has been examined in detail by Paul Botheroyd.<sup>34</sup> Sometimes Grass's narrators know things that would be beyond their knowledge if their ontological status within their fictional worlds were prescriptive. But these changes in pronominal reference, these momentary privileges of omnipotence and omniscience that are the prerogative of the authorial narrator, are instances of Grass's manipulation of the conventions of first-person narrative, as the metafictional reflections of some of his narrators demonstrate, rather than indications that the narrators are authorial. These deviations from the norms of first-person narration, or 'border transgressions', across the dividing line between first- and third-person narration have significant interpretive implications for the texts at hand.

Notwithstanding the shifts in Grass's practice with his narrator figures which I will describe, Grass has been remarkably consistent over more than four decades

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<sup>34</sup> An interesting discussion of alternating pronominal reference using some examples from German and American writing is to be found in Stanzel, *Theory* 99-110.

in the way he has chosen from the ‘ideal types’ of narrators.<sup>35</sup> It will be useful therefore to consider why Grass may have favoured first-person narrators so consistently. Gérard Genette has suggested that an author may prefer one kind of narrator to another ‘because it is more stimulating or simply because the choice is available and he feels, whimsically, like choosing one’ (Qtd. in Diengott 527). But this is a generalization that cannot adequately account for Grass’s virtually exclusive use of first-person narrators, nor for the changes which prompted this study. Dorrit Cohn’s radicalization of Stanzel’s person distinction in order to generate a heuristic space for her exploration of the modes of narrating fictional consciousness, as she seeks to define the theoretical borderlines between the telling of fictional and real lives, also provides useful insights into Grass’s literary techniques.

Grass’s practice with his first-person narrators is consistent with Stanzel’s view that the choice between third- and first-person narration is determined by structural considerations, rather than by questions of stylistic decorum (*Theory* 84). Telling their stories is no casual affair for Grass’s narrators. Their existential situations as German citizens, coping in various ways with their ‘schwierigem Vaterland’,<sup>36</sup> in whatever setting Grass chooses to portray them, compels them to write, just as Grass himself feels obliged to write. This means that their narration

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<sup>35</sup> It could be argued that there are some exceptions, such as the sections of *Aus dem Tagebuch einer Schnecke* in which the narrator tells the story of Herman Ott, or in *Die Blechtrommel*, when Oskar co-opts Bruno to tell a part of his story. But these are simply aspects of the narrative strategies of the works, rather than real exceptions.

<sup>36</sup> ‘Unser Grundübel ist der Idealismus’ 14: 473. Grass is quoting Gustav Heinemann.

is always relativized by the various conditions of their existence in the text.

The common factor in these conditions is guilt arising from the National Socialist past. Of the narrators of the books of the *Danziger Trilogie* Grass says:

Alle drei Ich-Erzähler in allen drei Büchern schreiben aus Schuld heraus: Aus verdrängter Schuld, aus ironisierter Schuld, im Fall Matern aus pathetischem Schuldverlangen, einem Schuldbedürfnis heraus (Arnold 10-11).

The fact that first-person narrators are ‘embodied’ also makes them an ideal medium for writing about ‘das Verhältnis von Ich und Geschichte’.<sup>37</sup> Stanzel observes that the corporeal presence of the first-person narrator in the novel creates an ‘independent, autonomous system of orientation’ around the embodied ‘I’ (*Theory* 92). This means that deictic relations in the first-person novel, the ‘then/there’ and the ‘here/now’, or the narrated time (*erzählte Zeit*), and the narrating time (*Erzählzeit*) can replicate the relationship between the individual and the past in the real world. A ‘fundamental feature of our experience of reality is also true of fictional narrative: every apprehension of reality is dependent upon more or less accurate presuppositions or a prior understanding of this reality’ (*Theory* 10). Stanzel notes that as early as 1910 the German narratologist Käthe Friedemann had described the narrator as:

the one who evaluates, who feels, who looks. He symbolizes the epistemological insight that we have had since Kant, that we do not perceive the world as it is in itself, but rather as it appears through the medium of the observing mind. He divides the world of phenomena into subject and object (*Theory* 4).

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<sup>37</sup> Cf. Frizen, ‘Schopenhauer’ 167.

First-person narrators present the fictional world from their own particular vantage points, *as they perceive it*, and not necessarily *as it is* (or as it would be perceived by a different commentator). Their view of the world is marked by their subjectivity and fallibility (*Theory* 11).<sup>38</sup> Third-person narrators, on the other hand, can enter the minds of characters and report their most intimate thoughts and feelings. Furthermore, when reading third-person fiction we accept without question statements with grammatical constructions that are quite impossible in real life. Take, for example, the following: ‘Now was his last chance to see her; his plane left tomorrow’ (Cohn 24); or, ‘Heute, aber, war der Tag gekommen’ (Hamburger 76). First-person narration, on the other hand, employs the same form as normal statements of reality, and is therefore, generally speaking, a more natural kind of discourse than third-person narration. For this reason the narratologist Käte Hamburger refers to first-person narration as a ‘feigned reality statement’, or ‘fingierte Wirklichkeitsaussage’ (271-277). In the authorially narrated, or third-person novel the physical constraints of everyday life do not apply: the authorial narrator can see anything, anywhere, is privy to the characters’ innermost thoughts, and is able to perceive every detail of the narrated world accurately. First-person narrators, on the other hand, are, at least nominally, constrained by the limits of their own subjectivity, and their own time and place in their world.

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<sup>38</sup> See also Cohn, *Distinction* 24.

The subjectivity of perception as it is shown by first-person narration is one of the most powerful tools Grass uses in his representations of reality. It is an important informing feature of all of his fiction and it is thematized in one way or another by each of his narrator figures. The work in which this feature is particularly obvious is *Mein Jahrhundert*, where the subjectivity of a particular person and era is highlighted as each new narrator introduces him/herself. With his thematization of the narrative process Grass exploits to the full the existential link between subjective experience and the compulsion to write about that experience. In an interview with H. L. Arnold he made it quite clear that even during the writing process the narrators of his first four books had to function in a very specific way:

Und bei allen diesen Büchern kam es, auch inklusive *Örtlich betäubt*, darauf an, eine Erzählposition zu finden, die es dem Autor erlaubt, nicht einfach nur Sklave dieser Erzählposition zu sein, sondern sie in der Schreibzeit, in der ein Buch entsteht, auch verändern zu können (15).

Grass's choice of narrative perspective has been determined by a number of factors. The earliest manifestation of Oskar Matzerath, as yet without a name, is in an early poem. Grass describes him as:

ein junger Mann, Existentialist wie es die Zeitmode verschrieb.  
[...] Noch bevor der Wohlstand ausbrach, war er des Wohlstandes überdrüssig: schier verliebt in seinen Ekel. Deshalb mauerte er [...] eine Säule, auf der er angekettet Stellung bezog  
[...] Um seine Säule kreiste die Stadtverkehr, versammelten sich Freunde und Gegner, schließlich eine aufblickende Gemeinde. Er, der Säulenheilige, allem enthoben, schaute herab, wechselte gelassen Stand- und Spielbein, hatte seine Perspektive gefunden und reagierte metapherngeladen ('Rückblick auf die Blechtrommel' 15: 326).

Grass was unhappy with the poem, and eventually located the source of the problem in the elevated perspective which he had chosen. It was too static. He solved the problem by making Oskar an 'umgepolter Säulenheiliger', thus



achieving the mobility and distance he required, as well as providing himself with a robust and assertive interlocutor on matters pertaining to his world (15: 322). Grass's early rejection of the stylite's elevated, remote position has continued to determine the structural relationship between narrator and narrated world in his narrative fiction.<sup>39</sup> It satisfies his need to use his writing as a means of examining and proving concepts through his characters, as it allows for progress and development in the consciousness of his narrators as they continually re-evaluate and re-interpret the world in which they live, and the events in which they are involved, whether directly, or as observers. It will be shown below that this is a particularly important aspect of *Unkenrufe*. Authorial narrators, in contrast, are not affected by the passing of time, and tell their stories from a fixed point in time, and with a fixed personality (Stanzel, *Theory* 205). Stanzel cites Goldknopf's observation that first-person narration has the potential to exhibit a 'confessional increment' which cannot exist when the narrating self is not the same person as the experiencing self, as is the case with authorial narration. By this he means that everything a first-person narrator tells us has '*a certain characterizing significance over and above its data value, by virtue of the fact that he is telling it to us*' (Qtd. in Stanzel, *Theory* 98. Stanzel's emphasis).

In her study of 'two typologies of narrators', Nilli Diengott describes Stanzel's model of first-person narrative as mimetic, in that it supposes 'personlike' narrators and is couched in terminology that shows a psychological-existential bias

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<sup>39</sup> The narrator of *Die Ratten*, high above the world in his space capsule, it might be argued, can be seen as a variation on the original stylite perspective.

which includes subjectivity, credibility, embodiment, deixis, and motivation (531).

These aspects of Stanzel's model are what makes it so appropriate for a study of Grass's strategies with his narrators.

To view a novel as mimetic, rather than as diegetic, seems at first glance to be a contradiction in terms, given the distinction which has existed since Plato between mimesis and diegesis, or between showing and telling (Chatman, *Story* 32).

Moshe Ron, however, suggests that narrative texts can be seen as mimetic, as being

in a broad sense, like a set of instructions for constructing a fictional world [and this] 'world' would consist of representations not essentially different from those a reader may make himself of the 'real' world in any major respect other than his being able to characterize them as fictional (Qtd. in Diengott, 524).

Using Ron's definition we can decode Grass's texts in the first instance as 'showing' us a narrator telling a story, rather than simply as a story being conveyed by a narrator. The terms encode and decode are used by Jurij Lotman as a way of describing the actions by which meaning is created and accessed in literary texts. Lotman has described the literary, or aesthetically functioning text as 'at minimum doubly encoded' ('Content' 339). The initial decoding, that performed in the reading of any text, literary or non-literary, by any recipient who shares an understanding of the 'natural language' of the text (i.e. French, German, Russian) is virtually transparent, and is adequate for arriving at the meaning of non-literary texts. However, for literary texts such decoding only opens up a part of the potential meaning. The literary, or aesthetically functioning text means more, not less, than non-literary texts, and therefore the reader is required to perform further

decodings in order to discover the other meanings in the text. An adequate decoding of the text relies on an awareness of these principles ('Content' 339-343).

Lotman's description of how we view a work of pictorial art provides a useful analogy of the way of looking at Grass's narrative texts that gives adequate recognition to the way in which his stories are 'mediated' by his narrators. As Lotman points out, once we begin to examine the frame of a painting as a kind of independent text, the canvas disappears from our field of vision. As an example of this he presents us with Titian's painting *The Repentant Magdalene* in the Hermitage museum. The painting is set in a frame depicting two half-naked men with twirled moustaches. 'The conjunction of the painting's subject and its frame creates a comic effect. The conjunction, however, does not take place, since we exclude the frame from our semantic field in viewing the picture' (*Structure* 209).

In the context of my study of Grass's narrator figures, meaning is 'encoded' in the text in the tension that is created between the conditions of the narrators' existence and the accounts they give of the 'reality' of their worlds. We can use the concept of encoding to investigate the substantial shifts in that relationship from one period to the next in Grass's prose fiction works. While they are generally not understood as framed narratives, it is nevertheless possible, and I believe, productive, to view the text-internal circumstances out of which the narrators' telling of their tales arise, as a kind of frame. The relationship between the 'frame' and the 'picture' in Grass's writing is as volatile as that between the frame and Titian's painting, and the conjunction can be made much more usefully than in the case of Titian's

painting where the separate art works of the frame and the painting are obviously not encoded to be read in conjunction with one another.

The final aspect of first-person narration that needs to be mentioned is that of 'unreliable' narration. The generally accepted definition of narrative unreliability is that a narrator is unreliable when the reader can perceive a conflict between the views expressed by the narrator, and those the reader attributes to the implied author. That is to say, the reader must read between the lines, as it were, and discover that the narrator is not speaking in accordance with 'the implied author's norms' (Booth 149). We detect the narrator's unreliability when our own reconstruction of circumstances described by the narrator does not accord with his/her presentation of them. This can be in relation to events and characters described by the narrator, or to the character of the narrator him/herself. Thus, unreliable narration is a means by which the author can create structural irony in the work (Chatman, *Story* 233).

Stanzel illuminates the device of the unreliable narrator further when he stresses that his use of the term 'unreliable narrator' is quite independent of the character traits of the narrator in question. It has nothing to do with the narrator's integrity or love of truth, but derives rather from the existential connection between the narrating and the experiencing self. The narrator's existential and physical presence in the world of the other characters necessarily limits the horizon of his perception and knowledge (*Theory* 89). The first-person narrator, like his real-life counterpart, can lie to him/herself, as well as to the reader. First-person narration mimics reality, with the narrators showing, in their acts of narration, that the

apprehension of reality is dependent upon, and limited by, preconceptions of that reality, and subjective needs. For this reason the technique of unreliable narration, because of its potential as an alienating device, imposes greater demands on the reader to actively participate in the construction of the narrated reality, as the view presented by the narrator is only conditional.

In addition to this kind of narrative unreliability, which is based on the ontological status of the narrator and the subjectivity of perception, the technique of the narrator as ‘outsider’ narrator may be employed, so that the narrator figure dramatizes his/her unreliability in a confronting manner. The use of this convention is especially obvious in the works which I allocate, in the periodization suggested at the end of this chapter, to the first phase of Grass’s prose fiction. In *Die Blechtrommel*, for example, Oskar Matzerath introduces himself as an inmate of an asylum, inviting us to think of him as a ‘madman’; in *Katz und Maus* Pilenz is overtly inconsistent in his accounts of details (such as the street in which Mahlke lived, and the colour of his eyes), and in *Hundejahre* Walter Matern’s statements are relativized when the reader realises how easily he follows each change in prevailing ideology. In *örtlich betäubt* Starush’s story has so many contradictions that the reader, along with the narrator, is unsure what is fantasy and what is reality. The overt unreliability of the narrators in the first period of Grass’s writing does not continue into the second period, but appears once again in the third. This suggests that that it might be enlightening to look for other commonalities between these two periods, and to compare the circumstances under which the books of each period were written, for one of the things that makes Grass’s work so interesting is the degree of play and variation in which he

has engaged while using the one narrator type, and how this changes from one period to the next.

## **METAFICTION, HISTORIOGRAPHIC METAFICTION, METAHISTORY**

### **METAFICTION**

The term 'metafiction' is said to have originated in an essay by the American critic and novelist William H. Gass in 1970, when, in keeping with the proliferation of 'meta-theorems' being developed in other disciplines at the time, he coined the word to describe a distinct literary genre in the tradition of the 'anti-novel' (McCafferty 181). Whereas the anti-novel indirectly criticizes past forms and suggests new perspectives on the relationship between fiction, the artist and reality, the defining characteristic of metafiction is its direct and immediate concern with fiction-making itself. Maintaining a distinct unity of intention, approach and subject matter, metafiction, are highly self-conscious, and deal with the inadequacies and problems of fiction writing. They often take the form of biographies of imaginary writers, or of autobiographical reflections of the authors themselves, and may employ such blatant devices as having the narrator engage in a dialogue with the reader about the book s/he is reading, thus undercutting the realist impulses of the work that takes not only art, but its own self as subject (McCafferty 182-183).

Patricia Waugh (14) and Linda Hutcheon (41), on the other hand, argue that, although metafiction is a practice that has enjoyed particular popularity since the sixties, it is a tendency or function inherent in all novels, rather than a sub-genre

of the novel. Waugh defines metafiction as the exploration of a '*theory* of fiction through the *practice* of writing fiction' (2), which operates on 'a fundamental and sustained opposition: the construction of a fictional illusion (as in traditional realism) and the laying bare of that illusion' (6). Metafictional novels are 'self-conscious' or 'self-reflexive', and can operate in two main ways. In the first, illusion-breaking authorial invention dramatizes the boundary between literature and criticism; the second way is the integrated dramatization of the external communication between author and reader (Currie 4; 15).

Metafictional works can use textual strategies like parody, metaphor and irony as well as overt commentary, to reflect on their own existence as artefacts. There is also, as Waugh points out, the question of degree. At the less self-conscious end of the spectrum there are the novels which take fiction itself as a theme to be explored. At the centre of the spectrum are the texts that operate essentially like realist works while simultaneously manifesting the symptoms of formal and ontological insecurity, and at the other end there are those works which reject realism completely, suggesting a world fabricated out of competing semiotic systems which cannot be reconciled with material conditions (18-19). Because of their metafictional attributes the works of Grass's *Danziger Trilogie* would be located at the centre of this spectrum.

Waugh observes, furthermore, that the opposition apparent in metafictional texts is most likely to emerge in times of crisis. Its recent prominence is attributed to the uncertain, insecure, self-questioning and culturally pluralistic nature of modern society, where the world of 'eternal verities' has been recognized as consisting in

nothing more than constructions, artifices, and impermanent structures (44). It is therefore not surprising that it is in the genre of the picaresque novel that earlier metafictional practice is to be found, or indeed, that Waugh chooses to preface her work on metafiction with a quotation from Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*:

The thing is this.  
That of all the several ways of beginning a book which are now in practice throughout the known world, I am confident my own way of doing it is the best – I'm sure it is the most religious – for I begin with writing the first sentence – and trusting to almighty God for the second (Qtd. in Waugh 1).

Parallels within Grass's work are immediately obvious.<sup>40</sup>

Man kann eine Geschichte in der Mitte beginnen und vorwärts wie rückwärts kühn ausschreitend Verwirrung anstiften. Man kann sich modern geben, alle Zeiten, Entfernungen wegstreichen und hinterher verkünden oder verkünden lassen, man habe endlich und in letzter Stunde das Raum-Zeit-Problem gelöst. Man kann auch ganz zu Anfang behaupten, es sei heutzutage unmöglich, einen Roman zu schreiben, [...] Ich beginne weit vor mir (3: 12).

Because of Oskar's deliberations of this kind, *Die Blechtrommel* has been described as a 'Roman eines Romans' (Neuhaus, 'Ich, das bin ich' 179). Indeed, Oskar's reflections on the poetics of the novel constitute one of the three levels or strands of the novel (the events which take place in the past, the events that happen during the writing of the novel, and the writing of the novel itself) which are sustained separately throughout and are finally brought together on the last page. Similarly, in *Katz und Maus*, Grass has his narrator Pilenz inform the reader that he is an invention, that he was made up by someone 'von berufswegen' (4: 6).

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<sup>40</sup> Grass's admiration of, and indebtedness to Sterne (as well as Cervantes and Grimmelshausen) has often been acknowledged by Grass himself and by others. See, for example, Günter Grass: 'Mein Traum von Europa', 16: 349. See also Arnold 16; Neuhaus, *Günter Grass* 4; 28; 150; 151.



In *Der Butt* the narrator is given instructions on certain aspects of the novel by one of the novel's characters, namely the flounder, who tells the narrator that the book he is writing must be named after him. Metafiction does not abandon the real world, it re-examines the conventions by which we make sense of it. By showing us how imaginary worlds are created by literary fiction, it helps us to understand how our concept of the real world is similarly constructed (Waugh 18).

In the prose fiction works published in the decade 1959 to 1969 Grass's explores ways in which individual memory can be given narrative form, always against the background of Germany's radical break with civilization. He depicts, by metafictional means, the individual's struggle not only with the problem of remembering, but also the challenge of the inadequacy of traditional forms and conventions which nevertheless provide the only vehicle available for the task at hand, that of recording living memory as a means of understanding and coming to terms with what has happened.

#### HISTORIOGRAPHIC METAFICTION AND METAHISTORY

The term 'historiographic metafiction' has a very broad definition, and can be applied to a wider variety of fictional and semi-fictional texts, not all of which have very much in common with *Unkenrufe*. In general terms it refers to 'those well-known and popular novels which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages' (Hutcheon 5). Neither metafiction, nor just another version of the historical or non-fictional novel, historiographic metafiction incorporates the domains of literature, history and theory. Through its theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs, it rethinks and reworks the forms and contents of the past, working

*within* the conventions in order to subvert them. Along with the conditions of its own production, historiographic metafiction explores the implications of narrative explanation and historical reconstruction in general. For Hutcheon it is *the* post-modern form of fiction (5; 40).

Thus, whereas the metafictional novel is founded on the paradox of epistemological ambiguity – say between criticism and fiction – and is prefaced with the problem of reproducing individual experience in narrative form, historiographic metafiction is concerned with the wider problem, beyond that of the individual. It operates by installing ‘totalizing order, only to contest it, by its radical provisionality, intertextuality, and often, fragmentation’ (Hutcheon 116). The modes of narration it privileges – an overtly controlling narrator, and multiple points of view – both problematize the notion of subjectivity. Its subjects have no confidence in their ‘ability to know the past with any certainty’ (Hutcheon 117). It both asserts and can shatter ‘the unity of man’s being through which it was thought that he could extend his sovereignty to the events of the past’ (Foucault, qtd. in Hutcheon 118). By engaging with the fundamental uncertainty about the reliability of empiricist and positivist epistemologies, it addresses such questions as whether we can ever really *know* the past, other than through its textualized remains (Hutcheon 20).

The problem which faces the narrator of *Unkenrufe*, as will be shown in Chapter 6 of this thesis, is not that he is ‘unable to know the past with any certainty’, as Hutcheon writes of the narrator of historiographic metafiction (117), but rather that he must choose between conflicting epistemological starting points for his

account. *Unkenrufe* is not so much concerned with the question as to whether or not we can know the past, or the problem of inscribing subjectivity into history, as may be said of Grass's earlier works, but rather with questions relating to *who* writes histories for *whom*, for what *purpose* they are written, and therefore what governs the *conditions* of their production, as well as *how* histories are constructed.

Historiographic metafiction, Hutcheon tells us, is like both historical fiction and narrative historiography, because it cannot help dealing with the problem of the status of their 'facts' and the nature of their evidence, their documents, and the related issue – which is of particular relevance for *Unkenrufe* and *Ein weites Feld* – of how these documentary sources are deployed. Can they be objectively, neutrally related, or does interpretation inevitably enter with narrativization (122)?

These are the particular concerns of another meta-discourse, that of metahistory. Some aspects of Hayden White's work on this topic will be used to facilitate an exploration of these questions in relation to *Unkenrufe*. I hope to show that, although the *Unkenrufe* narrator may be seeking a totalizing order, this evades him from the beginning to the end of his enterprise, and this despite his best efforts to impose the cohesiveness of narrative structure on the events he must record.

Historiographic metafiction shows us, as does White's *Metahistory*, that all reference, whether literary or historiographical, is discursive in nature, and that the referent is already inscribed in the discourses of our culture. If post-modern fiction 'does not aspire to tell the truth [...] as much as to question *whose* truth gets told' (Hutcheon 123), White's metahistorical observations show us that no

matter whose story is told, every representation of the past has ideological implications because of *how* it is told (*Metahistory* ix).

## PERIODIZATION OF GRASS'S PROSE FICTION WRITING

### PROBLEMS OF PERIODIZATION

There is hardly a study of any length of Grass's writing that does not involve some kind of classification of the work on the basis of perceived creative periods or phases.<sup>41</sup> Periodization and its categories, which 'seem to be as indispensable as they are unsatisfactory for any kind of work in cultural study' (Jameson 28), are useful for viewing works of art within the context of the intellectual, political and social framework within which they were created. I am mindful of the danger of oversimplification and 'facile totalization' (Jameson 27) inherent in such an approach to Grass's work, and hope my periodization will prove to be an exception to Patrick O'Neill's contention that most attempts to divide a particular author's works in to periods, even if only early, middle and late, approach an act of violence on the work of the author concerned (*Günter Grass* xi).

The periodization of Grass's prose fiction upon which I base my thesis on the significance of *Unkenrufe* in Grass's prose fiction oeuvre is determined by the differences among the narrator figures which appear in certain chronologically related groups of works. It does not imply that elements of the phenomena described as dominant in any particular period are not present in other periods, for

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<sup>41</sup> See, for example, Reddick; Cepl-Kaufmann, *Günter Grass* 220f; Gerstenberg; Neuhaus, 'Ich, das bin ich jederzeit' 180; Krumbholz, O'Neill, *Critical Essays* 3; Arker; Demetz, 19-24; Roberts 33-55; Stolz, *Vom privaten Motivkomplex* 17; Kniesche, *Ästhetik* 178; and Gruettner.

it would indeed be an act of violence to suggest that the periods or phases described are totally self-contained and independent of one another. Nor are the periodizations I propose meant to imply any kind of progress from one period to another. They refer only to changes in a feature that I have chosen to emphasize. It is nevertheless useful to highlight periods or trends because this enables us to better examine the relationships existing between literary techniques and societal changes. Periodizations can be based on any number of criteria, such as content of the story, or literary technique, and will vary according to the criteria chosen. Thus, as will be seen below, my periodization of Grass's work coincides in some respects with earlier periodizations, while deviating in others.

The historical periods that coincide with changes in Grass's practice with his narrators are defined in relation to the changing nature of German society, tendencies in German thought, and conceptions of German identity over the course of the post-war years. It is a perception of a dominant *tendency* of a particular period of time that becomes its defining feature. This is reflected clearly in the widespread usage of the term *Tendenzwende* to describe changes in German public life after 1970. Given the fact that novels are written over the course of several years, one does not expect to see clear breaks between periods. However, in terms of Grass's choice of narrator type, the breaks between the periods or phases of his work are very distinctive. While Grass's main interest remains 'I and History' (where history can, and indeed must, also include the present, or contemporary history), his approach to integrating history into his work changes significantly with *Unkenrufe*.

#### PROPOSED PERIODIZATION

The periods into which Grass's prose fiction works from 1959 to 1995 fall on the basis of the type of first-person narrator Grass chooses are:

First period:

*Die Blechtrommel* (1959), *Katz und Maus* (1961), *Hundejahre* (1963) and *örtlich betäubt* (1969).

Second period:

*Aus dem Tagebuch einer Schnecke* (1972), *Der Butt* (1977), *Das Treffen in Telgte* (1978), *Kopfgeburten* (1980), *Die Rättin* (1986) and *Zunge zeigen* (1988).

Third period:

*Unkenrufe* (1992) and *Ein weites Feld* (1995).

The narrators of the first period can be described as totally fictional, invented, non-referential inventions of the author's imagination who tell their own lives. Their preoccupation is with the past, although always in relation to the present, as it is their lives during the Nazi period which underlies their difficulties in coping with the present. They are all narrator-protagonists. That is to say, they tell their own stories. They are the centre point of their own narrations. It could be argued, in fact it is generally said, that Pilenz is the narrator of *Katz und Maus*, and Mahlke his protagonist. I would argue, however, that Pilenz is as much at the centre of the *Erzählung* as Mahlke, because it is *his* conflict, *his* obsession, *his* reactions to Mahlke that are the real content of the narrative. We learn nothing of Mahlke that does not tell us something about Pilenz.

The narrators of the second period, on the other hand, are not non-referential

inventions. Their reference is always to the author Günter Grass himself. The narrators of the second period are overt fictionalizations of the author who take the place of the fictional narrators who tell the stories in the previous works. Grass explains very clearly:

Daß mit dem *Tagebuch einer Schnecke*, und nun mit dem *Butt* konsequent vorangetrieben, ich zum erstenmal das Autoren-Ich als Erzähler-Ich einführe und das sonst, wie bei der *Blechtrommel* oder bei den *Hundejahren*, von vornherein gesetzte fiktive Erzähler-Ich ablöse, und daß ich denn beim *Butt* dieses Autoren-Ich nach einer gewissen Zeit in ein fiktives Ich verwandle, aber immer in Korrespondenz zum Autoren-Ich – das ist meiner Meinung nach ein neuer Vorgang, der natürlich andere Prosa-Formen und andere Lyrik-Formen gebiert (Arnold 28).

In the second period, although the fictional narrator has been replaced by an author who becomes fictionalised in the text, one important aspect of the narrators of the first period is retained, and that is that the narrators still tell their *own* lives. Each is still at the centre, the main participant, in the story he tells. Even in *Die Rättin*, where the she-rat plays such a dominant role, the orientation point is the ‘author-narrator’ (Neuhaus, *Günter Grass* 165). ‘Der Ich-Erzähler gibt sich als Autor aus, oder umgekehrt, der Autor macht sich zum Romanfigur’, as Klaus-Jürgen Roehm puts it (61). It could be argued that the ‘Malskat’, ‘Matzerath’ and ‘Märchenwald’ strands of *Die Rättin* are not told by a narrator-protagonist. However, these strands must be seen as subservient to the overall narrative structure. Except for the more intimate ‘Damroka’ story, the various strands of the narrative are developed by means of the dialogue between the first-person narrator (the fictionalised Günter Grass) and the other two narrator figures, Oskar Matzerath and the she-rat.

Another feature of the works of the second period closely related to Grass’s

instrumentalization of the ‘author-as-narrator’ narrative strategy is the presence of poetry in the prose fiction text. Grass explains that these poems are not mere insertions, but, rather, are part of the fiction writing process without which the books would have been unimaginable for him. They are ‘Bestandteil des jeweiligen epischen Entwurfs’ (‘Orientierungsmarken’ 16: 392). However, these poetic ‘Orientierungsmarken’ may also be read, because of poetry’s status as the most personal of the literary forms, as concomitant with the intimacy which Grass affects by his narrative strategy in the works of this period.

The advent of the third period is marked by the absence of poetry in the texts, as well as three major shifts in the way Grass constructs and uses his narrator figure. The first shift is with regard to the identity of the narrator. With the exception of the narrator of *Das Treffen in Telgte*, which is a name-puzzle,<sup>42</sup> the narrators of the first and second periods are all named. In *Unkenrufe*, for the first time in Grass’s prose fiction, the narrator is not named.<sup>43</sup> Nor are they named in the following works, *Ein weites Feld* and *Mein Jahrhundert*. It is not until *Im Krebsgang*, published in 2002, that Grass gives his narrator a name again.

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<sup>42</sup> There are a number of scholarly articles dealing with the topic of the narrator’s identity and the game Grass plays with readers of *Das Treffen in Telgte*. See, for example, Wimmer; Bauer Pickar; Ryan, ‘Beyond’; Weber; and Verweyen.

<sup>43</sup> I am aware that, in arguing that the narrator of *Unkenrufe* is not a fictionalization of the author, I differ with Volker Neuhaus (*Günter Grass* 187). But even if I were to concede this point, the fact remains that there has been a substantial shift from internal to external perspective as Grass moves from the second period to the third in his prose fiction writing. The story of Alexander and Alexandra is told not by a participant in their story, but by an outsider. Their story is all but complete at the time the narrator becomes aware of it. Furthermore, in an interview with me in Behlendorf in 1997 Grass described the narrator of *Unkenrufe* as a ‘zurückgezogener Erzähler’, not as a fictionalised author, as he has quite clearly described his narrators in the earlier works.



The second major shift lies in the relationship between the tellers and their tales. Whereas all of the earlier narrators tell their own stories, the narrators of *Unkenrufe* and *Ein weites Feld* do not. They are charged with telling the stories of others. These narrators are no longer the protagonists in the stories they tell. They are no longer the centre point of their own narrations.<sup>44</sup>

The third fundamental difference between *Unkenrufe* and the preceding work is that there has been a move from the narrator being concerned with metafictional issues in the earlier works, to metahistorical issues in the later ones. It is also important to note that although differing from Grass's narrators of the second period in these crucial aspects, they do bear a similarity with the narrators of the first period, in that once again Grass has chosen to use non-referential, invented characters as his narrators, rather than the author-narrator figures seen in the second period. Grass's abandonment of the highly personal type of narrator which he employed consistently for the previous two decades, in favour of a new variation of first-person narrator is directly related to issues of German historiography and, by implication, German identity. *Unkenrufe* is his first prose work since the highlighting of revisionist tendencies during *Historikerstreit* of 1986, and of course, the momentous event of German reunification.

For my periodization of Grass's fiction, two articles are of particular relevance: Volker Neuhaus's 'Ich, das bin ich jederzeit. Grass' Variationen der Ich-Erzählung in den siebziger Jahren' and David Roberts's 'The Historikerstreit and

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<sup>44</sup> This applies to *Im Krebsgang* and to many of the stories in *Mein Jahrhundert* as well.

the Self-Understanding of the Federal Republic and the Self-Understanding of a Generation: Jürgen Habermas and Günter Grass'. The relevant aspects of these articles will be outlined briefly here.

Taking the programmatic opening sentence of *Der Butt* as his title, Neuhaus observes that the eight prose fiction works which Grass had published up until that time fall into two groups of four works on the basis of the types of narrators employed. In this periodization the works of the Danzig Trilogy (*Die Blechtrommel*, *Katz und Maus* and *Hundejahre*) fall into the first group, along with *örtlich betäubt*. The second group of four works begins with *Aus dem Tagebuch einer Schnecke* and includes *Der Butt*, *Das Treffen in Telgte* and *Kopfgeburten oder die Deutschen sterben aus*. My periodization coincides with, and is an extension of that proposed by Neuhaus. The works of the first period all take the form of the fictive autobiography. The narrators are all problematic individuals whose fixation on the past makes them unable to cope adequately with the present. Neuhaus contends, however, that once Grass had begun to take an active role in politics, this form, which had served him so well up until that time, was no longer appropriate. Grass then began to use a new form. The most significant feature of the new form is that Grass makes 'das Autor-Ich und Erzähler-Ich weitgehend identisch' (181). This technique made it possible for Grass to address questions relating to the various aspects of his own life – as writer, politically active citizen, and father of children – while at the same time telling stories and commenting on the process of writing. It is a form which corresponds to his understanding of the interdependence of these aspects of his life which can separate, unite, support or obscure each other, and in which the

previously separate genres of epic tale and political speech are melded.

In contrast to Neuhaus, who divides Grass's work into stages or phases on the basis of literary form, David Roberts, in the second of the two articles mentioned above, suggests a periodization using the content of the 'stories' as his criterion. In order to place Grass's work within the context of the origins and ramifications of the Historians' Debate, Roberts begins by sketching in the major paradigm changes and continuities in Germany's self-understanding. He discusses problems of German identity, justifying the necessity of the semantic shift from the term 'identity' to the term 'self-understanding' with the suspect nature of the word 'identity' insofar as a 'national' identity might be implied. In the second part of his article Roberts aligns Grass's work with Wolfgang Mommsen's periodization of German intellectual history with its three stages of the 'German question', but argues that the stages in Grass's work also suggest an alternative periodization of West German developments since 1945. The stages identified by Mommsen are 1945-1960, characterized by repression and denial of the past under the dual sign of the Cold War and economic reconstruction; 1960-1975, characterized by the challenge of overcoming the past through the critical revision of German history carried out by the opening to the West; and finally, the period from the year 1975 onwards, characterized by the *Tendenzwende*, in search of a more stable national-historical identity in reaction to the threat of a rootless and alienating modernity.

For Roberts the hallmark of the works of the period 1959/60 until 1972 is the coming to terms with the shadow of the past. On this basis he allocates *Aus dem Tagebuch einer Schnecke* to the same period as the *Danziger Trilogie* and *örtlich*

*betäubt*, observing that the stages of Grass's work accord with the first and second phases of Mommsen's periodization. Roberts's second phase, it must be noted, corresponds to Neuhaus's first phase. This is because Roberts includes a first, 'incubation' period during which the early poems and plays were written, whereas Neuhaus's periodization concerns only the prose fiction, and therefore begins with the publication of *Die Blechtrommel*. Thus the periodizations undertaken by both Roberts and Neuhaus overlap with the one exception of the work *Aus dem Tagebuch einer Schnecke*. This difference is because of the differing criteria for the periodizations – narrative strategy, in the case of Neuhaus, and narrative content, in the case of Roberts. Roberts argues that *Aus dem Tagebuch einer Schnecke* is the last of Grass's works to date (1988) to deal with the 'German question'. *Aus dem Tagebuch einer Schnecke* documents the culmination of the defence of the republic carried out by the leftist intellectuals in the sixties, the election of Gustav Heinemann as Federal President and the election victory of the SPD/FDP coalition led by Brandt in 1969. For Roberts *Aus dem Tagebuch einer Schnecke* is a 'document of this real and symbolic victory' (44). He describes it as

a work whose historical significance grows with the years as the witness to the (still decisive) turning point in the history of the Federal Republic. It is the sum of Grass's struggle against the past in the name of its inescapable obligations and as such it presents in its complex interaction of past and present the moral political portrait of a generation (44).

Seen in this light, as a document of victory, *Aus dem Tagebuch einer Schnecke* can certainly be understood as the concluding piece in a body of work which had *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* as its central theme. In support of this argument Roberts cites Grass's 1973 speech 'The writer as citizen' in which the writer intimated that the post-war period had come to an end; the great topics had been

debated; and it was time to deal with everyday politics (Roberts 44).

Mommsen's three periods are thus conflated into two. Grass's call for normalization coincides with Habermas's observation that West Germany had become the contemporary of the Western world by virtue of its having established an identity or self-understanding that reflected recognition of the inescapable responsibilities imposed by the past. In Roberts's opinion the *Historikerstreit* was not a serious challenge to this consensus established by Habermas and the other leftist intellectuals of his generation in the course of the sixties. Their critical revision of German history created a second irreversible caesura – after that of 1945 – and the disparate revisions proposed by Hillgruber, Stürmer and Nolte in the 1986 debate hardly amounted to a real challenge. Rather, their efforts were merely a 'ghostly replay, whose merit is to recall the realities of the 'German question' which inform the self-understanding of the Federal Republic' (Roberts 44).

Roberts made the above remarks in 1988, at a time when it could have hardly been envisaged that reunification of Germany was possible in the near future. His postscript to the main article, written in March 1991, predates Grass's post-*Wende* fiction writing, which meant that only Grass's pronouncements on reunification as a public intellectual could be considered. Now, however, a wider arc can be drawn, so as to include the works written during the early post-*Wende* years.

The insights presented in both of the above articles are relevant to my discussion of Grass's work within the parameters I have outlined. Roberts addresses the question of German self-understanding or identity, and Grass's understanding of

what is at stake, but his study is based almost entirely on Grass's speeches and essays. His much less frequent references to Grass's fiction deal only with the content, or the *story* aspect of the narratives. Neuhaus's article, on the other hand, directly addresses Grass's narrative technique, but does not touch upon the question of German identity. Neuhaus's extra-literary explanation for his periodization of Grass's works is based on Grass's perception of the implications of juggling his responsibilities as a writer, on the one hand, and as a citizen, on the other.

The connections between *Unkenrufe* and the works from the first period of Grass's fiction writing reinforce Werner Frizen's observation that Grass works from a 'konstanten Motivreservoir', with 'verkappten Fortsetzungen', and 'werkübergreifenden Themen und Konzepten' (*Blechtrommel* 179). Volker Neuhaus's observation that each of Grass's works is a 'Bruchstück einer großen Konfession', a 'Fragment im romantischen Sinne, das über sich hinausweist, vor und zurück in einen größeren Zusammenhang, den er selbst nur dunkel erahnen läßt', still holds true (*Günter Grass* 1).

Grass's understanding of Germany's history and its relationship to contemporary German society in the decades since the end of the war is reflected in his prose fiction in many ways. The aspect with which my study is concerned is the way in which he has created three main kinds of narrator figures in the course of the different periods or stages of his work. The combined insights presented by Roberts and Neuhaus provide the necessary background to my contention that a new phase has come into being with reunification. I hope to show in the following

examination of *Unkenrufe* how, against a background of consistency in such features as adherence to first-person narration, intertextual association, and the integration of myth and magic realism, *Unkenrufe* stands out as a new departure, reflecting German reunification and its attendant problems in both its *discourse* and its *story* aspects. The following two chapters will deal primarily with aspects of the *story*, and in Chapter 6 we will return to aspects of its *discourse*.

### 3. WER ERZÄHLT HIER? UND MIT WESSEN ERLAUBNIS?

#### *UNKENRUFEN* – RECEPTION

In the ten years since its publication in May 1992 *Unkenrufe* has attracted very little scholarly attention. As is usually the case with Grass's new works, the reception in the media was of enormous scale and was often more informative about German society than it was about the book ostensibly under discussion. I shall address this aspect of the reception of *Unkenrufe* and its relationship to the debate about the place of political concerns in contemporary German literature directly. The normal flurry of promotional activity, feuilleton articles, and interviews with the author was followed by a remarkable stillness which was only broken in 1995 when the appearance of *Ein weites Feld* unleashed a new media storm of unprecedented proportions and a plethora of scholarly publications. This storm seems to have eclipsed *Unkenrufe* almost completely. However, new monographs on Grass by Neuhaus, Stolz, Vormweg, O'Neill, Moser and Preece include sections on *Unkenrufe*,<sup>45</sup> and the work also receives a mention in some overviews of contemporary German literature.<sup>46</sup> Relevant points from these publications will be addressed at the appropriate stages in the dissertation. Such scholarly articles as have appeared on *Unkenrufe* are relatively short and restricted in scope. I will summarize these briefly before looking at the reception of

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<sup>45</sup> Neuhaus, *Günter Grass*; Stolz, *Günter Grass*; O'Neill, *Günter Grass*; and Preece, *Life*.

<sup>46</sup> For example, Bullivant, *Future*; and Brockmann.



*Unkenrufe* in the daily and weekly press, and situating the work in the public debate of the time.

Hans-Werner Eroms has examined linguistic aspects of the text, relating individual linguistic elements to the text's meaning as a whole, on the understanding that such linguistic features and peculiarities are 'microstructural elements of the macro-sign text' (26). He comments, for example, on the unity achieved through repetition of the toad-call metaphor, the motif of alternating conjecture and certainty, and the frequency of adverbs that indicate the momentary, the late and the early. Other unifying elements identified by Eroms are Grass's reversal of the normal usage of passive and active structures so that inanimate objects are almost imbued with life, and the employment of a variety of language registers. These registers include the ironization of GDR, politicians' and students' usages; the continuing interaction of Reschke's pedantic yet eloquent style with Alexandra's broken German which is strongly influenced by the grammar of her native Polish; Erna's Cassubian dialect; and finally, elements of the Baroque which he attributes to the influence of the Danzig setting.

Sigrid Mayer's short article provides a brief account of the 'formal elements and motives' of *Unkenrufe* including the observation, also made by a number of reviewers, that Grass has reversed the motif of lovers separated by the political division of Europe. However, as will be shown below, her remark that the relationship between the lovers 'verläuft vielmehr von Anfang bis Ende in

ungetrübter Harmonie' does not take account of some significant interchanges between them (216)<sup>47</sup>. Her remarks on the narrator are limited to a description of him as a 'Distanzierungsmittel' placed between the author and the reader. Mayer notes that his pedantic attention to detail is reminiscent of Zeitblom, and that he shares some characteristics with the narrator of *Katz und Maus*. She does not elaborate on these points, nor does she really address what she identifies as the main shortcoming of the literary critics' reviews, and that is the relationship between the work and the political conditions that underlie it.

Chloe Paver addresses one of these issues, and that is the influence of the western free market economy on life in the former communist countries of Eastern Europe. She draws out the aspects of *Unkenrufe* that address the question as to whether capitalism and morality can be reconciled in these countries, and presents, by means of contrast to the flourishing Cemetery project described in *Unkenrufe*, examples of a 'fledgling money economy' as portrayed by Christa Wolf in *Medea*, and a non-capitalist system of exchange as portrayed by Peter Handke in his much maligned *Eine winterliche Reise zu den Flüssen Donau, Save und Drina oder: Gerechtigkeit für Serbien*. Paver traces the representations of the economics of the relationship between Poland and Germany through such aspects of *Unkenrufe* as the site of Alexander and Alexandra's meeting, the characters, and the events of the plot. Drawing attention to Vielbrand's role as the 'villain of the piece', and noting that 'Grass's attitude to Chatterjee [...] is difficult to establish', she

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<sup>47</sup> Just one example to the contrary: 'Als sie kurz vor Jelitkowo umkehrten, redeten sie immer noch, von Schwänen flankiert, aufeinander ein, sie an ihn vorbei, er über sie weg' (12: 217).

suggests that the work may be read as a warning ‘to Grass’s liberal-minded readers that they cannot expect to take on the capitalist beast armed with no more than a sense of justice and a desire to do good’ (‘Jesus’ 73; 75).

Reviews of *Unkenrufe* in the daily and weekly press followed the already well-established pattern of reaction to Grass’s work.<sup>48</sup> Verdicts on the literary quality of the work were spread right across the spectrum from Beatrice von Matt’s verdict: ‘pedantisch und lustlos’, to Armin Ayren’s ‘ohne Einschränkung: ein Meisterwerk’. The reaction of the critics to the Bengalee, Mr Chatterjee – Grass’s homage to his friend Salman Rushdie – is symptomatic: Iris Radisch’s view that ‘Mr Chatterjee aus Indien stört den kunstsönen altdeutschen Schlußchor der Erzählung’ competes with Herbert Glossner’s understanding that he embodies ‘die arme Welt, “die große Verschiebung”, die Elendsmigration, und [...] eine zukünftige, tolerantere Weltgesellschaft’ and is responsible for a ‘durchaus utopische Ironie’.<sup>49</sup> Glossner also quotes the nameless narrator of the work, whose incurable scepticism suggests to him that Alexandra and Alexander’s story is ‘zu schön, um wahr zu sein’. In relation to the work as a whole Glossner reverses the narrator’s verdict, saying the story is ‘zu wahr, um schön zu sein’!

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<sup>48</sup> For an interesting commentary on the reviews see Fries. The reviews have been collated by Daniela Hermes for KLG (*Kritisches Lexikon zur deutschsprachigen Gegenwartsliteratur*).

<sup>49</sup> The Chatterjee figure has a much wider significance for the text than can be addressed in this thesis. Judith Ryan’s observation, based on her reading of *Zunge zeigen*, that Chatterjee’s real-life namesake, Subhas Chandra Bose, is the only thing that unites the split Bengali nation (*Shrunk*, 116), suggests a promising starting point for future work which could include *Zunge zeigen* in a network of intertextual reference, as well as the ‘Vasco kehrt wieder’ section of the ‘Dritten Monat’ of *Der Butt*, Thomas Mann’s *Joseph und Seine Brüder*, and not least, Salman Rushdie himself, who, like Grass, is a ‘double migrant’ (Rushdie 178). Such a study would derive considerable vitality from sudden divergence in the two writers’ views during the Iraq conflict of 2001-2.

Jörg Magenau writes that the work was ‘von einigen Großkritikern verrissen worden, noch bevor sie es richtig gelesen hatten’. The correctness of Magenau’s observation that the book had not been read carefully is clear from the number of reviewers who appear to have been confused about the geographic and cultural origins of the characters, the location of the cemeteries, and the origins of the intended customers.<sup>50</sup> The negative critiques from some sections of the media continued a trend of increasing hostility towards Grass personally, and were clearly attacks on ‘the messenger’ as much as on the work itself. Grass’s political *engagement* has always drawn sharp criticism from his opponents, and upon the publication of *Unkenrufe* his traditional foes were quick to draw their swords against him, deriding the literary work in an attempt to undermine the credibility of ‘den unbequemen Mahner im Prozeß der Deutschen Einheit’ (Klüver). Sigrid Mayer comments that it is apparently easier to attack the author under the mantle of literary criticism than to take issue with him directly on the basis of any of his many public speeches or political essays (215).

The ‘campaign’ against Grass, with its criticisms of the book and of its author’s political views, was augmented by press articles that capitalized on Grass’s angry and passionate response to the attacks. He was dubbed ‘den dünnhäutigen Elefanten’ who ‘in prä-intellektueller Manier Kritik mit Mordlust verwechselt und

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<sup>50</sup> That some book reviews are written without adequate reference to the text is evident in some English language reviews as well, even though they do not have the same axe to grind as their German counterparts. For example: For Philip Brady both Alexander and Alexandra have ‘roots in Gdansk’. John Bayley misreads the intent of the cemeteries, saying, ‘Many German loved-ones lie under Polish soil, in the eastern provinces lost by Germany at the end of the war’. Herbert Mitgang has Alexander and Alexandra visiting the graves of both sets of parents in Danzig, although Reschke’s parents are buried in Germany.

leichtfertig mit dem Symbolwort 'Auschwitz' herum fuchtelte' (Schreiber 296).

One way in which the critics of this persuasion sought to undermine Grass was by propagating the unfounded assertion that he had instructed his publisher, Gerhard Steidl, not to distribute the customary number of prepublication review copies of the work (usually about 700), but to send instead only a handful of copies to selected friends. In the guise of fact the rumour spread so quickly, even in the foreign press, that, as Escherig points out, Steidl was obliged to resort to legal means to prevent the further spread of the erroneous information. The behaviour of some sections of the media in this matter is not dissimilar to that which they exhibited after the publication of *Die Rättin* in 1986 when Grass was derided for rushing off 'to India in a huff' because of the scathing reviews of the book (Morrison 26), when in fact his trip to India had been planned well before hand (Neuhaus, *Günter Grass* 181).

Grass's understanding of the vitriol of his critics as 'Vernichtungswille' may not be as far from the truth as some observers would have it.<sup>51</sup> Incidents such as the arson attack on his home in Berlin in 1965, or the painting of two swastikas on the door of his Lübeck office in 1997, although perpetrated from a different quarter, come as physical reinforcement of press polemic. Certainly Grass's critics would like to see him gather up his literary and political manuscripts like so many

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<sup>51</sup> In *Tabu 1. Tagebücher 1989-1991* Peter Rühmkorf, Grass's long-time friend and colleague, writes of Grass's 'persecution complex' (334). Qtd in Peitsch, 'Peter' 42. Keith Bullivant also says that Grass's reactions to criticisms of *Unkenrufe* 'did tend towards the paranoid' (195).

tattered standards from lost campaigns, and depart the public arena, as the last representative of the 1960s generation of politically committed writers.

An interesting feature of many reviews of *Unkenrufe* is the view that the work was the swan song of an aging author, although Grass was only 64 at the time it was published. This is a phenomenon worthy of further attention, and not only because of our knowledge of Grass's prodigious literary production since 1992. It was a false apprehension of which some had already fallen foul more than ten years earlier. In 1988, for example, Alan Keele described *Die Rättin* as 'something of a swan song for Günter Grass himself as he approaches age sixty' (166). Regarding *Unkenrufe*, John Bayley asks: 'As a last amusement for him [Günter Grass], what could be more local than a grave?' Iris Radisch calls the work 'ein Alterswerk' in which the author returns to the scene of his earlier successes, not in order to sink into memories but in order to celebrate for one last time, and then to bury, Danzig, German-Polish history, his didactic narrative talents and the faded integrity of his heroes. Beatrice von Matt writes: 'Der Autor hat sich in den Kopf gesetzt, im Herbst seines Mißvergnügens zu verharren'. In fact, Germanists may well have devoted more attention to *Unkenrufe* had it been a 'swan song'. But what might be described as the wishful thinking of some of Grass's critics was not fulfilled. Ironically, the willingness of some to see *Unkenrufe* as a swan song is not shared by Grass's harshest critic, Marcel Reich-Ranicki. His assessment was much closer to the truth as far as Grass's literary future was concerned. While proclaiming *Unkenrufe* a failure, he predicted in acidically ambiguous fashion that Grass's writing career was not yet over. 'Ist Grass mit seinem Latein am Ende? ... Ich indes glaube davon kein Wort. Er ist geblieben, was er immer war: ein ganz und

gar unberechenbarer Schriftsteller. Er wird uns noch manch eine Überraschung beschenken. Zuzutrauen ist ihm alles' ('Einfaltspinsel' 153).

The pronouncements of the end of Grass's literary production are important because they are part and parcel of a wider phenomenon, and that is the debate about the place of 'engaged' literature in Germany after unification. Keith Bullivant describes the book's reception in the media as 'the most compelling and illuminating proof that the substance of the 'German literary battle' of 1990 would continue to determine the immediate future of German literature' (192). Similarly, referring to Schirmacher's review of *Unkenrufe*, Fritz Rudolf Fries comments: 'Der Kassandra-Ruf entfährt der FAZ nicht von ungefähr, erinnert doch der Verriß der "Unkenrufe" an das Schema eines anderen Verrisses – dem zu Christa Wolf's "Was bleibt"' (132).

In the West German press the reunification of Germany had been welcomed by many, including critics like Frank Schirmacher and Ulrich Greiner, as an historical watershed that could at last provide a release from the pressures of *Gesinnungsästhetik*.<sup>52</sup> The word *Gesinnungsästhetik*, which refers to the expression of moral values in the aesthetic work, is employed in both positive and pejorative senses, to refer to the perceived relationship between the autonomy of the aesthetic work as pure art, and the expression of basic convictions, or moral standpoints in the art work. For some, like H.J. Hahn, the term is purely pejorative (77). However, an entirely different connotation is evident in David Roberts's use

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<sup>52</sup> See, for example, Schirmacher, 'Abschied' and 'Literatur und Kritik'; and Greiner.

of the term when he writes of historical self-understanding of the post-war generation of writers as articulated by Jürgen Habermas. The defence of the republic and democratic values consists for writers in:

die Verpflichtung zum öffentlichen Verbrauch der Historie, zur kritischen Funktion der Literatur und zum moralischen Engagement in der demokratischen Erneuerung der Gesellschaft: d.h. die Verpflichtung eben zu einer 'Gesinnungsästhetik', die von der Erfahrung und dem Bewußtsein der Folgen eines verbrecherischen Nationalismus nicht zu trennen ist ('Gesinnungsästhetik' 236).

The role of the writer implicit in Roberts's statement is akin to that of moral preceptor, of interpreter and promulgator of the moral values which are assumed to be required for democratic renewal. For the great post-war German writers like Heinrich Böll, Uwe Johnson and Günter Grass, *Gesinnungsästhetik* was, and is, a motivating force. For Greiner and other like-minded critics, on the other hand, it was merely a 'Vernunft Ehe' – a marriage of convenience – of literature and morality (211). Greiner argued that the concept of the writer as a moral authority, and of literary works as political and moral statements, had led to the neglect of aesthetic values, and he describes the literary situation in Germany at the beginning of the 90s as a 'literarische Öffentlichkeit, deren erstes Interesse die Gesinnung, die moralische Kampfkraft und die politische Richtigkeit ist' (215). He took the position that the aesthetic rules which had governed post-war German literature were the result of a grandiose misunderstanding, and that it had taken forty years for that fact to be understood (216). He was drawing on Georg Steiner's essay, 'Von realer Gegenwart' and the articles 'Kulturschutzgebiet

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VERGLEICHENDE  
LITERATURWISSENSCHAFT  
UND  
KULTURSTUDIEN  
BRUNNEN



DDR?’ and ‘Die Ästhetik am Ausgang ihre Unmündigkeit’<sup>53</sup> by Karl-Heinz Bohrer (who had been arguing for the autonomy of art well before the *Wende*<sup>54</sup>).

Many of these assertions concerning the role of politics in contemporary German literature took place within the context of a literary debate that followed the publication of Christa Wolf’s *Was bleibt*. The book, with strongly autobiographical content, tells of a female writer who is under observation by the Stasi. The debate moved from accusing Wolf of wishing to exonerate herself by depicting herself as a victim of, rather than a supporter of the GDR regime, to an attack on all literature with a political message. It was a debate which, as the title of Thomas Anz’s documentation of the *Literaturstreit* says, was not about Christa Wolf (or her book) at all. Her book, which followed so closely on reunification, merely provided the catalyst for a public debate in which the proponents and supporters of *littérature engagée* met head to head with those who believed that the German literature which had arisen in reaction to a literature tarnished by complicity or silence in the face of immense immorality had run its course and was due to be replaced by a ‘depoliticized’ literature (Bullivant 182).

In some ways the debate about *Gesinnungsästhetik* following reunification is reminiscent of the debate which took place in the mid-sixties concerning the term *engagierte Literatur*. Grass’s response then, as now, to the demands of the critics is marked by his resentment of, and resistance to having other people, literary

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<sup>53</sup> Both pieces appeared in *Merkur* 10/11 Oktober, November 1990.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Hahn.

critics in particular, dictate the terms under which literature should be written. The title of his famous 1966 Princeton speech, ‘Vom mangelnden Selbstvertrauen der schreibenden Hofnarren unter Berücksichtigung nicht vorhandener Höfe’, (14: 167-172), with its reference to the ‘lack of self-confidence of court jesters who are writers’ evokes the dilemmas which society’s conflicting demands impose on writers. One of the points that Grass makes in the speech is that the distinction set up between *engagierte* writers and others is a spurious one. ‘Ist ein Schimmel mehr Schimmel, wenn wir ihn weiß nennen? Und ist ein Schriftsteller, der sich ‘engagiert’ nennt, ein weißer Schimmel?’ he asks (14: 169). In the early nineties he found it particularly offensive that critics like Greiner should try to impose a philosophy of art on writers in general, and on himself in particular. In his 1992 speech in the Bertelsmann Series ‘Reden über Deutschland’, Grass speaks of critics wielding the word *Gesinnungsästhetik* like a truncheon: ‘das Knüppelwort, ‘Gesinnungsästhetik’, mit dem unsere frischgewendeten Kulturbetriebswirte alles niedermachen, das sich nicht der Ästhetik hübsch inszenierter Beliebigkeit befleißigt’ (‘Rede vom Verlust’ 16: 366). In Grass’s poetry of the early nineties – the cycle of thirteen sonnets entitled *Novemberland* – his opposition is expressed with great intensity. The dual demands of aesthetics and morality form an abrasive combination, and not only in terms of the intentionally irritating friction between the classical sonnet form and the genre of topical or political poetry, but also in the sonnets’ content. This is especially the case with the seventh sonnet which Adler describes as ‘ein Spott-Sonett auf das deutsche Feuilleton, das in seiner Welt verbaler Verblasenheit der neuen politischen und sozialen Realität nicht gewachsen ist’ (97).

#### AUSSER PLAN

Auf alte Zeitung, die im Garten treibt, unstetig,  
und sich an Dornen reißt, auf Suche nach Ästhetik,  
schlägt wütig Gegenwart, ein rüder Hagelschauer;  
November spottet aller Schönschrift Dauer.  
Schaut nur, die blassen stilgerechten Knaben,  
die sich, auf Wunsch, der Stunde Null verschrieben haben.  
Jetzt jammern sie, weil selbst auf Stasispitzel  
Verlaß nicht ist, um Zeilenschwund und momentanen Kitzel.  
Betreten reisen sie, wie altgewohnt, zur nächsten Vernissage,  
auf Spesen mürrisch von Premiere zur Premiere  
und reden sich bei Billigsekt und Klatsch in Rage;  
da kommt Gewalt dem fixen Wortfluß in die Quere  
und brüllt aufs neue überlieferten Jargon:  
verschreckt (ganz außer Plan) wacht auf das Feuilleton (1: 21).<sup>55</sup>

In his 'Schreiben nach Auschwitz' lecture Grass reiterates the same sentiments regarding form and content that informed his much earlier poem, 'Askese', which appeared in the 1960 poetry volume entitled *Gleisdreieck*. There he had advocated 'Verzicht auf angerilkte Irgendwie-Stimmungen und den gepflegten literarischen Kammerton' (16: 242).<sup>56</sup> Grass's prose works of the post-reunification period are

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<sup>55</sup> Grass's original publication, *Novemberland* (Göttingen: Steidl, 1993) should not be confused with the similarly titled volume, Günter Grass: *Novemberland. Selected Poems 1956-1993*, Translated from the German by Michael Hamburger, New York, San Diego London: Harcourt Brace, 1996. The latter is a bilingual version, not of the cycle of thirteen sonnets that constitute the German *Novemberland*, but, as the subtitle says, a collection of Grass's poetry which does, however, include the 13 sonnets. The numbers are so important to the original Göttingen edition that the facing page of each sonnet is occupied by Grass's water colour rendering of the number for that sonnet. Most of the translations suffer from the perennial translators' conflict between literal translation and commitment to maintaining the rhyming system. The translation of the seventh sonnet, for example, fails to do justice to the vexed relationship between aesthetics and politics in literature that lies at its heart because, in his desire to remain true to Grass's rhyming pattern, Hamburger has rendered the key words *Ästhetik* and *Schönschrift* as 'harmony' and 'calligraphy' respectively, thereby losing the tension and sharp edge of the Literature Debate that gives the original German its bite.

<sup>56</sup> For a commentary on 'Askese' see Stolz, 1994 69f. See also Chapter 4 below, under the heading 'Die Idee, die bleibt rein? Selbst anfangs nicht rein'.

less abrasive than the *Novemberland* sonnets, but they are nevertheless just as much products of the intellectual climate that gave rise to them.

Given the sentiments expressed by Schirmmacher, Greiner, Bohrer and others, cited above, as well as the obituaries for the respective literatures of East and Western Germany, one might well have expected to observe a move away from ‘German’ themes in post-reunification German literature. Bill Niven observes, however, that there has been an increase in literature concerned with National Socialism, and lists seventeen authors as ‘just a few of those authors who have turned their hand to the theme’ (14).

It is, of course, not surprising that Günter Grass has experienced no release from his perceived obligation to keep Germany’s history in the public domain, or that he has refused to present the reading public with ‘eine pflegeleichte Literatur, die Pfötchen gibt’ (‘Gegen die hohen Priester der Eindeutigkeit’ 16: 336). What Habermas calls the ‘public use of history’ (‘Vom öffentlichen Gebrauch’) remains a persistent feature of Grass’s literary output in which the processes and consequences of Germany’s problematic past continue to find expression.

### ***UNKENRUF* – AN OVERVIEW**

*Unkenrufe* can be read, and indeed has been read virtually exclusively, as the story of Alexander Reschke and Alexandra Piątkowska, their love story, their *Idee*, and its ‘entsetzliche Fleischwerdung’ (12:150). However, this approach to reading *Unkenrufe* neglects the profound contribution made by the construction of the narrative. *Unkenrufe* is much more than the story of Alexander and Alexandra. None of the secondary literature on *Unkenrufe* cited above addresses the role

played by the narrator in any detail, and yet a study of his role is of quintessential importance for understanding the work. In the present chapter I shall look at two inter-related aspects of the narrator – his identity and his motivation. Franz Stanzel’s description of the existential basis of the first-person narrator’s motivation to write, explained above, provides an extremely pertinent set of questions that need to be asked. Related to the question of motivation is, of course, the question of identity. Who is the speaker who tells Alexander and Alexandra’s tale? In looking for the answer to this question I will explore aspects of names and naming in *Unkenrufe*. With the results of these investigations, I hope to justify the claim put forward in my introduction, that *Unkenrufe* marks a distinctive shift in Grass’s treatment of his narrator figures. After describing the narrator and his role I move on to the *story* and *discourse* aspects of the work, bringing out the significance of such elements as the ‘toad’ metaphor, the timing of Alexander and Alexandra’s meeting, the names of the characters, number symbolism and the Dance of Death, the *Stunde Null*, the protagonists’ *Idee*, and the significance of the *Zinsgroschen* painting before which Alexander and Alexandra make their marriage vows.

## THE NARRATOR

### IDENTITY

In a manner reminiscent of the opening of *Katz und Maus* the *Unkenrufe* narrator begins his story without preamble, simply plunging the reader straight into the action: ‘Der Zufall stellte den Witwer neben die Witwe’ (12:7). It is from the second sentence of the work – ‘Oder spielte kein Zufall mit, weil ihre Geschichte auf Allerseelen begann?’ – that we are able to make the first assumption about the

nature of the narrating voice, as it enables us to infer that the speaker is not an omniscient narrator. Such a narrator would know whether chance was involved or not. The narrator continues to remain withdrawn, obscured as it were, behind the action of the story he is telling, emerging only in glimpses in the first of the sections into which Grass has divided the opening chapter. The reader's first glimpse of him does not occur until page nine, when we read: 'Schlag zehn: Das war die Katharinenkirche. Was ich über den Ort ihrer Begegnung weiß, mengt meine teils verwischte, dann wieder überdeutliche Ortskenntnisse mit des Witwers forschendem Fleiß [...] (12:9). Now we can safely assume that the narrator lives in the same world, or ontic sphere, as the characters. This is the first time that the reader is able to see that the narrator's 'realm of existence', as Stanzel puts it (*Theory* 48), is identical to that of the characters. In fact, the narrator draws attention to the fact himself by weaving items from his own memory into the information he finds in Reschke's diary. Following Stanzel, we know that the motivation of embodied first-person narrators is 'existentially determined' (*Theory* 93). It is up to the reader now to discover the nature of this existential determination, and to ask: Why is the narrator telling this story? Why does he tell it in the way he does? To answer these questions we will want to ask: 'Wer erzählt hier?' – a question which relates not to the author, in this case, but to the narratorial construct within the text.

#### NAMES AND NAMING

Because he gives away very little about himself, the narrator does not make it easy for the reader to answer these questions. Moreover, for the first time in Grass's prose fiction writing, the narrator is not given a name. This is a significant

departure from Grass's previous practice. In the first period of Grass's prose fiction writing each of the narrators was named. One narrator – Amsel – even went by a handful of names. Furthermore, in many cases the saying 'nomen est omen' applies to the names Grass uses. Just as Oskar's deliberations on the process of writing novels in *Die Blechtrommel* serve to highlight the thematization of the narrative process, his reflections on the subject of names as he is being interrogated by the *Stäuberbande* provide a clue to the importance of names and naming for Grass:

'Wie heißt du?'

Diese Frage mußte kommen. Das lag an der Begegnung. Diese Frage nimmt einen wesentlichen Platz in der menschlichen Konversation ein. Von der Beantwortung dieser Frage leben längere und kürzere Theaterstücke, auch Opern – siehe Lohengrin (3: 480).

Oskar, too, says that he has gone under many names (3: 427). Individuals have no influence over the place, date and hour of their birth, over their forebears, or under what circumstances they come into the world, nor over the name that is given to them at birth. The one thing that the individual is at liberty to change, however, is the name by which he is known, and, significantly for works in which names and naming are important, this is a liberty of which several of Grass's narrators – as well as other characters – in the works of this first period of his fiction avail themselves. Oskar, for example, because he cannot decide whether his real father is Matzerath (the German) or Bronski (the Pole), uses whichever name appeals to him at any particular moment, identifying himself either as Oskar Matzerath or as Oskar Bronski depending on which name is more practical at the time. Sometimes he uses the name of his maternal grandfather, the Cassubian Koljaiczek (3: 662). Koljaiczek himself lived under the assumed name of Wranka in order to escape

punishment for his expressions of ‘Polish nationalism’ which had taken the form of painting a fence in the red and white colours of Poland, and of creating a red and white spectacle by setting fire to a newly erected white-washed sawmill (3: 26). As mascot of the gang of young hoodlums known as the *Stäuberbande* Oskar goes under the name of Jesus (3: 481). This is the name that he assumes again when he is about to be arrested for the murder of Sister Dorothea (3: 777). As a *Fronttheater* entertainer he goes by the family name of his lover, the artiste (Roswitha) Raguna, and modifies his given name to Oskarnello. The significant thing about all of these ways of identifying himself is that in each case he identifies himself by association with another entity, by linking himself to their respective identities – the German Matzerath, the Polish Bronski, the artist Raguna, the Cassubian patriotic arsonist Koljaicek, and Jesus, who Oskar thought could have been his ‘Zwillingsbruder’ (3: 180).<sup>57</sup> While the family names that Oskar chooses from reflect and denote ethnic origins, Oskar’s given name provides a link to literary tradition. Bahlow tells us that Oskar is a north German name made popular in Germany around the middle of the eighteenth century by the Ossian legend, and that the enthusiasm with which Oskar, the hero of the Ossian legend, was received in Germany is reflected in the works of Klopstock, Herder and Goethe (*Unsere Vornamen* 80).

The thematization of names and naming continues in *Hundejahre*, and it is no coincidence that when Harry tries to solve problems ‘namendeutend’ (5: 307) his

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<sup>57</sup> For a treatment of the numerous parallels between Oskar and Jesus see an Huef.



efforts are blessed with success: 'Namen Namen. Die Geschichte besteht daraus' (5: 478). When he discovers Amsel's new name (i.e. Haseloff) he says: 'Namen haften. Namen trägt man. Jeder Mensch heißt.' (5: 309). Even the relatives who attend Amsel's rather remarkable christening – or name-giving – are named in an exhaustive list –

Aber alle Tiedes aus Groß-Zünder, außer den vier Söhnen, die bei der Kavalerie gefährlich lebten – später fiel der Zweitjüngster –, stapften in gutem Tuch hinter dem Taufkissen. Es ging der Toten Weichsel entlang: die Schiewenhorster Fischer Christian Glomme und Frau Martha Glomme, geborene Liedke; Herbert Kienast und seine Frau Johanna, geborene Probst; Carl Jakob Ayke, dessen Sohn Daniel Ayke auf der Doggerbank, im Dienste der kaiserlichen Marine, zu Tode gekommen war; die Fischerwitwe Brigitte Kabus, deren Mutter [...] (5:35).

and so on for the best part of a page. At first this may seem to be no more than Grass's well-known propensity to relish long lists which provide sheer sensual pleasure in their sounds, quite apart from any intrinsic meaning. There are many instances of such lists in his work that do not consist of names, as, for example, in his enthusiastic embracing of all possible shades of brown (*Hundejahre* 5: 256-7). It is a technique which Grass may well have adapted from Rabelais's *Gargantua et Pantagruel* with its 'long lists – whether of games, library books, prominent souls in Hell, or foods and dishes – that express an almost God-like delight in the sheer sound and number of names no less than in the multiplicity and diversity of things' (Weidhorn 887). The technique is also seen in Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* and Joyce's in *Ulysses*. All three writers are acknowledged as significant

influences on Grass.<sup>58</sup> But names for Grass express more than a sensuous delight in sound. Beyond the *Klangmalerei* in which Grass indulges, the names of the characters serve as historical and cultural identifiers. For all their professed or imagined individuality and/or outsider status, for all their peregrinations, whether voluntary or involuntary, these narrators are inseparable from their historical and cultural milieu, their *Heimat* in the north-east corner of Europe, that was lost for ever as a result of Germany's racist war. It was Grass's intent to recreate the lost *Heimat* in the works that became the *Danziger Trilogie*. In the first instance, therefore, the use of appropriate names was essential for his literary reconstruction of the lost society. In the poem 'Kleckerburg' Grass includes names 'that are only names' in a list of memories carried to the surface like flotsam on the tide, or like ore brought up from mines:

und Namen, die nur Namen sind:  
 Elfriede Broschke, Siemoneit,  
 Guschnerus, Lusch, und Heinz Stanowski (1: 197).<sup>59</sup>

However, this is only one level of Grass's usage of names.

In *Hundejahre* the 'play' with one of the narrator's names is also an important structural element. The first narrator introduces himself as Brauxel, but before he has advanced very far into his story, in fact we are still on the first page of the narrative, he makes three significant points about his own name:

Der hier die Feder führt, wird zur Zeit Brauxel genannt. [...] Der  
 Federführende schreibt Brauksel zumeist wie Castrop-Rauxel,  
 und manchmal wie Häksel. Bei Laune schreibt Brauxel seinen

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<sup>58</sup> Re Rabelais see 15: 328; Sterne 16: 349; Joyce 16: 179.

<sup>59</sup> Originally published in *Gleisdreieck*. Neuwied/Berlin: Luchterhand 1960.

Namen wie Weichsel. Spieltrieb und Pedanterie diktieren und widersprechen sich nicht (5: 7).

The first point that we note is the expression ‘zur Zeit’. In other words, names are not permanent. A person can have different names at different times, as Oskar has shown in *Die Blechtrommel*. The second point is that even when one name is settled upon, the spelling is free. The third point is that it is all a game, but with serious intentions. (Didacticism and the urge to play neither demand nor exclude each other.) All of these ideas about names are conveyed in rhythmic prose with an abundance of alliteration that always coincides with the name. The names themselves are, of course, by no means random choices. The Weichsel is the River Vistula – a defining feature of the landscape which, like all of literature’s waterways, puts its stamp on the identity of all who live near it. Although the river’s course may be diverted by dikes, these, as the narrative of *Hundejahre* shows, are constantly at the mercy of mice or the might of the torrent. The word ‘Häksel’ is not to be found in standard dictionaries. However, its homophone ‘Häcksel’ is.<sup>60</sup> According to Grimm’s *Wörterbuch* this word is not standard German and its usage is confined to that area of Germany in which Grass is at home. The dictionary also provides a variety of possible spellings – hecksel, hechsel, häxel, hexel – that coincides closely with those proffered by Brauxel for his name.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> For this advice I am grateful to Dieter Stolz, Literarisches Colloquium, Berlin.

<sup>61</sup> Grass is very familiar with the works of the Grimm Brothers. As well as what appears to be an adaptation from their work as described here, he draws on their *Märchen* for sections of *Die Rattin* and on the entry under ‘Unken’ in Jakob & Wilhelm Grimm’s *Deutsches Wörterbuch* for *Unkenrufe* (as will be shown in below in my discussion of the title metaphor in Chapter 4) and for the humorous four-liner ‘Seit Grimms Zeiten’ in *Fundsachen für Nichtleser* 97.

*Häcksel*, moreover, means ‘chaff’, the finely chopped straw which serves as feed for livestock. It is a metaphor for impermanence which stands in direct contrast to the permanence of the river Vistula which determines the north German landscape in Brauxel’s description. Chaff is rich in Biblical connotations that have to do with dispersal, insecurity, impermanence and divine punishment of the enemies of Israel. Isaiah 17, 13 is one of many examples: ‘The nations roar like the roaring of many waters, but he will rebuke them, and they will flee far away, chased like chaff on the mountains before the wind and whirling dust before the storm.’

A further aspect of names and naming is the concept that to give someone or something a name is to gain control over it. This concept has a long history. In the first chapter of Genesis God commanded Adam to name the living creatures over which he had dominion. In the Ten Commandments it is forbidden to take the name of God in vain. In Islam it is forbidden to say the name of God. In the Third Reich Jews were forced to adopt certain Jewish names. In this way names were used to denigrate and maintain control over the individuals bearing those names. On the other hand, a name change can help an individual escape detection. Joseph Koljaiczek is an example in Grass’s fiction. Not mentioning a person’s name is a means of diminishing their existence, as is removing a person’s name. Thus Pilenz tries to erase Mahlke from his consciousness by removing his name from the board in the latrines: ‘aber ich hackte Mahlkes Lieblingssequenz mit einem Beil [...] und tilgte auch Deinen Namen’ (4: 139). Names are also changed to symbolize a moral step forward in a person’s life, as a sign that an older self has died and a newer, better one come into existence. The classic example of this is the Saul/Paul conversion on the road to Damascus. Others include Abram’s to

Abraham after his encounter with God, and Simon's to Peter after he was called by Jesus. A further kind of name change is that practised by those who want to blend in with, or show allegiance to, a particular community. The germanization of Polish-sounding names in Danzig during Grass's childhood, and the anglicising of immigrants' names (as practised in the 50s and 60s in Australia) fall into this category.

Whenever a person changes his or her name it raises the question as to which of these categories the change falls into. Throughout *Hundejahre* Grass plays an ironical joke with Brauxel's several names. The other narrators are unaware that the person who has commissioned them to write is the fat child they knew as Eddi Amsel during their childhood, and only an astute reader will pick up the clues on first reading the book. But what do Amsel's name changes – Brauxel, Haseloff, Goldmäulchen – signify? Do his name changes signify that a new, better person has emerged, promoted by the *Schneewunder* or by his descent into his underground realm? The most poignant result of the name changes is the confrontation between Amsel/Brauxel and Matern in *Eine Öffentliche Diskussion* (5: 622-668) where Matern is brought to confess his crime against Amsel, not knowing that it is his victim whom he is addressing. The book concludes with Matern's resignation: 'Und Dieser und Jener – wer mag sie noch Brauxel und Matern nennen? – ich und er [...]' (5: 744).

It is 'ich und er' in *Unkenrufe* too, the narrator and Alexander. But unlike the situation in *Hundejahre*, where both are named, in *Unkenrufe* one is not named. At first this may seem to be of little consequence. However, given the

significance of names in Grass's previous work, as demonstrated above by just a few of the many examples that could be cited, it is significant when an important, central figure such as the narrator is not named.<sup>62</sup>

The absence of a name for the narrator is symptomatic of a dramatic shift in the structure of Grass's narratives, and that is a shift of focus away from the narrator and onto the protagonists. Here, for the first time, the hero of the story is not the narrator. Grass's treatment of the narrator's name in *Katz und Maus* is also of interest in relation to our search for the identity of the *Unkenrufe* narrator. The reader does not find out Pilenz's name for a very long time – not until after the halfway mark in Chapter 8, when he says: 'Ich, Pilenz – was tut mein Vorname zur Sache – ' (4: 102). This is a strategy that draws additional attention to matters relating to the naming of the speaker. The revelation of Pilenz's name coincides with his most intimate self-revelation – namely the basis of his relationship with Mahlke. So overpowering are Pilenz's emotions at this stage that he must admit twice how strong Mahlke's hold over him was: 'Wenn Mahlke gesagt hätte: "Mach das und das!" ich hätte das und noch mehr gemacht' (4: 102), and: 'Und hätte Mahlke nach der Rede des U-Boot-Kommandanten zu mir gesagt: "Pilenz, klau ihm das Ding mit dem Drussel!", ich hätte das Ding mit dem schwarzweißbroten Band vom Haken gelangt und für Dich aufgehoben' (4: 103).

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<sup>62</sup> Concerning the names of the narrators in the second period see the remarks under the heading 'Periodization' in Chapter 2 above.

The state of affairs in *Unkenrufe* with regard to the narrator's identity, the complete absence of a name for him, together with his physical absence from the scene of the events he describes, is also highlighted in the contrast provided by the significance attached to the names of the other protagonists – which go well beyond the simple repetition of Alexander and Alexandra. Alexander is a very evocative name, suggesting allusions to Alexander the Great, for example. In *Aus dem Tagebuch einer Schnecke* Zweifel tells Lisbeth Stomma the stories of Alexander, Napoleon and Hannibal. Like the fiction of *Unkenrufe*, in which significant developments in the plot are tied to significant events in German-Polish relations, Zweifel lets Hannibal and Alexander suffer defeat at the same time as the German divisions became 'stuck in the mud' before Moscow (7:158). Possible allusions to Goethe's *Italienreise*, during which he attended a performance of Anfossi's 'Alexander in Indien' might be called into play (*Goethes Werke* 11: 156). Or the name might be read in conjunction with that of Alexander Deutschland, a member of the *Danziger Synagogengemeinde* whose moss-encrusted grave stone Alexander and Alexandra find on one of their visits to old cemeteries (12: 184); or as an allusion to the 'Staffelhund Alex', which, in *Katz und Maus*, had to learn to jump with a parachute; or perhaps to Alexander Kluge, whose work Grass admires, not to mention a string of popes and czars.<sup>63</sup> A further possibility is that the names of the heroes are an allusion to Alexandria, the principle centre of the Gnostics. Grass's knowledge of the Gnostics and Augustine

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<sup>63</sup> Coincidentally, Józef Piłsudski, to whom a number of references are made in *Unkenrufe*, was arrested for attempting to assassinate Czar Alexander III (Davies 53).

is suggested by Pilenz's admission of his addiction to the magic of Bloy, the Gnostics, Böll, Friedrich Heer and 'good old Augustine' (4: 102). The influence of the Gnostics and Augustine in Grass's construction of his 'subjektive Zahlen- und Symbolwelt' has been explored comprehensively by Harscheidt. Some further examples of Grass's play with names and numbers in *Unkenrufe* will be explored in the section entitled 'Dances of Death and Numbers' below.

A further instance of the significance of names in *Unkenrufe* is Alexander's surname, Reschke. Like Matern, but with a good deal less certainty and mythologizing, the fictional Reschke tries to establish a link between his own name and that of a possible ancestor, Catharine Rebeschke, 'auch Rebeschkin genannt' (12: 65), the wife of the real astronomer Johann Hewelke (Johann Hevelius, 1611-1687, after whom the hotel in which Reschke is staying is named). On the day after he meets Alexandra, Reschke comes across a memorial stone bearing his name written 'nach älterer Schreibweise' Rebeschke in the floor of St. Marien (12: 53). Eventually, in one of *Unkenrufe*'s dual outcomes, Reschke changes his name back to the Polish-sounding 'Reszkowski', the name his father bore until 1939 when he followed the widespread practice of Germanizing surnames (12: 213).

However, Alexander's explanation of how his family came to bear the name Reschke is problematic. The similarity between the sound of the names Mahlke and Reschke can hardly be overlooked either. In *Katz und Maus* Pilenz observes that names ending with '-ke, -ke or -a' sound Polish, and that many people whose names sounded Polish had them changed to more German-sounding names. One



of the priests – whose malpractice with altar boys Pilenz describes as ‘gelegentliche und harmlose, im Grunde nur meine katholische Seele suchende Handgriffe’ (4: 114) – applies to change his name from Gusewski to Gusewing. Pilenz’s ironical description of the change allocates it to the Saul-to-Paul variety, and therefore he rejects the change, and continues to use the priest’s Polish name.

Such events provide a context for Reschke’s wish to change his name, but the question as to whether it is opportunism or an attempt to reclaim a lost ethnic heritage remains open. With their final ‘ke’, each name anchors its bearer (or his ancestors) to a specific geographical location. According to name dictionaries, such names are of either Slavic-German (Bahlow 167), or Wendish, in origin (Gottschald 487). Gottschald adds that the name ‘Reschke’ means *Spitzmau*, a word has the same two meanings as does its English counterpart, ‘shrew’, one of which is a kind of mouse (187). Given the many similarities between *Unkenrufe* and *Katz und Maus*, several of which will be explored below, one wonders whether this can be mere coincidence.

Another significant aspect of names and naming in *Unkenrufe* concerns the names of Reschke’s three daughters: Sophie, Dorothea, and Margaretha. Although the last of the names has a slightly different spelling they are nevertheless an intertextual reference to *Der Butt*, in which the cooks of the Second, Third and Sixth Months are called Dorothea, Margarete and Sophie respectively. Grass seems to be drawing attention to the connection when he has Reschke refer to his eldest daughter as ‘Gret, wie ich sie früher rief’ (12: 154). The narrator of *Der Butt* used this form of the name for Margarete Rusch. Some further implications

of the occurrence of these names in *Unkenrufe* will be mentioned below. All of this information about names and naming in Grass's work, and in *Unkenrufe* in particular, demonstrates that it is quite a remarkable phenomenon that the narrator should be left nameless.

It was mentioned above that the narrator of *Das Treffen in Telgte* is a special case because the reader is invited to participate in a game to discover his identity. The reader of *Unkenrufe* could embark on a similar quest. We begin to gain some insight into his past when he provides in passing some information about his and Reschke's shared school days. This information has led Volker Neuhaus to conclude that the narrator of *Unkenrufe* is, like the narrators of the works of the 70s and 80s, a fictionalised Günter Grass. He writes:

Wieder ist dieser Erzähler-Autor mit zahlreichen Grass-Biographica ausgestattet, die Schulen (Ur, 14f), die Morgenfeiern der HJ (Ur, 102); die Zeit als Flackhelfer (Ur, 219), der Kriegseinsatz als Panzerschütze, die Verwundung, das 'zufällig[e]' Überleben (Ur, 263f) auch scheint er, der Autor der 'Blechtrommel' zu sein (Ur, 264). Der Empfang des von Reschke zugesandten Materials stellt ihn aber zugleich auf dessen Stufe und fiktionalisiert ihn – wie es in allen Erzähltexten seit 'Aus dem Tagebuch einer Schnecke' stets der Fall ist (Günter Grass 187).

The similarities between Grass and the narrator of *Unkenrufe* even exceed those mentioned by Neuhaus. For example, they both changed schools often (12: 13), and they are both 'starrsinnig ohne Computer' (12: 78). But in my view this does not come close to the degree of autobiographical representation that was the hallmark of the works in the previous period. Furthermore, the characteristics cited by Neuhaus apply to a good many people of Grass's generation, and can also be understood as generational, rather than personal identifiers. Personal details

from the life of the real Günter Grass that are part and parcel of the works of the preceding decades are missing here. In *Unkenrufe* I have been unable to find specific, clear references to Grass of the kind one finds in the works of the middle period. Furthermore, although Reschke refers to the narrator as a person who was not very bright at school, but could write good essays – ‘In anderen Fächern warst Du gewiß keine Leuchte, aber Deine Aufsätze ließen schon früh erkennen...’ (12: 14) – I am unable to find anything in the text to support Neuhaus’s view that the narrator is a ‘bekannter Schriftsteller’, and ‘Autor der *Blechtrommel*’ (Günter Grass 187).

Moreover, Grass’s play with his own biographical details in *Unkenrufe* also embraces the main protagonist, for Reschke, too, is conspicuously equipped with a number of ‘Grass-Biographica’. The first, and most prominent of these is the beret, an item worn by both Grass and Reschke, and one with which the narrator indulges in provocative play.<sup>64</sup> Others include the avid reading of ‘Knackfuß-Künstlermonographien’ (12: 17);<sup>65</sup> the conviction that Germany’s eastern territories were ‘endgültig und schuldhaft vertan worden’ (12: 33), for ‘(s)chließlich ist diese Barbarei zuallererst von uns begangen worden’ (12: 22); the belief that the future of Europe lies not in the ‘Festung-Europa’ mentality, but in multicultural, multi-ethnic diversity; and serious reservations about the wisdom of reunification (16: 387; 12: 75 and 88). Both Reschke (12: 15) and Grass sport cord slacks and a tweed jacket. They also share the unusual hobby of collecting

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<sup>64</sup> Grass’s play with the beret will be described in more detail in Chapter 6 below.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Neuhaus, ‘Das konstante Gefühl zufällig überlebt zu haben’ 313.

coffin nails (12: 187) – an interest that has fed both poetic and graphic work by Grass.<sup>66</sup> There are even remarkable similarities in the way Reschke treats Alexandra, and the way the Günter Grass of *Zunge zeigen* treats his Ute. Ute's coughing fit in the dusty tobacco factory, for example, does not move Grass to leave it any sooner (Zz: 90), just as Reschke does not interrupt his taping of toad-calls because Alexandra is being bitten by mosquitoes (12: 106). Similarly, although Ute is ill with a fever (Zz: 36), and absolutely exhausted (Zz: 38), the busy round of visits and inspections from one coast of India to the other does not stop. In *Unkenrufe*, when Alexandra thinks the time has come to give up on their plan 'weil noch schön ist' (12: 143), Alexander simply fobs her off.

It is not surprising, then, that while Neuhaus sees the *Unkenrufe* narrator as a fictionalised Günter Grass, others, like Bullivant and Radisch, for example, see Reschke as Grass's 'double'. This phenomenon confirms the existence of a persistent desire to find the author in the text, a phenomenon that is encouraged by Grass's deliberate play with the narrator's identity which informs the work's structure.

In my search for the narrator's identity I will now turn to some other information the narrator provides about his school days. He explains how he had swallowed the little frogs he calls *Poggen*, three or four at a time, then brought them up again and let them hop away while at his school's annexe in the country (12: 37). This

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<sup>66</sup> See, for example, 'Sargnägel', *Radierungen und Texte 1972-1982. Zeichnen und Schreiben II*. Rpt. 1: 47.

snippet of memory has all the elements of a scene from Grass's earlier work *Hundejahre*: the school's country annexe, the *Poggen*, and school boys forcing one of their number to swallow living creatures. It is Brauxel/Amsel's account of a scene at the school's annexe in the Saskoshin Forest. The narrator has taken us back to the world of the *Danziger Trilogie*. Could it be that one of the characters from this fictional world has been resurrected in *Unkenrufe*, just as Oskar Matzerath was resurrected for *Die Rättin*, and Tulla Pokriefke for *Im Krebsgang*? Could it be, perhaps, that the narrator of *Unkenrufe* is Eddi Amsel? The narrator's statement, 'Also schlucke ich abermals, wie verlangt' (12: 34), could well have been made by someone like Amsel, the boy who had to buy his way out of being tormented by means of swallowing the squirming tails of lizards, and regurgitating them, still wriggling, three to five at a time, as it says in *Hundejahre* (5: 131). But no, Eddi Amsel is ten years older than the narrator of *Unkenrufe*, as the former was born in April 1917 (5: 34).<sup>67</sup>

Once the prospect of identifying the unnamed narrator of *Unkenrufe* with other characters in Grass's prose fiction is entertained, other possibilities begin to present themselves. It is significant that the possibilities that present themselves concern characters from books written at least thirty years before *Unkenrufe*, during the period in which Grass was primarily concerned with dealing with the National Socialist legacy. The narrator certainly seems to be pointing the reader in this direction when he says that the tram that Alexandra and Alexander take to

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<sup>67</sup> See also Harscheidt 20.

Erna Brakup's home immediately after her death is 'ein Schienenstrang, der mir aus anderer Geschichte, am Friedhof Saspe vorbei, alteingefahren ist' (12: 216).

While this may at first seem like an insignificant, passing remark, a reading of the text which privileges the role of the narrator, and which is therefore built on the premise that everything that the narrator says is determined by the conditions of his existence, that is, existentially determined, requires that the implications of such remarks be examined. The reference is, again, unmistakably to the setting and milieu of the *Danziger Trilogie*.

The narrator's indirect evocation of the setting and milieu of the *Danziger Trilogie* thus ties *Unkenrufe* into the organic structure of Grass's whole prose fiction oeuvre, continuing his practice of linking his created worlds to each other by means of intertextual references. The connections thus made, however, are not nearly as direct and unequivocal as those made between earlier works, such as references to Oskar Matzerath, the narrator and hero of *Die Blechtrommel*, in *Hundejahre* and *Die Rättin*. More is demanded of the reader, and once again Grass's pedantic playfulness, or playful pedantry, is at work. The reference to the Number 9 tram, whose route takes it past Danzig's Saspe cemetery, and the 'other story' may be read as a cryptic hint about the narrator's identity. If the narrator of *Unkenrufe* is someone who is very familiar with the Number 9 tram, Oskar Matzerath would have to be considered as a possibility, were it not for the fact that Grass finally managed to kill him off in the atomic *Knall* of *Die Rättin*. He certainly has significant connections with Saspe cemetery, as his two fathers are buried there. However, it is the connection to Grass's following work *Katz und Maus* that I think is more fruitful to follow.

The relationship between Alexander Reschke and the *Unkenrufe* narrator is similar to the relationship which exists between several of what Grass calls his 'Kontrastpaaren' in his work from the sixties.<sup>68</sup> One of these pairs is Mahlke and his 'chronicler' Pilenz (Neuhaus, 'Ich' 179), the protagonist, and the narrator respectively of the Novelle *Katz und Maus*. They belong to the same Danzig milieu as Amsel. Alexander is similar to Mahlke in that he tends to tower over his chronicler in his achievements. Mahlke is known as 'the Great Mahlke' because of his physical prowess and feats of bravery. It emerges that Alexander, too, was an outstanding figure during his school years. It was Alexander, for example, who was the organizing genius who was able to achieve an increase in the payment for the potato beetles the school children collected, whereas the narrator could not even fulfil his own quota of beetles without Reschke's help. But the similarities do not end there. Both narrators, Pilenz from *Katz und Maus*, and the narrator of *Unkenrufe*, mention that Pilenz and Reschke respectively permitted them to copy their school work (4: 28-9, and 12: 51; 117). During their school days both Pilenz (4: 82-83) and the *Unkenrufe* narrator were once fond of a girl called Hildchen, who appears to be Reschke's cousin. Indeed, the narrator even hints that he used to meet Hildchen at the very spot where Alexander and Alexandra meet each other (12: 37), and that they may have smooched on a park bench instead of seeking the safety of an air-raid shelter when the alarm sounded (12: 51).

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<sup>68</sup> See Ceppl-Kaufmann, 'Gegner' for the Haß-Liebe of Grass's 'Kontrast-Paare'.

As well as these overlapping experiences, there are similarities in the way the two narrators write. Pilenz's equivocation about who set the cat upon the mouse is similar to the *Unkenrufe* narrator's equivocation regarding his school days with Reschke. Each of their stories shows small inconsistencies, regarding, for example, the weather on the day that Alexandra and Alexander meet, in the later work, and the colour of Mahlke's eyes, in the earlier one. Furthermore, both narrators experience, and attempt to resist, the urge to write about *themselves* when they are ostensibly writing about the *other*. Pilenz says: 'doch soll nicht von mir die Rede sein, sondern von Mahlke oder von Mahlke und mir, aber immer im Hinblick auf Mahlke' (4: 25); and 'aber es soll ja nicht meine Geschichte [...] abgespult werden – vielmehr darf hier nur von Dir die Rede sein' (4: 126-7). Similarly, the *Unkenrufe* narrator says, 'Aber hier muß von Alexandra and Alexander berichtet werden' (12: 37). As well as this, each narrator is described as a gifted writer (4: 126 and 12: 14), and each writes out of an existential necessity which stems from a close association formed during the National Socialist era. Pilenz says, for example, 'Wäre ich nie mit Mahlke befreundet gewesen, [Wäre ] ich nur locker, aus Neugierde, auch weil wir in einer Klasse saßen, an Mahlke gebunden, dann müßte ich jetzt nicht schreiben [...]' (4: 106).

The most significant, or most loaded link between the two narrators, however, is the above-mentioned tram from Danzig/Gdańsk to Brösen/Brzeźno. We know from references to it in the books of the *Danziger Trilogie* that it is the *Linie 9* to which the narrator refers in the final – auspiciously the seventh – chapter of *Unkenrufe*. The connotations of this particular tramline for Pilenz in *Katz und Maus* are overwhelming, as it functions as a frame for several scenes which are



particularly significant in his relationship with Mahlke. For example, Pilenz travels on the *Linie 9* when he goes to inspect Mahlke's much admired hole in the ice (5: 56); then, consumed with excitement and dread, he travels on it again when he must confirm that it is Mahlke who stole the *Ritterkreuz* (4: 97). Having confirmed his hope and fear he travels on the *Linie 9* with Mahlke, *knowing* that Mahlke is carrying the stolen medal (4: 107). Most significantly, the tramline is closely associated with Pilenz's betrayal of Mahlke. For it is the *Linie 9* in which he is travelling when he tells Mahlke the lies that contribute directly to the latter's assumed death (4: 167-68), that is, that someone had been to his home looking for him (4: 167), and that his mother had been taken to Hochstrieß (4: 168).

There are even more similarities between the narrators of *Katz und Maus* and *Unkenrufe*. But there are also differences, and I am not suggesting here that the two narrators are, in fact, the same person. What I have undertaken above is merely a comparison that suggests itself from the text of *Unkenrufe*. It is a comparison which serves as a reminder of events which reunification and the possibility of increased freedom of access to Germany's lost eastern provinces has tended to force into the background in German public life. It is, of course, no coincidence that these are also the very events that provide the basis for Reschke's nineties project. Were it not for National Socialist crimes there would have been no need for Alexandra and Alexander's costly repatriations of the dying, the dead and the decayed remains of expellees.

The above exploration of names and namelessness in *Unkenrufe* in relation to some of Grass's earlier works highlights the profound difference between the

narrator of *Unkenrufe* and his forebears in Grass's fiction. It also illustrates a fundamental change in the way Grass has approached the telling of a story. My conclusion is that in this work, and in *Ein weites Feld* as well, the individual identity of the narrator is no longer as important as it was previously. The narrator, as a person, is no longer important. But the *function*, that is to say, the telling of the story is as important as ever. Even though this narrator is not identified as an individual by being given a name, he is identified by virtue of his birth year as belonging to a certain group in German society, namely the generation which, although enjoying the *Gnade der späten Geburt*, still has a debt to bear.<sup>69</sup> But why does the *Unkenrufe* narrator tell Reschke's tale?

#### MOTIVATION

Our lack of knowledge about the narrator's identity is compounded by a dearth of information about his inner life. We know only that he is very reluctant to take on the task Reschke entrusts to him. This state of ignorance persists until the very last pages of the work, and even then it is only partially dissolved. Yet we do need to look for the narrator's reasons for acting as he does. As Dorrit Cohn points out in her epistolary exchange with Gérard Genette:

Homodiegetic narration without presentation of the narrator's past inner life [...] calls – better: *yells* – for interpretation. More precisely, it forces the reader to seek a plausible explanation in the psyche of the narrator ('Narratological Exchange' 263).

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<sup>69</sup> This expression has gained considerable currency since it was used by Helmut Kohl on a visit to Israel in 1984.

The search for ‘a plausible explanation’ for the narrator’s reluctant acceptance of Reschke’s request is well worth undertaking, as allows us to discover the key to one of the essential messages that *Unkenrufe* conveys. There are hints as to the narrator’s motivation, and statements to encourage the reader to think about it, at various points of the tale, as well as indications that it is not only Alexander and Alexandra and their story that are important, but that the narrator and his concerns are significant as well. In the final sentence in the opening section of the first chapter, for example, the narrator begins to draw attention to himself and his task. His repetition of the first-person pronoun, for example, and his use of the modal verb of compulsion, emphasize the fact that it is a personal, individual responsibility or compulsion to which the narrator is responding. ‘Und ich? Ich muß dem Paar hinterdrein’ (12: 13). Here the narrator gives the reader something specific for which a ‘plausible explanation’ needs to be found. Thus the narratological insights which suggest that the reader needs to search for the narrator’s motivation are supported from within the text. The absence of an explanation for the narrator’s motivation adds an element of suspense to the story, and also serves to relativize all of his statements, for we cannot know how to evaluate them when we do not know why he is making them.

In the first instance, the ‘existential situation’ that prompts the narrator to write is the request from Reschke that accompanies a package of archival material – newspaper cuttings, notebook-diaries, receipts, photographs, tape recordings and a video recording – that comes into the narrator’s life completely out of the blue. But this alone would not suffice to motivate the narrator to take on the task of writing which he so resents. Yet his receipt of the package of archival material and

its accompanying letter changes his existential situation from one in which it seems he could comfortably forget the past, to one in which there is a change in his attitude. His initial denial of knowledge of the past events to which Reschke refers must give way, first to grudging acceptance and then, finally, to the vocalization of the implications of what happened in the past for an understanding of the present. But this is a painfully slow process.

In his letter to the narrator Reschke reminds him that they once sat side by side at the Petri-Oberrealschule in Danzig. The narrator claims that he cannot even remember this person called Alexander Reschke who claims to remember him from his now chronologically and geographically distant school days. He changed schools often, the narrator says, and cannot remember who sat beside him when and where. But he has already, at this stage, let slip a remark that shows he probably does remember Reschke: ‘Er hätte wissen müssen, wie leicht ich ins Erzählen gerate’ (12: 13). He refers to Reschke as ‘mein ehemaliger Mitschüler’ (12: 14), but then claims that he cannot remember a fellow student called Reschke (12: 16). After first saying that he is *supposed* to have gone to the same school as Reschke (12: 19), he gradually recalls significant incidents from his school days with him. He says, furthermore, that he *must* comply with Reschke’s request to write an account of the Reconciliation Cemeteries because in his letter Reschke plays around with insinuations that expose him, and that he was admired at school for swallowing a live toad (12: 34). Expose him as what? The answer to this question is never revealed. He responds to Reschke’s assertion that he once swallowed a toad by saying that it may be true, but that he only did it once, ‘um anzugeben oder aus Gutmütigkeit, weil der gelangweilte Haufen das sehen wollte’

(12: 37). It is important for him to assert that it was not a revolting red-bellied toad, not the kind of toad that lives in German mythology as the prophetess of doom, as Reschke would have it (12: 37). Yet he ‘swallows the toad’<sup>70</sup> again, and takes up his narrative, reflecting along the way on the information in Reschke’s letter, as well as on the process of sorting the material and arranging his report.

The way the reader receives the narrator’s account from that point on is coloured by this indication that the narrator has some kind of secret. What is it about himself that he does not want to have revealed? And why does the Reschke’s threat continue to motivate his writing of the history of the Reconciliation Cemeteries Association even when Reschke appears to have died in the road accident in Italy before the narrator receives his letter? Potential answers to these questions can be found if we view the threat of exposure posed by remarks in Reschke’s letter not as revelations to the outside world about the narrator, but rather, as threats to the narrator’s own self image. How painful it is to be reminded not only of our sins of commission, but also of our sins of omission. It could be, perhaps, that Reschke’s letter forces the narrator to see himself more clearly, to confront his own weakness, as seen, and acknowledged reluctantly by him, in his swallowing toads? A further explanation the narrator provides is equally unenlightening, namely that he is ‘angestiftet’ by the fact that Alexander and Alexandra are widowed, and therefore not indulging in ‘landläufige Ehebrecherie’ (12: 45).

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<sup>70</sup> I will return to this metaphor below, in Chapter 4, under the heading, ‘The Title Metaphor’.

Of course, questions could be asked as to whether the narrator's fear of exposure may be associated with the crimes of the Third Reich. But Grass has pre-empted this by telling us the ages of both Reschke and the narrator. They are 62, the same age as Günter Grass himself, as the action of *Unkenrufe* begins in November 1989 (12: 42). This marks him clearly – as indeed all of Grass's previous narrator figures have been marked – as a member of Grass's generation, a group in German society, as has been shown in the introduction to this thesis, which occupies a special position in relation to questions of guilt and innocence and the duty of memory.

Although it may be appealing for people to absolve themselves of guilt by claiming *die Gnade der späten Geburt*, in Grass's view, it is not an unencumbered grace that this generation enjoys. For many the 'grace of the late birth' is merely a burden of a different kind to that borne by their parents' 'Täter' generation, one which makes moral demands of its own. Even the term itself has become burdensome, as can be seen, for example, in a collection of short stories entitled *Die Gnade der späten Geburt. Sechs Erzählungen* by Gert Heidenreich. In Hanns-Josef Ortheil's *Hecke* the 'Gnade' is a self-deception as the mental and spiritual injuries of the war are carried forward into the next generation, even if it is through denial.<sup>71</sup>

We must search elsewhere for clues as to why the narrator should take on the project of writing the history of Alexander and Alexandra's venture despite his

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<sup>71</sup> Cf. Schmitz 100f.

repugnance for the task. As mentioned above, Reschke reminds the narrator that he let him copy his school work (12: 117). The motif of the child who lets other children copy his work comes straight from Grass's storehouse of motifs and images. In *Katz und Maus* Pilenz was allowed to copy from Mahlke (4: 28-29), and in *Hundejahre* Harry Liebenau says that he let other children copy his work (5: 293). It seems to be an 'objective correlative'<sup>72</sup> for a relationship of power and dependence. Yet still the narrator appears to be unsure about who Reschke really is. We cannot tell whether his uncertainty is real or feigned, although his crystal clear recollection of some incidents earlier on suggests he is trying to avoid confronting whatever it is that forms the crux of his relationship with Alexander. In fact he plays with his memory of Reschke, like a cat with a mouse: now bringing him closer, now pushing him away. The variations in his references to Reschke – from 'Professor Dr. Reschke' to 'Alex' – are an indication of this. He says he is not sure whether Reschke is 'jener langgeschossener, pickliger Junge [...], den leiseste Kritik zum Weinen brachte', a boy who was above average in all of his subjects and let others copy his work, but needed to receive copious praise in return. Or was Reschke perhaps the boy he remembers as a keen *Fähnleinführer*. The narrator's clearest memory of Reschke seems to be that of the boy who drew the picture of Danzig in flames under a hail of bombs, and cried when he was punished for it (12: 117), although he is uncertain until the last pages

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<sup>72</sup> See Neuhaus for a discussion of the term 'objective correlative' in relation to Grass's work. The term is a practical means of avoiding the word 'symbol' which, in most cases, is not appropriate for Grass's practice of 'allmähliche Aufladung eines Dings mit einer festen Bedeutung' (*Günter Grass* 11-18).

of his story as to whether Reschke was the tall pimply one, or the one who was the efficient organizer of beetle and clothes collections. It seems as if the narrator probably does know well who Reschke is, and is using the vacillations as an avoidance tactic, for, as he admits near the end of the story, it was Reschke's reminder that he had helped the narrator collect his quota of beetles that compelled him to accept the task: 'Und dann verpflichtet er mich mit Hinweis auf unsere gemeinsame Schulzeit: "Du erinnerst Dich gewiß an die Kriegsjahre, als wir in Klassenstärke auf die kaschubischen Acker mußten [...]"', to which the narrator replies, 'Ja, Alex, ich erinnere ich mich [...]' (12: 244). Yet somehow this explanation still does not seem to provide a plausible justification for the narrator to take on such an onerous, time-consuming enterprise. It has been suggested that the narrator has a guilty conscience because he informed on Reschke because of his drawings depicting Danzig in flames,<sup>73</sup> but I have been unable to find unequivocal justification for this in the text, nor even a hint such as the conditional denial Pilenz makes in relation to informing on his teacher Oswald Brunies in *Katz und Maus* (4: 48). The narrator's insinuation that Alexandra may have something to do with his decision to take on the task of writing the history of the Reconciliation Cemeteries Association – 'Vielleicht weil die Witwe ...' (12: 26) – seems to be a red herring.

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<sup>73</sup> For this suggestion, and other very helpful comments made following my presentation of a paper about *Unkenrufe* at the University of Bradford's Seventh International Colloquium on Contemporary German-Language Literature in April 2000, I am grateful to Helmut Peitsch.



Given that it is their association during the war years that seems to lie at the heart of the narrator's problem with Reschke, it would be useful to consider what other circumstances from that time may be impinging on the narrator's ability to deal more adequately with Reschke's request. The very fact that the narrator and Reschke survived the war at all is due in part to the fact that they, like their creator Grass, were too young to be sent to the front earlier in the war. As has been shown above in the section entitled 'Grass and History', Grass consistently links the accident of the year of his birth to two things. The first is his survival of the war.<sup>74</sup> Had he been just a few years older, he would have belonged to that generation of young men which was all but obliterated. The second is his relationship to personal involvement in Nazi atrocities. Of great concern to Grass is the knowledge that his generation was not tested, that it never came to the point where they had to choose between putting up some form of resistance, or following the prevailing ideology of the time. His feeling is that he would probably have acted in a way consistent with his education and upbringing by convinced National Socialists, and his ambitious lower middle-class family who had sought to repress its Polish-Cassubian heritage in favour of German idealism. It was an idealism of mythical-religious intensity, inculcated through such vehicles as R. A. Schröder's 'Deutscher Schwur', which the Germans of Grass's age group had to recite 'anlässlich Morgenfeiern, Weihestunden, beim Fahnehissen, im Zeltlager, in Jungvolk- und Hitleruniform nach choralähnlicher Melodie, mit Todeschauern im Rücken' ('Mein Ungedicht' 14: 31), swearing to die 'Haupt bei Haupt' for their

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<sup>74</sup> Cf. Neuhaus, 'Das konstante Gefühl'.

‘Heilig Vaterland’. To Grass it seems more than likely that in this environment he could have become enthusiastic about ‘großräumige Ziele’, and that he could have interpreted ‘subjektives Unrecht als objektives Recht’ (‘Kein Schlußwort’ 15: 530-31). This is an horrific thought which, as we have seen, continues to plague him.

This insight is one that is painful to bear, a self-perception which many people, perhaps also our fictional narrator, could be at pains to avoid. To admit to weakness is much more difficult than to assume the mantle of virtue. The ‘virtue’ assumed by those who have not been tested is questionable.

The recollections that begin to surface in the narrator’s mind as he reads Reschke’s letter would seem to indicate that he was not a strong character who would have been able to assert himself against the current of the times, had he been old enough to do so. He was a toad-swallowing toady who did whatever was asked of him, and who well may have been as obliging as Pilenz could see himself being had Mahlke asked anything of him. However, the fact that he and his generation were ‘too young to be guilty’ (‘Wie sagen wir es den Kindern?’ 15: 513), born too late to belong to the *Tätergeneration*, would not, in Grass’s view, absolve him of responsibility in the here-and-now. In Habermas’s view the *Nachgeborenen* have grown up in a society intimately connected to that in which Auschwitz happened. Their way of life is related to that of their parents by an indissoluble web of familial, geographical, political and intellectual connections (‘Vom öffentlichen Gebrauch’ 247). As a person who was there, and who therefore knows what went on, ‘in the broad light of day’ (‘Kindern’ 15: 505), he

has a responsibility to contribute to the awareness of his younger fellow citizens. Germany's *Schuld* is something for which, Grass says, there is no statue of limitations ('Kindern' 15: 514).

The question of *Schuld* in Grass's works has been examined in detail by Thomas Kniesche, who observes that four strategies can be discerned in the treatment of *Schuld* in Grass's prose fiction writing ('Das wird nicht aufhören' 187-8).<sup>75</sup> The first strategy consists in embedding the *Schuld* in the narrative structure so that the telling of the story is driven by the first-person narrator's awareness of his guilt – a strategy found in the works of the *Danziger Trilogie* as well as in *örtlich betäubt*. The second strategy involves demonstrating 'die geschichtliche Aufarbeitung der Schuld' as manifested in certain individuals. We see this strategy at work in the books of the *Danziger Trilogie* through to *Aus dem Tagebuch einer Schnecke*. The third strategy relies on the 'Metaphorisierung der Schuld'. By this Kniesche means the treatment of *Schuld* as *Schulden*, or German guilt as a debt which is passed on to subsequent generations. It is a debt that can never be paid off. Kniesche finds this strategy at work in *Der Butt* and *Die Rättin*, as well as in the earlier works, *Die Blechtrommel* and *Hundejahre*. The fourth way of representing *Schuld* identified by Kniesche is more an attitude or a conviction than a strategy: it is Grass's belief, which has been increasing in strength since the end of the seventies, that German guilt 'immer unbegreifbarer, unfäßbarer wird, daß sie sich jedem Versuch der "Bewältigung" entzieht' (183). Pointing out that *Unkenrufe* is

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<sup>75</sup> Cf. also Kniesche, 'Nietzsche' and 'Grenzen'.

concerned with German-Polish relations and the dwindling hope that anything can be learnt from the past, Kniesche contends that Grass now has stagnated in his understanding of German guilt, for while he has understood that the rise of a new generation has implications for the way guilt must be dealt with, he has no advanced theoretical concept for dealing with symptoms that are not determined by direct experience of the Nazi regime.

I would like to venture that Grass does indeed offer a strategy in *Unkenrufe*. As we know, Grass's concept of the literary writer is someone who writes 'gegen die verstreichende Zeit' (7: 148). The narrator does just this when he accepts the task given to him by Reschke, for although the action of Alexandra and Alexander's story is in the here-and-now, it is past crimes and past guilt that have led to their embarking on their venture. By putting their story in writing, the narrator will be linking the present with what went before, and keeping alive the memory of what Germans did to their neighbours – and to themselves – in the past. This is how he can use his literary talents to help pay the debt that has been passed down to his generation. It is up to those who were there, even if they were too young to have to been responsible for the crimes, to keep telling the stories of that time. Someone like the narrator, who is a gifted writer, has the greatest responsibility in this regard. We are reminded of Pater Alban's words to Pilenz: 'der Herrgott versah Sie nicht ohne Bedacht mit Talenten' (4: 126).<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> This is also a particularly important aspect of *Im Krebsgang*.

In addition to the similarities between the narrators of *Katz und Maus* and *Unkenrufe*, mentioned above, there is similarity in their motivations to write. Both are driven to write, and in both cases the catalyst for their writing is a person who is *presumed* to be dead. Just as Judith Ryan asks why Pilenz continues to falsify the record, even after Pilenz's death ('Resistance' 151), so, too, must we ask with regard to *Unkenrufe*: Why does the narrator feel bound to carry out Reschke's request, even after his presumed death? In Ryan's view, Pilenz's activity is founded not only on his ambivalent relationship with Mahlke, or his psychological make-up, but on the fact of his own previous involvement with Nazism. This consideration leads us to a crucial difference between the two narrators, one which is also a marker for the new period in Grass's prose fiction. Pilenz writes for the sake of his own peace of mind. To be sure, the priest, Pater Alban, encourages him to write, but his aim is to free himself from his past, to come to terms with it and in so doing disentangle himself from the grip Mahlke has on him. This is shown not only in Pilenz's own statements, but also in that of the priest when he says, 'Schreiben Sie sich frei' (4:126). The *Unkenrufe* narrator's motivation for writing, however, comes not from inner disquiet, but from an external influence. It is Reschke who compels him, or at least activates his conscience. Moreover, the subject that he is to write about is the present, not the past, even if that present is a direct outcome of things that happened in the past.

These assumptions about the *Unkenrufe* narrator's motivation for writing, taken together with the fruitless search for a name or an individual identity for him, provide further justification for my contention that it is his *function* in the story, as a recorder of events, rather than his individual identity, or *who* he is, that is of

importance. This, too, I would argue, marks a significant difference between the narrator of *Unkenrufe* and the narrators of Grass's prose fiction of both preceding periods. The narrator's similarity to Grass and to the fictional figures in his previous works, particularly those written during the time of Grass's most intense preoccupation was with the Nazi period and the preservation of his lost Heimat in literary form, is important. It provides a vehicle for demonstrating the constraints, the challenges, the conflicts and the responsibilities of the writer in post-Auschwitz, and post-unification Germany. It also demonstrates Grass's conviction that the stories that happen in Germany today began a long time ago, and that they have no end.<sup>77</sup> Furthermore, the re-employment of narrative strategies characteristic of his first period of fiction writing, strategies which had not been used during the seventies and eighties, when he believed for a time that the past had been dealt with, reflect his view that reunification is a danger to the left-liberal consensus achieved during the sixties.

The verbs which the narrator chooses to use in association with his motivation for accepting Reschke's historiographic task, 'anstiften' (12: 45), 'ködern' (12: 241), and 'verpflichten' (12: 244), reveal the complexity of the issues relating to the writing of this little piece of history. The last of these is the strongest, not only in meaning, but also by virtue of its place in the closing pages of the narrative. The narrator feels obliged to Reschke, but it is an obligation which appears to have less

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<sup>77</sup> Cf. 'Wie sagen wir es den Kindern?' 15: 514: 'Ich wollte die Kinder lehren, daß jede Geschichte, die heute in Deutschland handelt, schon vor Jahrhunderten begonnen hat, daß die deutschen Geschichten mit ihren immer neuen Schuldverschreibungen nicht verjähren, nicht aufhören können.'

to do with the kind of thing Reschke is asking him to do – i.e. write a history – than with the simple return of a favour. Reschke, the organiser, came to the aid of the dreamy narrator in his youth. Now it is the turn of the narrator to show his ‘Gutmütigkeit’ once more, and employ his gift, namely the ability to use his imagination, to help Reschke. Yet the fulfilment of this obligation is laden with difficulties, as Chapter 6 of this thesis will show. Before that, however, I should like to consider the story that the narrator must tell and how it relates to events of German-Polish history, intertextual references to Grass’s other works, and Grass’s integration of a number of cultural traditions.

#### **4. A LOVE STORY UNDER A CLOUD**

##### **ALEXANDER AND ALEXANDRA**

Certainly the most accessible aspect of the text is its hero Alexander Reschke, his indispensable partner Alexandra Piątkowska and their cemeteries. Alexander is a German professor of Art History whose speciality is the baroque memorial tablets in the floors of Danzig's churches. He seems a bit awkward and dodderly at first, but turns out to be quite a cunning old fox in his dealings with money, and also in his dealings with Alexandra. Alexandra, his opposite in every way, is an art restorer who specialises in gilding. She is Polish, slightly younger than Alexander, very much to the point, practical and sensuous, with a voluptuous figure that contrasts with Reschke's leanness. The couple has been interpreted as a variation on 'war-crossed lovers' (Mitgang) and as Philemon and Baucis (Fries 128). They were frequently described as 'geriatrics' in reviews despite the fact that they are only in their very early sixties, and neither of them has reached retirement age.

Several critics express dissatisfaction with the development of the two main characters. In his review entitled 'Das Danziger Versöhnungswerk' Frank Schirmacher observes that the two represent the national characters of Poland and Germany: 'Ihr Innenleben könnte aus den Durchschnittswerten sämtlicher Daten der Volksbefragung bestehen. Und sie amtieren als wären sie Idealfiguren in einem Planspiel des Statistischen Bundesamtes'. Heinrich Goertz also comments that the two operate as vehicles for political tendencies. Martin Chalmers calls them 'irritating caricatures'. A contrasting view is expressed by John Bayley who



sees the characters as 'positively Dickensian' and 'genuinely human and endearing'.

Those who criticize the portrayal of Alexander and Alexandra as 'Chargen' are missing an important aspect of the tale's construction. By bringing our focus back onto the role played by the narrator, we are reminded that the reader can only see the characters through his eyes. He was not there while the events of the story were happening. This, as already mentioned, is one of the significant features of *Unkenrufe* that distinguishes it from all of Grass's previous prose fiction: the narrator was not at the scene of the action when Alexander met Alexandra, nor at any other event associated with their project. It is only with the help of Reschke's diaries, cassette tapes, and a video, augmented by his own imagination, that he is able to simulate the feeling of having been there himself. Although the narrator knew Alexander Reschke in his youth, that is a long time ago, so distant from the present day, that he resents Reschke addressing him with the familiar 'du' form (12: 14). First-person narration, as mimesis, as an imitation of the realities and limitations of perception, can only give us as much information about the characters as the narrator himself is able to glean from the information available to him.

The allocation of the couple's respective genders, however, certainly conforms to their interpretation as allegories for Poland and Germany in keeping with popular portrayals at the time, in which Poland was represented as being the 'weaker sex'. (Indeed, it is quite an interesting exercise to imagine the story with a Polish male, and a German female protagonist!) The East-West marriage used by Grass in

*Unkenrufe* is a metaphor which was popular in 1989/90 for the union of the two Germanys. Jarausch cites several examples including depictions in which the enormous size difference between Kohl and de Maizièrè reflects the relative bargaining positions of their respective states as the 'rape of the east' takes place. He also refers to a cartoon in which an Eastern bride holds up her empty purse to her Western groom at a civil wedding ceremony, saying, 'Helmut, I need more household money' (Jarausch, *Rush* 187). While Poland's position vis-à-vis Germany was considerably weaker than that of the former GDR in economic terms, the relationship between Poland and Germany is much more difficult as it is greatly encumbered by their problematic relationship in the past. Yet despite cultural and economic differences Germany and Poland share many cultural and religious practices.

One of these is the All Souls' Day tradition of placing of flowers on the graves of relatives. Alexandra is buying flowers for this purpose when Alexander enters her life. He is the one who takes the initiative in beginning the relationship, by buying up so many of the very flowers that Alexandra is choosing that she is unable to achieve a decent bunch. One wonders why Alexander, a 62-year-old on a study trip and staying in a hotel, would buy flowers from the market stall, if not as a means of initiating contact with Alexandra. He certainly does not appear to be the kind of man who would pretty-up his hotel room by buying the odd flower or two to stick in the water glass. Nor is there any grave in Gdańsk on which he would be likely to lay flowers, seeing as his parents had to flee the area. It seems as if his only motivation in buying the flowers can lie in making himself indispensable to Alexandra's achievement of her aim. His own unconvincing explanation is that he

was following an irresistible impulse, 'einem Sog' (12: 8). This may be read as an early sign that he is on the wrong path, for in *Aus dem Tagebuch einer Schnecke* Grass describes the writer as someone 'der gegen den Sog schreibt' (7: 258).

When Alexandra finds that the few passable blooms she has been able to pull from the buckets are only worthwhile if combined with those that Reschke has chosen, she must either accept his offer, or make do with an unsatisfactory floral tribute to her parents.

Here, at their first meeting, the two already provide an allegory of the relationship between Poland and Germany. Alexandra's commitment to honouring her parents with a fitting floral tribute is informed by a sense of necessity similar to that which underlies Poland's need to develop a market economy after the collapse of communism. Neither Alexandra's nor Poland's goal can be achieved without German help, and in both cases the help is needed because of German actions. Once again Germany (i.e. Reschke) has the upper hand, or, as Pilenz in *Katz und Maus* would have put it, 'Oberwasser'. Not for nothing does Reschke call the flowers he has chosen, and now silently passes to Alexandra, his 'rust-red booty' (12: 8). When Reschke wants to pay for the flowers, Alexandra will not have it. But she acquiesces when he wants to buy her some of the mushrooms that are for sale on the same stand (12: 11). A 'late, delayed' erotic adventure is in the air as they leave the scene of their meeting with Alexandra carrying Alexander's 'späten,

verspäteten Steinpilze' in her bag (12: 12).<sup>78</sup> Reschke insists, despite Piątkowska's protestations, on accompanying her to a local cemetery where she intends to lay the flowers on the grave of her parents. Now the scene is set, and the motifs established: love, sex and death, if in a somewhat unconventional arrangement.<sup>79</sup> The narrator highlights Alexandra and Alexander's differences while quietly satirizing them: 'Sie nahm den Geruch ihres vorlauten Parfüms mit, er die leise Widerrede seines Rasierwassers' (12: 13). The point is that the couple will rise above these differences by means of their devotion to a shared ideal.

Yet to reduce Alexandra and Alexander to simple allegories is to cut off multiple avenues of interpretation that arise from the ways in which they do not conform to their respective stereotypes. Much as many Poles and Germans may wish to see their opposites in the other nation in the pedantic and pompous Alexander, or in Alexandra's seemingly pointless laughter or overdone fashion accessories, both Alexandra and Alexander defy the national stereotypes in a number of ways. In her support for German reunification, for example, Alexandra does not conform, as the statistics provided by Jarausch, cited above, show. Nor could Alexandra's exclamation, 'Na, machen wir deutsch-polnische Friedhofsordnung ... Wo wir müssen lernen schon, daß nicht polnische Wirtschaft sein darf, nur deutsche noch' (12: 35), be considered to be a typically Polish sentiment.

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<sup>78</sup> For the phallic symbolism of mushrooms in Grass's work see, for example, the large format poetry and graphics volume, *Mit Sophie in die Pilze gegangen*.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. Stolz, *Konstante 77* for the love, sex and death combination in Grass's early poetry.

It is Alexandra's closeness to the stereotype that adds emphasis and importance to her deviations from it. This is further accentuated by her use of the term 'polnische Wirtschaft', which is a pejorative expression denoting a lack of order. The term demonstrates the degree to which the traditional antipathy of the Germans to the Poles has become imbedded in everyday language, and Alexandra's use of it is quite ambiguous, insofar as it is difficult for the reader to ascertain whether she uses it naïvely, or whether it can be seen as a shibboleth that reveals that she knows which side her bread is buttered on. There is certainly no ambiguity about the German visitors' use of the term when they arrive in huge numbers and find that neither hotel beds nor cemetery flowers are available in sufficient quantities to satisfy their demands (12 :144). Grass's use of the politically incorrect term 'polnische Wirtschaft' in these two instances may be understood as an attempt to criticize, if not undermine, its currency in society at large.

By consciously evoking national stereotypes Grass shows the limitation of such view points while suggesting ways that their narrowness may be overcome. He has his protagonists themselves draw attention to 'nationaler Klischees, was Polen und Deutschen als typisch nachgesagt wird' (12: 63) as an immediate prelude to a discussion of the graphic artist, Daniel Chodowiecki. Chodowiecki (1726-1801) was a Polish miniaturist and engraver who, like Grass and Schopenhauer, was born in Danzig. In fact, it is in conjunction with Schopenhauer that Chodowiecki enters Grass's work in the early poem *Kleckerburg*, in which two figures, one German and one Polish, stand for Danzig's German-Polish heritage: 'Auch Chodowiecki, Schopenhauer / Sind dort geboren. Wann? Warum?' (1: 197). In

1797 Chodowiecki moved to Berlin and became president of the Royal Prussian Academy of the Arts. His works include a famous set of miniatures entitled 'The Life of Christ', engravings for Goethe's *Hermann und Dorothea*, and for Lessing's *Minna von Barnhelm*. Sometimes he is called the German Hogarth. Grass admires Chodowiecki's drawings and etchings depicting the citizens of Danzig from all walks of life, from the mayor to raftsmen on the river. They show a city 'so bunt gemischt, so gut genährt aus vielfältigen Kulturen, so europäisch', and his depiction of the Pommeranian and Cassubian countryside are unusual because of their realistic charm ('Chodowiecki zum Beispiel' 16: 308-9).

For Grass, as for Reschke, Chodowiecki is an ideal figure, the quintessential *European*.<sup>80</sup> The nationalist sentiment that seems to lie behind Alexandra's view that he is a 'Verräter an polnischer Sache' (12: 64) because he accepted the position of president of the Royal Prussian Academy of the Arts in Berlin seems at first to be strangely at odds with her professed desire to embrace 'deutsche Ordnung'. The same kind of contradiction is evident in her distrust of Chatterjee coupled with her willingness to be driven to her wedding in one of his rickshaws. What these contradictions highlight, however, is the potential for change, growth and development, as Alexandra finally allows herself to be persuaded by Reschke's arguments for accepting Chodowiecki's choices.

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<sup>80</sup> In 1992 Grass endowed an annual prize for Polish graphic artists, and named it the Chodowiecki Prize. Cf. Grass, 'Chodowiecki zum Beispiel' 16: 308-315, and 'Wie ich zum Stifter wurde'.

Attitudes can also be modified if the rewards for rethinking issues are sufficiently desirable. On a purely personal level, Alexandra can put up with the way Alexandra shuffles, Alexander with the way Alexandra smokes while she cooks – even though each would like to re-educate the other – for the sake of the benefits their relationship brings them. But one must often wonder about the nobility of the motives behind the actions which allow such benefits as ‘den Kauf pelzgefütterter, “sündhaft teurer Stiefeletten” für die Piątkowska’ (12: 153).

Alexandra and Alexander are two people from historically opposed countries whose bilateral relations, as the action begins, pivot precariously on how they will deal with the sensitive issue of the immeasurable human cost of the transfer of territory from one to the other fifty years earlier. The process by which Alexander and Alexandra reach agreement with one another by negotiation and compromise seems to bode well for the reconciliation of their respective countries. However, the positive implications of the freedom and ease with which these lovers can meet and reach agreement, the erotic promise of the mushrooms, the symbolism of the ‘unlöschar brennende Astern’ which ‘still vor sich hin brennen (12: 8) are counter-balanced by strong negative elements.

The first two negative elements, both of which will be explained in greater detail below, are the title of the novella, and the inauspicious date that Grass has chosen for the couple’s meeting. Another is found in the scene in which the couple passes by the memorial near the gate of the Lenin Shipyards. Alexander asks Alexandra to translate the lines of a poem engraved there. It is by Czesław Miłosz, a Polish poet who shares with Alexandra the fate of having been expelled from his

homeland in Lithuanian Vilnius. In an election speech in 1983 Grass named Miłosz's novel, *Verführtes Denken*, with its portrayal of the collapse of individuals under the weight of the ideological totalitarian burden of the twentieth century, as one of three novels he had read as a 24-year-old that had contributed significantly to his literary development ('Orwells Jahrzehnt II' 16: 72). In a way, of course, this is a tribute to Miłosz whom Grass met while he was writing *Die Blechtrommel* in Paris in the fifties and Miłosz was living in the Polish exile community there ('Begegnung in Paris' 16: 418). However, it is hardly a good sign that the couple should be reading his 'Vergeblichkeit feiernde Verse' (12: 18) at this stage. Finally, there is the narrator's satirical stance in relation to the events he describes with the help of Reschke's notebooks. In relation to the asters mentioned above, he cites Reschke's comment: 'Welche leise Übereinkunft! Wie ihr sind mir rostrote Asten, die still vor sich hin brennen, besonders lieb ....' (12: 8). However, in the same breath he cancels out the mood evoked by Reschke's beautiful assonance and alliteration by opening his next sentence with the adverb 'Jedenfalls' (12: 8). The narrator colours his account of events with his own needs and wants, preconceptions, expectations and commitments, and by his aversion to the very task he is undertaking. In this, as will be shown in the following chapter, the narrator's account of the fictitious events of *Unkenrufe* is no different from histories written in the real world.

A fourth element in *Unkenrufe* that seems to work against a positive outcome for German-Polish reconciliation is the significance that can be attributed to the site of Alexandra and Alexander's meeting. They meet between the market hall (Dominiksmarkthalle), which was erected on land that was once the site of a



Dominican Monastery, and the church of St Nicholas. Between ‘God and Mammon’, as Chloe Paver points out (‘Jesus’ 73). Moreover, the circumstance that the market hall is on the site once occupied by a religious building calls to mind the Bible scene in which Jesus casts the traders and money changers from the temple of Jerusalem. This connection is broadened further by the fact that an exchange kiosk has been set up in the ruins of an old tower nearby. The tower was called ‘Kiek in de Köck’ because in earlier times as you could see what was going on in the monastery’s kitchen from its vantage point. Now, it seems there is little oversight of what is going on in the church, or in the market place. When Jesus expelled the money changers from the temple it was with the words, ‘Heißt es nicht in der Schrift: Mein Haus soll ein Haus des Gebetes für *alle Völker* sein?’ (My emphasis). Already in *Unkenrufe* a picture of Poland is being presented in which, it seems, the traders from all nations *except* Poland can profit, as the Polish currency loses value against the American dollar by the hour.

Against this gloomy background the relationship between Alexandra and Alexander flourishes. Within hours of their meeting Alexander is in Alexandra’s kitchen where the mushrooms are prepared, cooked and consumed. Here the sympathetic reader may succumb to the irresistible lure of domesticity which Grass has always portrayed so well as a counterbalance to the world outside. However, as has always been the case, the domestic and private are not unrelated to the public and political. The narrator searches voyeuristically amongst the material Reschke sent him for information about what went on within Alexandra’s four walls. He says that he would like one of them to have referred to the ‘arousing’ aroma of the mushrooms as they are being prepared, but concedes: ‘Ich

kann bei Reschke nicht lesen, ob er oder sie den Ausdruck “erregender Geruch” gewagt hat’ (12: 29). From this one can assume that any erotic tension in the scene in Alexandra’s flat may be simply imagined by the narrator. But in revealing his deliberations in that regard the narrator succeeds nevertheless in imbuing the cooking of the mushrooms with erotic anticipation. The following evening Alexandra finds her way into Reschke’s single bed in the hotel in which he is staying. Reschke’s conquest, which began with his intervention while Alexandra was choosing the flowers for her parents’ grave, is now sealed. As he says to Alexandra, ‘Mich wirst du nicht mehr los’ (12: 68). Unlike his historical namesake, Alexander the Great, who sealed his conquest of the east by marrying into the conquered society, Grass’s Alexander *begins* his campaign in the east by entering into a relationship with the woman from the east. Of course, whether it is valid to see Alexander Reschke’s project as a ‘campaign’ in these terms depends very much on the perspective of the viewer. The numerous perspectives created in the novel highlight just how open different aspects of the relationship between Germany and Poland are to varying, contradictory interpretations.

The national differences between Alexander and Alexandra are more than compensated for by the many things they share. Grass emphasises the common historical heritage of Poles and Germans by giving his protagonists much in common, including their names, their professions, their stage of life (both divorced with adult children), and by having his narrator refer to them frequently with the almost identical terms *Witwe* and *Witwer*. The coincidence of Alexander and Alexandra’s names is discovered by the pair only after they have symbolically, for Grass’s fiction at least, sealed the fact that they will become

lovers by buying mushrooms together. Furthermore, they have left the 'frühmittägliche Gegenwart' (12: 26) by creeping through a hole in the fence into a cemetery.

While matching names are common in the libretti of opera and operetta, they are rare in serious literature, and therefore attract the reader's attention. Reich-Ranicki, apparently taking his cue from the *Unkenrufe* narrator's snide remark that matching names are at best suitable for 'ein Singspiel nach berühmten Vorbild' and are 'geeignet für Märchenfiguren' (12: 19), is disparaging when he mentions Papageno and Papagena in his cutting review of *Unkenrufe*, but he may have been closer to the reality of the work than he intended. The *Singspiel*, a form of drama in the German vernacular consisting of spoken dialogue broken by interpolated songs, has a very strong tradition in German music, ranging from its probable origins in the morality plays of the Middle Ages right through to its highest manifestation in Mozart's *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (Wilpert 569).

A feature of many *Singspiele* is the use of allegorical names, and when names are doubled, as with Papageno and Papagena in Mozart's *Zauberflöte*, this too serves an allegorical function. Mozart's first *Singspiel*, *Bastien and Bastienne*, as the title says, also features a couple with matching names.<sup>81</sup> The use of the vernacular and relatively simple themes made the art form more widely accessible than 'Grand

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<sup>81</sup> Interestingly, this piece (K50), which was based on Favert's parody of Rousseau's *Devin du village*, and is also referred to variously as a *Liederspiel* and as an operetta, was first performed in a private theatre belonging to the Austrian physician Mesmer, the discoverer of animal magnetism – that force to which Alexander and Alexandra seem to succumb (*Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians* 818).

Opera' and 'some of the greatest composers have not disdained to write in this form' (Scholes 961). Even the theme of Alexander and Alexandra's autumn love affair finds its precedent in *Singspiel*, namely in Hayden's *Philemon and Baucis*. Thus, although Grass's choice of the matching names may appear to have an element of *Kitsch*, this *Kitsch* is most definitely a means to an end. As a key convention of this type of romance its ironical invocation of the *Singspiel* tradition draws attention to the mythical, fairy-tale aspects of Alexander and Alexandra's relationship. This, in turn is subjected to the narrator's sceptical assessment.

As the narrator reconstructs their first conversation from Reschke's written recollection of it, he believes he discerns a well-established pattern – the pattern that forms the basis of operatic duets: 'Gut eingespielt, wie seit langem einander vertraut, stritt das Paar. In jeder Oper hätten sie ihr Duett singen können' (12: 12). Several pages later the narrator again uses a comparison with musical tradition when Alexander and Alexandra discover the harmony, or 'Gleichklang' of their names (12: 19).

The narrator's use of the word 'Gleichklang' for their homophonous names echoes his use of the same musical term to describe the colour of the asters that Alexandra and Alexander were drawing from the market woman's buckets: 'Dieser farblicher Gleichklang hat ihn närrisch gemacht' (12: 8). Musical references abound in the text and deserve more attention than I can give them here. At this stage of the work they serve two related functions. They are used by the narrator as a means of making the couple's burgeoning relationship seem trite and boring in its reproducibility and adherence to well established norms. On the

other hand the introduction of a conventional narrative pattern that relates to romantic love sets up expectations about the course this love story might take. Will it be a tragic love story, or will it be a comic one with a happy ending? Either way, in this convention true love follows a path that rarely ‘runs smooth’. The hero and heroine of fairy tale and operetta are inevitably faced with challenges that must be met before they can ‘live happily ever after.’

For Alexander and Alexandra the challenge lies in the reconciliation of their stereotypically portrayed national differences. In the context of the narrator’s juxtaposition of fairy tale, romance and *Singspiel*, it is interesting to note that Grass has subtitled his work, *Eine Erzählung*. According to Wilpert the *Erzählung* is a genre that distinguishes itself from the saga and the fairy tale ‘durch Vermeidung des Unwirklichen’ (569). So there is tension between Grass’s genre designation and aspects of the work’s content.<sup>82</sup> Similarly, Mozart’s *Entführung* and *Zauberflöte* are subtitled *Singspiele* on the title pages of the original librettos, yet musicologists assert that they are on ‘too high an emotional plane’, or bear ‘pathetic elements’ and therefore should not be classified as such.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> It is not unusual for Germanists to dispute the validity of genre designations with which Grass subtitled his prose works. Armin Ayren remarks that *Unkenrufe* is actually a *Roman*, not an *Erzählung* as its subtitle states and that the genre description *Novelle* with which Grass subtitled *Katz und Maus* was also a contradiction of the genre with which he would have normally associated the work. Heinrich Vormweg, on the other hand, finds that the subtitle of the work, *Eine Erzählung*, is modest and appropriate.

<sup>83</sup> Wilpert, for example, describes *Die Entführung* as the highest manifestation of the *Singspiel* form, but asserts that *Die Zauberflöte* cannot be described as such because of its ‘pathetic elements’ (569). On the other hand, *Grove’s Dictionary of Music and Musicians* describes both *Die Entführung* and *Die Zauberflöte* as being on ‘too high an emotional plane’ to be classed as *Singspiel* (818). Scholes notes that *Die Entführung* is designated a ‘Singspiel’ on the title page (961).

## **‘TOTE UNGEZÄHLT’: FLUCHT UND VERTREIBUNG**

While Alexander and Alexandra's relationship may be the stuff of romantic comedy, the background from which each of them comes, and which provides the customers for their venture, is one of the most awful 'peacetime' tragedies of the century. When *Im Krebsgang* appeared in early 2002, both the author and some commentators seemed to see the work as a taboo breaker as far as writing about the German victims of *Flucht und Vertreibung* is concerned. This is also the way the work was viewed in the English press (Hooper). However, as early as 1992 Herman Beyersdorf showed that there are in fact a good number of literary works which treat the theme of *Vertreibung*. He suggests, however, that a taboo does exist in another related area, for despite the relatively large volume of literary works which concern themselves with the topic, it has been relatively neglected by scholars. He attributes the 'ablehnende Haltung der Germanistik diesem Thema gegenüber' and its status as a 'nicht-Thema' in part to the problematic role played by the Expellee Associations ('den Osten verloren' 47). Reactions to *Im Krebsgang* were typically polarized, and included Grass's being aligned with the revisionists, as if he had never written about the suffering of the German victims before. Even in the English press the suspicion was raised that Grass may be siding with the Right. In *The Guardian* John Hooper expressed the concern that *Im Krebsgang* may be symptomatic of a change in German attitudes which would be a cause of deep concern for the rest of Europe. On the 25th March 2002 *Der Spiegel* began the series: 'Flucht und Vertreibung der Deutschen aus dem Osten'. The title page of the weekly's 'neue Blick auf die Vergangenheit' (6) is an emotive appeal to the reader with its depiction of refugees on foot and in horse-

drawn wagons making the trek across a seemingly endless white wasteland. The photo could be an illustration of a brief passage in *Unkenrufe*:

Erika von Denkwitz, die mir auf kein Foto vorliegt, war fünf Jahre alt, als sich ihre Mutter mit ihr und drei Geschwistern sowie dem Gutsverwalter und dessen Frau von Stuhm aus mit zwei vollgepackten Pferdewagen auf die Flucht in Richtung Westen machte. Zwei der Geschwister und die Frau des Gutsverwalters starben unterwegs. Nur ein Pferdewagen hielt durch (12: 118).

The first part of the emotive *Spiegel* series is sandwiched between two thoughtful articles. In the first, ‘Die Deutschen als Opfer’, Hans-Joachim Noack clearly spells out that the suffering of the 14 million East Prussians, Pommeranians and Silesians who were driven from their homelands came as a result of Hitler’s *Vernichtungskrieg* (36-39).<sup>84</sup> He also points out that only one in four of the 50 million people who were forced to leave their homes in various parts of Europe between 1939 and 1947 were German. The pictures of the victims of ethnic cleansings in the Balkans, he contends, provided a stimulus for the German Left in particular to engage with this neglected aspect of Germany’s history. In Noack’s opinion good neighbourly relations in Europe will be served by people telling their stories of this terrible time. The sons and daughters of the expellees, he says, ‘will nicht “aufarbeiten” oder das Unabänderliche gar in Frage stellen, sondern wissen, was war’ (39).

The second article which serves to further contextualize the sensitive issue of German victims is an interview with the historian Hans-Ulrich Wehler entitled

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<sup>84</sup> Other sources, Ziemer, for example, estimate the number of Germans who were driven from the eastern provinces at 15 million.

‘Die Debatte wirkt befreiend’ (61-64). Here Wehler and *Spiegel* editors Dietmar Pieper and Klaus Wiegrefe reinforce the underlying message of the main article, namely that the appalling things that happened to the Germans in the east happened because ‘Adolf Hitler und seine skrupellosen Kriegsherren und Gauleiter noch immer vom Endsieg schwadronierten’ (41). Wehler notes that the tragedy struck ‘Millionen von Menschen, die ganz überwiegend weder den Zweiten Weltkrieg verursacht hatten noch an den Verbrechen der Nazis teilgenommen hatten’ (61). He also comments that Hitler saw that public outrage over the Armenian genocide was not maintained, and that encouraged him to commit similar crimes. He is reported as having said, ‘Wer redet heute noch von der Vernichtung der Armenier?’ (64). While welcoming the ‘befreiende’ effect of speaking openly about ‘Flucht und Vertreibung’, especially amongst the surviving victims who have had to suffer in virtual silence for so long, Wehler is cautious about what the outcome of speaking more freely about the crimes perpetrated on the Germans might be, suggesting that in the course of EU expansion a horror scenario might develop, with people asking: ‘Warum soll man mit den Kindern dieser Täter in einer Union zusammen leben?’ (62).

It is clear in *Unkenrufe* that these questions were on Grass’s mind more than a decade earlier. He is very conscious, and always has been, that the suffering of his own countrymen and women, and even that of the innocent children such as evoked in *Die Blechtrommel* with the *Kleinkindertransport* and the merry-go-round scene, and the plight of the five-year-old Erika Denkwitz who ‘verlor ihre Puppen’ on the trek to the west (12: 118) in *Unkenrufe*, must be seen in relation to Germany’s initiation of the atrocities. At the very beginning of *Unkenrufe*, the



fictional Reschke also makes it clear that the 'Recht auf Heimkehr' that he claims for the expellees is a different thing altogether from the 'Recht auf Heimat' demanded by the refugee organizations (12: 33). Grass has criticized conservative politicians like Strauß and Barzel in the past, for their cheap vote-buying by means of giving the *Heimatvertriebenen* hope that the lost provinces could be regained.

Zu Beginn steht ein Verbrechen: der vom nationalsozialistischem Deutschland vorbereitete Überfall auf Polen. [...] Die Bilanz ist bekannt: Am Ende des Zweiten Weltkrieges war ein Fünftel der polnischen Bevölkerung ermordet, gingen die polnischen Ostprovinzen in sowjetrussischen Besitz über, wurden neun Millionen Deutsche aus ihrer Heimat vertrieben, hatte Unrecht Unrecht zur Folge, mußte die Deutschen für Hitler zahlen, auch wenn viele nicht begreifen wollten, wie teuer uns Hitler zu stehen gekommen ist ('Verlorene Provinzen – gewonnene Einsicht' 15: 77).

The same standpoint is clear in his early fiction too. Beyersdorf observes, 'Der in der *Blechtrommel* klar zu erkennende Standpunkt verbindet Sehnsucht nach und Trauer um die verlorene Heimat mit einer gleichzeitigen Ablehnung, ja Verurteilung jeglicher revanschistischer Positionen' (52). In *Unkenrufe* Grass returns to this very theme, the theme of *Unrecht* as a consequence of *Unrecht*. Yet, perhaps because of the way it is presented, as the background to the bizarre *Kopfgeburt* of two people past their prime, or because the hard words are spoken by a strange old woman, the theme of the plight of German victims does not seem to have raised an eyebrow anywhere – in strong contrast to Grass's treatment of the same theme in *Im Krebsgang*.

While visiting the cemetery to lay flowers on the graves of Alexandra's parents, Alexander and Alexandra discover that they are both the children of expellees, those victims of the Allies' agreements at Yalta and Potsdam which ratified

‘population transfers’ from Silesia, Pomerania, East Prussia, Eastern Poland and Sudetenland, as they shared out the conquered territory, in contravention of the Atlantic Charter of 14 August 1941, which stated that ‘The Alliance desires to see no territorial changes that do not accord with the freely expressed wishes of the peoples concerned’ (Qtd. in de Zayas 77-78). In Churchill’s words, Poland was to be ‘moved bodily 150 miles to the west, like a company of soldiers taking ‘two steps to the left, close ranks’ (Qtd in Davies 489). With apparently no concern for the untold human cost of being uprooted after hundreds of years, Churchill said before Parliament on the 15th of December, 1944: ‘Expulsion is the method which, so far as we have been able to see, will be the most satisfactory and lasting’ (Qtd. in de Zayas, 1993 79-80). Mass deportation of civilian populations had been one of Hitler’s methods of Germanizing occupied territories in keeping with his policy of establishing ‘a new order of ethnographic conditions’ (Wachenheim, Qtd. in de Zayas, 27). At the Nuremberg trials mass deportation was defined as a crime against humanity and a war crime, yet even while the trials were in progress the very same powers whose prosecutors and judges were condemning the mass deportations practised by the Nazis decreed or at least sanctioned millions of Germans being submitted to the same fate (de Zayas 31).

The German census of 1946 found that 9.7 million Germans had been moved out of the disputed territories of Sudetenland and the German provinces east of the Oder-Neisse rivers. Then, between 1946 and 1950, a further 12 million Germans were expelled from the eastern German provinces and the eastern European settlements. Of these it is estimated that 1.6 to 2 million starved, were killed or died on route (Kurthen 73). These figures do not take into account those Poles,

represented in the text by Alexandra, who were expelled from the areas to the east of Poland which were occupied by Russia. If they had not already fled, the Poles who had lived in these areas became part of the westward moving ‘tidal wave of assorted human flotsam – exhausted German soldiers separated from their units, stranded partisans who wished to submit neither to the Germans nor to the Soviets, deserters, camp-followers of both sexes, escaped prisoners and criminals living off the land, and civilian refugees who did not know which way to turn’ (Davies 467).

As the numerous reports gathered and quoted by de Zayas testify, the forced expulsions followed closely after the panic-stricken flight of German civilians from the advancing Russian army whose atrocities against Germans irrespective of age or gender knew no bounds. In the largest mass migration the world has ever seen the expellees struggled across the devastated European landscape in goods trains, horse-drawn wagons, and on foot. They were driven away from farms and villages and preyed upon by marauding bands; they were robbed, raped and beaten by Russians, by Poles, and by bandits. They had no safe place to hide. As Grass says of his own grandfather, by the time he arrived in the west he had been robbed of everything but his underpants (Sandmeyer, Schönfeld and Hinz). The millions who perished from cold, hunger, exhaustion and disease were buried in nameless, makeshift graves or left lying by the roadside. Grass situates Alexandra and Alexander’s parents in this landscape of human suffering, with Alexandra’s parents amongst those expelled from Vilnius (the present day capital of

Lithuania<sup>85</sup>), and Alexander's from Danzig.<sup>86</sup> Alexander and Alexandra's clients are drawn from a gradually vanishing generation of people who suffered great trauma.

The fate of these people is not comparable with economic refugees from Asia as Mark Cory suggests when he says: 'The 1,000,000,000 living souls [Chatterjee] represents put the several hundred thousand [sic] displaced and deceased Germans in perspective' (184). For the surviving German expellees the grief and homesickness that they suffered, having lost loved ones, their homes, their possessions and their livelihoods, was compounded by the fact that they were met with hostility when, after all the trials of the journey, they finally arrived in the west. They were unwanted outsiders whom the post-war authorities herded into inadequate barracks or compulsorily billeted with people who themselves had barely enough to survive upon from day to day, and who resented the imposition of the outsiders. The shortage of housing after the ravages of the war was acute, and basic infrastructure had broken down or been destroyed in many places. Unemployment was a major problem because of the destruction of German industry, not only due to bombing, but also as a result of the politics of Potsdam

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<sup>85</sup> Known since the 10<sup>th</sup> century, Vilnius became the capital of Lithuania in 1323, but has since been subjected to Polish and Russian territorial claims. It was the centre of European Jewry in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

<sup>86</sup> A number of reviewers seemed confused about which people were to be returned to which country to be buried/reburied. For example, John Banville writes that Alexandra and Alexander 'set up a cemetery to which expatriate Poles can return to be buried in their native soil.' According to Philip Brady, Alexander and Alexandra 'both [have] roots in Gdansk'. Two reviewers (Fein and Mitgang) extended Alexandra and Alexander's scheme to include the reburial of Lithuanians, a national grouping which Grass has neglected totally in this work, not even including the Lithuanians along with the Latvians and Estonians in Reschke's list of peoples who have been forced to flee their homelands in this century of expulsions (12: 32).

(de Zayas 124-126). As late as February 1949 a Bavarian Red Cross report documents the appalling privation and misery of the expellees living in barracks with water coming through the walls, no facilities to isolate tuberculosis sufferers, two to three families sharing a room two metres square, two or three people to a bed, the few clothes they still possess worse than inadequate, no linen, no shoes, and, after four years of camp life no immediate prospect for improvement (de Zayas, 124-126). It is not surprising that the exiled people from the east dreamed constantly of going home, and that this dream became integral to their political consciousness, even after their conditions began to normalize following the injection of funds into Germany through the Marshall Plan, and the implementation of the Equalization of Burdens Law of September the 14th 1952.

In the 'rush to German unity' in 1989/90 the expellee and refugee organizations, or *Landsmannschaften*, still had sufficient political influence to delay the recognition of the Oder-Neisse border with Poland by the Kohl conservative government (Jarausch, *Rush* 124). This is not surprising, seeing as nearly 20% of the population of reunified Germany are either expellees or their descendents (de Zayas 1). In *Unkenrufe* Reschke's involvement with *Landsmannschaften* is one of the matters which casts doubt on his credibility as an agent for reconciliation. In a letter to Alexandra, Reschke even says that the editor of his 'sonst obskuren Heimatblatt', 'immer noch meint, man könne die Geschichte rückläufig betreiben' (12: 81). He could not but be aware that these organizations have been striving since May 1945 for the return of Germany's lost eastern territories, territories to which, Reschke says, echoing Grass, the Germans have forfeited their rights. In the end it is the influence of the *Landsmannschaften* in the Reconciliation

Cemeteries Association which indirectly drives the Association in a direction not visualised by its founders. It is important to note, however, that the driving force does not come from the people who were the actual victims of the expulsions, and who suffered so much. It comes from the next generation, from people who have never known the lost *Heimat*, like the young woman of ‘sprachlos deutscher Herkunft’ (12: 205). Alexander and Alexandra know well that time is of the essence, because those who will make their venture a financial success, that is to say, those who lived in the lost areas and will want to be buried there, are dying out. As Alexandra says, ‘Und Zeit läuft weg, wenn wir nicht bald machen Tempo...’ (12: 85).

It is still Grass’s frequently expressed contention that Germany must accept the loss of territory to Poland because of the horrendous crimes committed by Germany on this land and its people. As he explains to Françoise Giroud:

Es gibt die Fakten, die habe ich sehr früh einsehen müssen nach dem Krieg. Er wurde von den Deutschen begonnen und verloren, durch den Hitler-Stalin Pakt wurde Ostpolen an die Sowjetunion ausgeliefert, entsprechend ist der Anspruch der Polen auf einen Gebietsausgleich, auf ehemalige deutsche Provinzen berechtigt. Ich unterschreibe nicht den polnisch-chauvenistischen Standpunkt, das seien immer polnische Gebiete gewesen. Den halte ich für aberwitzig, da müßte man bei der Völkerwanderung wieder anfangen (Grass and Giroud 78).

This statement is a reference to the fact that although the regions east of the Oder had been occupied by Germans for 700 or so years, they were originally Polish. Yet he sees neither the 700 years of German settlement, nor the claim of Polish settlement prior to that as a justification for either party to lay claim to the areas today. Grass’s view that the existing Oder-Neisse border should be maintained is

based on a concept of justice that discounts 'historical' claims to the areas based on prior occupation. This goes against beliefs held on both sides of the border. Grass has often enough criticized the attitudes of his countrymen, and urged them to learn from their losses, rather than try to 'make history go backwards' (12: 81), for reconciliation and good neighbourly relations can never be achieved if this course is pursued. But for reconciliation to take place, it is necessary for both parties to acknowledge their *Unrecht*, not just one.

Since the 'irreversible caesura' brought about by the leftist intellectuals' critical revision of German history in the 1960s, described in Chapter 2 above, the Federal Republic has occupied itself intensively with its shameful past. The burden of German guilt has remained a powerful element of the nation's central political narrative of its past, despite the resurgence of German nationalism, Neo-Nazism, anti-foreign violence, and the desire to leave the Nazi past behind (Herf 372).

Martin Altmeyer suggests that now that the Germans have done their 'Erinnerungsarbeit' they should be free to show their own wounds. He observes that history is never unambiguous, and although it frequently combines guilt with innocence, and perpetrators with victims, there is no ambiguity as far as action and reaction, before and after, and cause and effect are concerned. He urges the Left not to shrink back from allowing Germany to show its own wounds, for it is not the Left's preserve, but that of the Right to hide the ambivalence of history, and shut out the things that do not fit the picture.

'Die Ambivalenz der Wahrheit zeigen' is one of the things Grass tries to achieve in his fiction. In *Unkenrufe* (as in the two dramatic pieces which Grass uses as

examples of this practice, *Die Plebejer proben den Aufstand* and *Davor*) the positions are constantly changing, so that one must ask again and again, ‘Wer ist hier im Recht? Wer ist der eigentliche Motor dieses Geschehens?’ (‘Die Ambivalenz der Wahrheit zeigen’ WA 1987 X: 188). The reader must of *Unkenrufe* is forced by the narrator’s ambivalence to the matters he is recounting to ask these questions again and again. In relation to the German victims of Nazism, the very posing of these questions by a writer like Grass surely presupposes a certain maturity on the part of readers, a maturity in their attitude to the present that has grown out of their ‘Erinnerungsarbeit’ and their appropriate working through of Germany’s past.

It is not only in Germany that such mature attitudes need to be brought to bear in order for reconciliation between Germany and Poland to occur. In *Unkenrufe* Polish attitudes, too, come in for criticism. In his predominantly linguistic analysis of *Unkenrufe* Eroms comments that: ‘Die “Froschperspektive” der Erna Brakup erlaubt auch eine ungebremsste Kommentierung des Weltgeschehens’ (39). He goes on to note that this commentary even includes ‘Kritik an den polnischen Verhaltensweisen, was [Grass] sonst aufs peinlichste vermeidet’ (39).<sup>87</sup> Whereas the reader is never sure whether Reschke and the narrator are telling the truth, and their motives remain largely ambiguous, with Erna there is never any doubt. ‘Ihre

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<sup>87</sup> It is not quite true that Grass never criticizes Polish behaviour. He is, in fact, very critical of ‘polnische Nationalisten, denen ihr Polentum zum gottgefälligen Mysterium mißrät’. He is also critical of the suppression of historical facts in order to promote view the former German provinces are Polish territory that has been regained. However, such comments are always within the context of ‘deutscher Anmaßung und Menschenverachtung, in der Unbedenklichkeit deutschen Gehorsams’ (‘Scham und Schande’ 16: 217-220).



Existenz erinnerte die Polen an Unrecht, das nicht, wie sonst üblich, den Russen zugeschoben werden konnte' (12:181) writes the narrator. We can see that the narrator is aware that Erna is breaking a taboo, for he uses the term 'Ausplaudern' when refers to her telling the members of the Reconciliation Cemeteries Association, "wie ählendich war nachem Kriech hiä jewesen"" (12: 181), and 'die Pollakens, die uns ham durchjemengelt, bis nuscht nech jeblieben is' (12: 109).

Erna is a ninety-year-old 'übriggebliebene Frau' (12: 157), a living remnant of the world of Grass's, Reschke's and the narrator's youth, one of those who remained behind and managed to eke out a meagre existence on the fringe of the new Polish society in Gdańsk by denying her German heritage. Hitler's war took her husband, her children, and her Jewish doctor.<sup>88</sup> Then the inevitable Polish reaction to German barbarism took her home and her livelihood, broke down social relationships and outlawed her mother tongue. Her dialect, which Grass reproduces in *Unkenrufe*, is one aspect of the world which he has lost and for which he grieves. Grass believes that the loss of regional dialects is an enormous loss for the German language as a whole and he justifies his use of dialect in his works thus:

Und so spielt in meinen Büchern das Konservieren und Weiterentwickeln einer Mundart, des Plattdeutschen dieser Region, eine Rolle. Diese Mundart wird nicht mehr gesprochen. Sie ist tot. Ich kann damit umgehen wie mit Latein. Aber sie spielt in der Literatur eine Rolle und setzt den Verlust voraus (Grass and Giroud 135).

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<sup>88</sup> This is Dr Citron. He also belongs to the personel of the *Danziger Trilogie*: 'Als Tulla geboren wurde, hatte Dr Citron seine Praxis noch in Langfuhr; später mußte er nach Schweden fliehen' (*Hundejahre*, 5: 147).

To deprive people of their native tongue is a commonly used punitive measure for the subjugation of peoples. So a lost language is a sign of very deep estrangement from one's roots. A sign of Poland's willingness to move towards reconciliation with Germany was the granting of minority right and the lifting of the prohibition on speaking German in the early nineties in response overtures from the Kohl government. At that time it was trying to stem the flow of German resettlers from the former eastern provinces by introducing measures to make life more attractive for ethnic Germans where they were living abroad (Kurthen 76).

Erna provides a strong contrast to the politically correct, yet hypocritical pronouncements of some of the Cemeteries Association board members, and to Reschke's and the narrator's equivocations. She describes things as she sees them without any deference to sensibilities. Yet neither the members of the board in the fiction, nor, as mentioned above, the critics in the press seem to have taken umbrage at these statements the way they have at Grass's treatment of the refugees in *Im Krebsgang*. Perhaps this is because there are many things happening in the book that distract attention from what the book is really about. Perhaps it is because Erna's statements are in dialect, that they are not taken seriously. Reich-Ranicki, for instance, dismisses Erna as 'die komische Alte' of classical operetta, completely ignoring the fact that even in comic operetta it is the 'fool' who speaks the truth. Another reason why Erna's provocative statements may have gone unnoticed may lie in the fact that the suffering she describes is rarely an exclusively German experience. It is always set in the context of war in general, and with the Gulf War in particular. The same is true of Reschke's description of the plight of refugees and expellees. The refugees and expellees from the east are

part of a vast global tide that he groups together under the heading of ‘Das Jahrhundert der Vertreibungen’ (12: 32), listing the many peoples who have suffered this fate:

Da blieben viele auf der Strecke, Tote ungezählt. Typhus,  
Hunger, die Kälte. Millionen. Niemand weiß, wo sie liegen.  
Verscharrt am Straßenrand. Einzel- und Massengräber. Oder nur  
Asche blieb (12: 32).

Erna sees in the Gulf War a continuation of the factors which lead to all wars. ‘So isses schon emmer jewest. Wenn de Härren da oben nuscht nech mä wissen, denn machen se Kriech’ (12: 157). This grieves her and she asks: ‘Is denn noch emmer nech kain Äbarmen?’ (12: 157). A timeless desperate cry in the face of injustice which has been heard so often down through the centuries, reminiscent of the words of Klaj three hundred years earlier:

Ist denn kein Erbarmen?  
Ist kein Recht mehr in der Welt?  
(Johann Klaj, From *Leidenden Christus*, in Forster, ed. 135)

Because Erna takes everything at face value, her first reaction is to welcome the Reconciliation Cemeteries. The political reforms in Poland and the founding of the cemeteries had allowed her to revive her hidden German heritage, but it is a heritage based on quite different values from those of the ‘new Germans’ (12: 214). It has none of the ‘Danziger Hanseatendünkel’ (12: 181) of Frau Dettlaff and the other ‘Berufsvertriebene’ (12: 91), who make a profit out of having been refugees, and turn their noses up at their countrymen who remained in the east, a

phenomenon in German-German relations that has long grieved Grass.<sup>89</sup> In ‘Kleckerburg’, for example, Grass expresses his despair at the attitudes he encountered at meetings of refugees: ‘[...] hatten sie / vergessen, wie die Ostsee macht, / und ließen den Atlantik röhren’ (1: 198). Dettlaff, Vielbrand and Karau are very different to the tough little old lady who uses her position as speaker for the German minority in Danzig to arrange for them to obtain some small comforts which they have been denied for so long: simple things like German mail order catalogues and song books.

Slowly Erna comes to understand that the activities of Alexander and Alexandra’s organization do not contribute to real reconciliation at all. She says:

Da ist kaine Jerechtichkait drin. Nuä wennde raich bist ond deitsch, kriegste Umbättung jeliefert. Ond der Pole macht noch Jeschäft draus. Abä wennde deitsch bist ond armer Schlucker, kannst liejen blaiben mid daine Jebeine, wo se diä ainjebuddelt ham, damalich inne schlimme Zeit, als och kaine Jerechtichkait war (12: 189).

For her the whole thing becomes a perpetuation of the injustices of war: ‘Aber was wird gemacht nu, da ist keine Menschlichkait drin. Das geht über Mensch weg, wie war schon oft. Vorm Krieg im Krieg und nachem Krieg. Das weiß ich, weil ich bin dagewesen’ (12: 189). When Erna sees through the rhetoric and recognises the real agenda of the Cemetery Association, she vehemently renounces any association with it by declaring that she no longer wants to be a German, so bitter is the betrayal of her values by the association: ‘Abä nu willech nich sain deitsch,

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<sup>89</sup> Cf. ‘Rede vom Verlust. Über den Niedergang der politischen Kultur im geeinten Deutschland’ 16: 360-379; and *Gunter Grass. Martin Walser*.

liebä eine Pollacksche, wo ech katholisch bin sowieso. Ond alles fier Penunzen. Nai! Jejen son Jeld väkoof ech miä nech. Ond ausse Aufsicht tret ech zurick glaich. Pfui Daibel!’ (12: 179). Erna discovers after almost half a century, that to be German does not mean the same as she thought it did. In this crisis which challenges the identity she has secretly maintained against all odds, it is with the Poles, her one-time oppressors, that she wishes to be buried when she dies. This is the moment of reconciliation.

The view of Poland in *Unkenrufe* is not confined, however, to the misery of Erna’s post-war existence, nor her eleventh-hour reconciliation. The ‘Ambivalenz der Wahrheit’ in relation to Poland also comes through in Grass’s gently ironic portrayal of the Poles’ fondness for heroes and a heroic past, a pageant of myth, legend and history stretching back to the great tribal migrations of the first centuries of the Christian era. Poland’s borders, like those of the German lands, once encompassed a great empire, only to contract again with the country’s changing fortunes. In the course of its chequered history Poland has had several ‘saviours’, who contribute to the sense of Polish identity as experienced by Alexandra. The narrator’s cynical attitude towards Alexandra’s belief in Poland’s saviours seems to echo Grass’s view: ‘Die Polen neigen dazu, ihr überfülltes Reservoir an Heiligen und Märtyren ständig aufzustocken, wobei sie ihre in der Tat leidvolle Geschichte wie einen Theaterfundus plündern’ (‘Chodowiecki zum Beispiel’ 16: 313).

The first of these ‘saviours’, portrayed in *Unkenrufe* is the Black Madonna of Tschenstochau (Matka Boska Czestochowska). She is a familiar figure from

Grass's earlier writing, especially *Katz und Maus*, in which she is pictured on the medal Mahlke retrieves from the wreck, and which subsequently symbolizes not only his Maria cult, but also his covert allegiance to Poland,<sup>90</sup> for she functions as a symbol of the alliance of Church and State in Poland. There is a legend that Maria came to the aid of the defenders when the monastery in which the painting of her is housed was besieged by the Swedish army in 1655, as well as on other occasions. The Black Madonna is reputed to resemble the Polish queen Richeza who, with her husband Miecislav, began the conversion of Poland to Christianity (Ryan, *Uncompleted Past* 99). In *Unkenrufe* her programmatic importance can be seen by Grass's placement of references to her both at the beginning and at the end of the work. She is equated by Chatterjee with nationalistic, conservative, religious Polishness: 'Sogar die Polen, die nichts als Polen, immer nur Polen sein wollen, werden lernen müssen, daß es neben der Schwarzen Madonna von Tschenschow Platz genug gibt für eine weitere schwarze Gottheit' (12: 40-41). In the futuristic fantasy of one of the book's alternative endings Reschke describes a new altar in St Trinitatis, shared by a Black Madonna and Kali, the black Hindu goddess. Furthermore, Reschke thinks he recognises the Black Madonna on a medal on Erna Brakup's rosary before she is buried in a Polish cemetery.

The second aspect of Polish national consciousness that we see in Alexandra is the idealization of Polish heroes. The narrator notes that she often refers to the Battle of Liegnitz at which 'ein Herzog aus rühmreichem Piastengeschlecht' lost his life

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<sup>90</sup> For this little understood aspect of Mahlke's motivation, see Ryan, 'Resistance and Resignation', esp 154-55.

while repelling the invading Mongols; she also speaks with admiration of the Polish king, Jan Sobieski's routing of the Turks at Vienna.<sup>91</sup> The narrator's criticism of her attitude is clear from his ironic commentary on these battles. The first he describes as 'die erste Rettung des Abendlandes durch polnischen Heldenmut' (12:236). Of the second he says, 'Abermals konnte das Abendland aufatmen' (12: 236). One assumes that it is Alexandra's anachronistic attachment to these long-gone heroes that leads her to equate Chatterjee and his countrymen with the Turks who once threatened Poland. She says: 'Werden wir klein kriegen, wie wir Polen haben Türken vor Wien besiegt' (12: 138). However, it is one of the ironies of history that Sobieski's heroic campaign against the Turks ultimately accelerated Poland's downfall, for once he had relieved Austria-Hungary of the troublesome invaders that empire was able to turn around and attack Poland. Whereas in Grass's tale the 'Turk' Chatterjee stays and makes a substantial contribution to the financial recovery of Poland and to the environmental rescue of the rest of Europe, in history the expulsion of the Turks led eventually to the reduction and then the partition of Poland so that it twice disappeared from the map completely (at the hands of Prussia, Austria and Russia). It was during the first such partition that the Polish national anthem 'Jeszcze Polska nie zginęła' ('Polen ist noch nicht verloren' or 'Poland has not yet succumbed') was first sung, and the Polish Catholic Church came to assume its great significance as the bearer of Polish national aspirations (Misztal 75-77).

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<sup>91</sup> Jan III (Sobieski) reigned 1674-96. See Davies 303.

Early this century a third 'saviour' of Poland appeared in the person of Marshall Józef Piłsudski. Like the fictional Alexandra, he was born in Vilnius. His daring and unconventional exploits fighting for Polish freedom from Russia earned him five years in penal exile in eastern Siberia, and incarceration in a mental hospital in St Petersburg. For his refusal to swear an oath to the German emperor he spent over a year in Magdeburg Castle before becoming Polish Chief of State in November 1918. However, he too was something of a mixed blessing for the Poles, because once he had freed Poland from Russian oppression he became the oppressor himself, assuming dictatorial powers. The personal attributes and skills which had seen him become a hero did not equip him well for participation in day-to-day politics. 'He possessed all the political vices in full measure: he was wayward, reckless, rude, vindictive, childish, taciturn and unpredictable' (Davies 55).

The next in the line of Polish heroes is Lech Wałęsa. There are remarkable parallels between Wałęsa and Piłsudski, for both were instrumental in freeing Poles from oppression, and both of their careers subsequently followed a similar path. Wałęsa, however, earns Alexandra's contempt, and she compares him unfavourably with Piłsudski: 'War mal gut für Streik von Arbeiter. Will nun kleiner Marszałek Piłsudski sein' (12: 142). Alexandra's attitude to the two heroes shows very well how we pick and choose which aspects of a person we will admire, and which we will ignore. Wałęsa, like Piłsudski, was a devoted and daring fighter for a political cause. An electrician in the Lenin shipyards in Gdańsk, he became a union activist after experiencing the 1970 food riots during which the police killed a number of protesters. In 1980 when new protests over



food prices erupted he climbed over the shipyard fence to join the protesters outside, quickly becoming a highly effective union leader, and eventually leader of the federation of unions, *Solidarity*. In this position he gained considerable concessions for Polish workers, but then the Polish communist government reneged on its agreements with the unions and Wałęsa was imprisoned in 1981 for almost a year. His situation was still so tenuous in 1983 that he did not dare leave Poland to accept the Nobel Peace Prize in person for fear he would not be allowed to return. However, when his fortunes were reversed with the collapse of Communism in Poland and he was elected as president in 1990, he followed a pattern of behaviour similar to that exhibited by Pilsudski. His 'plain speech, his confrontational style' and his refusal to relax strict new anti-abortion laws soon eroded his popularity, and in 1995 he lost the election ('Łech Wałęsa').

It seems as if Grass may have recognised these tendencies very early in Wałęsa, for in *Unkenrufe*, without actually naming him, Grass makes Wałęsa the target of several of the narrator's satirical comments without making provision for a contrary view to be put forward. He is described, for example, as the 'in Gdańsk ansässigen Arbeiterführer, der sich, wie viele Kleinwüchsige, berufen sah, Großes zu tun' (12: 131). A certain arrogance is suggested in *Unkenrufe* when his fictional equivalent expresses the desire to have the Lenin shipyards renamed after himself, and when Alexandra says: 'Nun will Elektriker König von Polen sein' (12: 170).<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Wałęsa was to earn further criticism from Grass for his behaviour in relation to the memorial ceremony at Auschwitz in 1995. In 'Willy Brand im Warschauer Ghetto' (16: 422-424) he is not

Over a year after the publication of *Unkenrufe*, *Der Spiegel* painted a similar portrait in a small article entitled 'Polen: Auf Samtpfoten in die Diktatur'.

Nostalgia for the past on Alexandra's side of the Oder-Neisse line – 'überall Märtyrer und Denkmäler von Märtyrer (12: 17)<sup>93</sup> – is equally prevalent on Alexander's side, and in neither case is it conducive to reconciliation. As noted above it is strong enough to wield considerable political influence. The strength of opposition to a reconciliatory attitude towards Poland, such as is espoused by Grass, is evident in the reluctance of the Kohl government to commit itself to abandoning claims to former German territories,<sup>94</sup> and more recently in the Bavarian conservative leader, Edmund Stoiber's demand that the Czech Republic should not be admitted to the European Union unless it guarantees the right of return to the Sudetenland expellees. In 1970, when Chancellor Willy Brandt signed a provisional agreement recognising the Oder-Neisse border, the Federal Republic did not have a common border with Poland. At the time it was a singular, extremely significant gesture, but it had no practical ramifications. Reunification was to change that, and it was feared by some and hoped by others that with reunification the border with Poland might be challenged.

referred to by name, but as the 'polnischen Staatspräsident [dem] es schwer fiel, die angemessene Haltung zu finden' (423).

<sup>93</sup> Polish love of monuments is also remarked upon by the historian Norman Davies (525).

<sup>94</sup> Cf. Glaessner, 15 and 99, as well as Osmond 67ff.

### **‘NACH VOLLBRACHTER MÜH UND JAMMER’**

Any revision of Oder-Neisse border would have been in direct contravention of Brandt’s intentions, and a threat to the status quo in Europe. The kneeling figure of an angel that Alexandra is restoring in *Unkenrufe* has several allegorical functions, one of which, because of its kneeling posture, is to act as a reminder of Willy Brandt on his knees on the site of the Warsaw ghetto. Brandt’s ‘Kniefall’ in December 1970 was a singular gesture to which Grass refers again and again. It implied acceptance of the Oder-Neisse line as Germany’s eastern border, as well as the recognition of Warsaw as the place from which Germany’s Jewish genocide began.<sup>95</sup>

In *Unkenrufe* the significance of the kneeling posture is emphasized by what would otherwise be gratuitous repetition of forms of the verb ‘to kneel’ in relation to the angel. The verb is used nine times within the space of a few pages. It is here, too, amongst these references to the kneeling angel, that the narrator reports the establishment of Reconciliation Cemeteries at Allenstein, Stolp, and ‘sogar in Bromberg’ (12: 200). Perhaps particular attention is drawn to Bromberg, where ‘ein hartes Nein’ (12: 190) had been the initial response to overtures from the Reconciliation Cemetery Association, because of the Polish atrocities against Germans that occurred there two days after the German attack on Danzig (de Zayas 20).

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<sup>95</sup> Cf., for example, ‘Willy Brandt im Warschauer Ghetto’ 16: 422:424.

The angel is a signal of hope for reconciliation, as it brings the message of resurrection and a new life (12: 209). Alexandra's work on the angel begins in Chapter 6 of *Unkenrufe* and coincides with the news of Erna's illness (12: 197). The work is finally completed when the news of Erna's death is received (12: 210). This conjunction of events seems to suggest an echo of Goethe's 'Stirb und werde', evoked earlier in the text by Reschke when he sees Chatterjee's and his own mutually complementary projects as 'gültige Belege des ewigen "Stirb und werde"' (12: 137).

The angel, so Reschke believes, must have been part of a larger piece, representing the Last Judgment and the Resurrection. The piece would have consisted of a number of angels whose trumpet blasts would tear open crypts, graves and charnel houses in fulfilment of the saying he had recently read on a grave stone: 'Nach vollbrachter Müh und Jammer / Ruh ich jetzt in meiner Kammer / bis ich eins werde Auferstehen / Und zur ewigen Fried eingehen'. He writes: 'Dazu gab Alexandra's Engel das Signal' (12: 208-9). The prospect of resurrection is the culmination of Grass's extreme concentration of images of death in *Unkenrufe* – a concentration which is reminiscent of Walter Benjamin's description of another *Erzählung*, namely Johann Peter Hebel's *Unverhofftes Wiedersehen*: 'Der Tod tritt in ihr so regelmäßigen Turnus auf wie der Sensemann in den Prozessionen, die um Mittag um die Münsteruhr ihren Umzug halten (II (2): 450-451). The 'Sensemann' is an aspect of the Dance of Death motif which will be discussed in the section 'Dances of Death and Numbers' below.

Alexandra's 'Auferstehungsengel' is in a very sorry state when it comes to her to

be restored. Reschke says: 'Der auf linkem Knie kniende Engel muß in seinem geflicketen Zustand erbärmlich ausgesehen haben, ein Veteran wechselnder Zeitläufte' (12: 209). In this it seems to have an affinity with Walter Benjamin's famous interpretation of Paul Klee's painting 'Angelus Novus' in 'Über den Begriff der Geschichte' (I (2): 697-8). However, for Benjamin there is no hope of a restoration of the angel whose wings, having been caught in the violent wind from Paradise, can no longer be closed. Benjamin's angel can only look back at history, which is 'eine einzige Katastrophe, die unablässig Trümmer auf Trümmer häuft', and a 'Vorgang unaufhaltsamen Verfalls'. Benjamin muses that the angel looks as if he is about to move away, although he would like to stay, awaken the dead and restore what has been smashed. I think the *Unkenrufe* angel is a little more optimistic. It is always waiting patiently on the table, rather than wanting to move away, whenever Alexander and Alexandra go out. As Alexandra says to Alexander, 'Du weißt, Engel wartet auf uns in Küche' (12: 206). As a veteran of changing times it, too, will have seen its share of destruction, and has itself suffered the ravages of time. But for Grass the destruction is not 'unaufhaltsam'; it is cyclic, interspersed with ever repeated restorations, which only the foolish expect to last. In this *Unkenrufe* builds on the view of history expressed by Oskar in *Die Blechtrommel*:

Rechtstadt, Altstadt, Pfefferstadt, Vorstadt, Jungstadt, Neustadt und Niederstadt, an denen zusammen man über siebenhundert Jahre lang gebaut hatte, brannten in drei Tagen ab. Das war aber nicht der erste Brand der Stadt Danzig. Pommerellen, Brandenburger, Ordensritter, Polen, Schwede, und nochmals Schweden, Franzosen, Preußen und Russen, auch Sachsen hatten zuvor schon, Geschichte machend, alle paar Jahrzehnte die Stadt verbrennenswert gefunden – und nun waren es Russen, Polen, Deutsche und Engländer gemeinsam, die die Ziegel gotischer Backsteinkunst zum hundertstenmal brannten, ohne dadurch Zwieback zu gewinnen (3: 512).

The cycle of destruction and reconstruction is repeated in slightly different form, as if to draw attention to the cycle:

Dann kamen die wilden Pruzen und zerstörten die Stadt ein bißchen. Dann kamen die Brandenburger von weit her und zerstörten gleichfalls in bißchen. Auch Boleslaw von Polen wollte ein bißchen zerstörten, und der Ritterorden sorgte gleichfalls dafür, daß die kaum ausgebesserten Schäden unter den Ritterschwerten wieder deutlich wurden. [...] Ein zerstörerisches und wiederaufbauendes Spielchen treibend, wechselte sich mehrere Jahrhunderte lang [...] (3: 520)

In *Unkenrufe*, too, the endless cycle of destruction and restoration is important, although, in keeping with the *Erzählung* form, it is not treated in as much detail as it is in the epic *Die Blechtrommel*. In Sankt Marien, for example, ‘Die wenigen Touristen und einige betende Polen verloren sich in der Hallenkirche, deren neugespanntes Gewölbe von sechsundzwanzig achteckigen Freipfeilern bis zur nächsten Zerstörung getragen wird’ (12: 51). The circumstances that pertain to the church building also pertain to the building in which the Polish National Bank is housed: ‘Dort täuschte die von Granitsäulen getragene Kassettendecke Beständigkeit vor’ (12: 103). Permanence is only an illusion. Nor is war the only instance to cause so much destruction. The so recently restored facades of Gdańsk are now crumbling as a result of another human activity – environmental pollution: Sulphur fumes blowing across from the harbour are disfiguring the stone work, undoing the results of recently completed restorations. As Reschke says, ‘Dieser viel bewunderten, aufwendig fortwährenden Täuschung ist kein Ende gesetzt’ (12: 26). The *Täuschung* refers to the deluded belief that the restored object has any chance of permanence. Only the *Täuschung* is ‘fortwährend’.

The passing of time which is represented so vividly for Benjamin in the midday procession 'um die Münsteruhr' is expressed in *Unkenrufe* in Reschke's – and the narrator's – habit of recording the hour at which important events occur.

Alexander and Alexandra meet at 'Schlag zehn' (12: 7 and 12: 9), and Reschke wonders whether it was the 'Glockenschlag' that made him approach Alexandra (12: 8). They move off shortly before 'Schlag elf' (12: 13). The time the couple spends in Alexandra's flat is measured by the town hall's electronic Glockenspiel (12: 29 and 12: 31). The 'penny drops' 'kurz vor Schlag neun' (12: 32). Their wedding takes place at 'Schlag elf' (12: 239). Then, of course there is the historic midnight hour when the two Germanys united, 'Schlag zwölf, als ein blutiges, bis zum Schluß waffenklirrendes Jahrzehnt verging' (12: 76-7).

The cycle of destruction and reconstruction in *Unkenrufe* is a reminder of the cycle of guilt and atonement, also expressed in *Die Blechtrommel*, in Raskolnikov's penetrating statement to Oskar – 'Nichts ist vorbei, alles kommt wieder, Schuld, Sühne, abermals Schuld!' (3: 621). Alexandra's 'Wirst sehen. Wird sein wie neugeboren' (12: 210), in relation to the angel she is restoring, is suggestive of Konrad Jarausch's 'drama of guilt, atonement, and redemption' ('Normalisation' 23), cited above.

When the treaty ratifying the inviolability of the Polish-German border was finally signed on the 12th of September 1990,<sup>96</sup> it was hoped that Polish-German relations, too, might be 'wie neugeboren'. However, there is evidence that tin

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<sup>96</sup> Cf. Osmond 288.

some quarters, at least, the new bilateral relations were like Alexandra's angel, with thin layers of gold covering a puttied, worm-eaten interior. There was a lot of unpleasantness on the Polish-German border at Frankfurt/Oder when, on the 8th of April 1990, after decades of Soviet suppression, the Poles were finally allowed to leave their country without a visa. In an article entitled 'Raffgang auf der Oder' an anonymous *Stern* reporter wrote: "Tagsüber koofen wir den Polacken allet leer, nachts schlagen wir sie tot, wa," stellt grinsend ein Deutscher fest, der seinen Namen natürlich nicht genannt haben will' (308). There is no evidence of 'gewonnene Einsicht' here.<sup>97</sup> Ceremonial acts, no matter how sincere, may have done little to reduce the real resentment still existing in some sections of the community. The ugly scenes at the border are also described in *Unkenrufe*:

Einige Wochen oder nur Tage lang sollten alle polnischen Kümernisse vergessen sein. Doch kaum war die Grenze überschritten, schrie sich Haß heisser. Freigesetzte Gewalt schlug zu, Parolen aus dem Sprachschatz, Szenen aus dem Bilderbuch deutsch-polnischer Geschichte wiederholten sich häßlich, und alle schönen Worte der letzten Zeit verfielen abgewertet (12: 210).

The second development suggested by Alexandra's angel is one in keeping with the 'Stirb und werde' motif. Here Dr Wenthien, the 'immer gleiche und wie geschlechtlose' Sisyphos-Reisen tour guide from Grass's *Kopfgeburt* may be cited: 'Der ewige Kreislauf. Alles fließt. Stirb und werde' (10: 70-71).<sup>98</sup> In *Kopfgeburt, oder die Deutschen sterben aus* Grass also explains the

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<sup>97</sup> Cf. 'Verlorene Provinzen – gewonnene Einsicht' 15: 77-79.

<sup>98</sup> Chatterjee has his own version of this philosophy which he uses in relation to the expected influx of people from the sub-continent: 'Alles wird, wie schon die alten Griechen wußten, in Fluß geraten' (12: 40).



significance he attaches to Camus's 'Mythos von Sisyphos'. The 'heiterer Steinewälzer' is someone who happily continues to roll his stone up the hill, even though he knows that it will roll down again. With a series of rhetorical questions he explains how he lives out this philosophy:

Was ist mein Stein? Die Mühsal der nicht ausgehenden Wörter?  
Das Buch das dem Buch das dem Buch folgt? Oder die deutsche  
Fron, das bißchen Freiheit für Steinewälzer (und ähnlich absurde  
Narren) immer wieder bergauf zu sichern. Oder die Liebe samt  
ihrer Fallsucht? Oder die Kampf um Gerechtigkeit gar, dieser so  
mühsam berggängige, dieser so leichthin talsüchtige Brocken?  
(10: 100)

The false promises of an 'earthly paradise', or 'heavenly Jerusalem', or an end to the cycle of 'stirb und werde' cannot distract him from his 'stone'. He knows that it will always need to be rolled to the top, and it will always roll down again.

'Deshalb', he says, 'verlache ich jede Idee, die mir die letzte Ankunft, die endliche Ruhe des Steins auf dem Gipfel verspricht' (10: 101). For this reason, too, he continues against persistent opposition to try and inculcate in his countrymen and -women a sense of their country's history, and their susceptibility to dangerous ideologies, so that at least one cycle can be broken.

We can see the agreement to relinquish any claim to former German territories as a part of this endless cycle. As Germany finally signed the agreement as a prerequisite for reunification, it was not necessarily a sign of genuine reconciliation. It could also be interpreted as a means of placating the rest of Europe in order to gain approval for the reunification of Germany. Furthermore, the recognition of the border served to smooth the path for the entry of German entrepreneurs into the newly capitalist Poland. Was the aim, then, 'aus dem erklärtem Verzicht, Gewinn zu ziehen'? (12: 90).

To answer that question we need to go back to the beginning of *Unkenrufe*.

Buoyed by the optimism of their new love Alexander and Alexandra conceive a plan, an 'Idea', with a capital 'I', their *Idee*, which they proceed to turn into a reality, namely, the creation of cemeteries for the expellees from Gdańsk and Vilnius, so that those driven from their homelands during and after the war can return to be buried in their native soil, rather than lying buried, as their respective parents do, under 'foreign' soil.

**'DIE IDEE, DIE BLEIBT REIN? SELBST ANFANGS NICHT REIN'**<sup>99</sup>

As Eroms notes, the word *Idee* is taken up time and time again in the text (28-30). Mayer, too, comments on the 'idea', singling out Reschke's words: 'Und dann scheiterte unsere Idee' (222). She says that, strictly speaking, an idea cannot fail. It can only be right or wrong. In her view, 'die eigentliche Fehlleistung des Paares bestand bereits in ihrer noch so human verbrämten Idee eines deutsch-polnischen bzw. polnisch-litauischen "Versöhnungsfriedhofs"' (220). While frequent repetitions of the word *Idee* in *Unkenrufe* drew it to the attention of both Eroms and Mayer, neither of them suggested why the word is so prominent, or described the ways in which this prominence is achieved.

*Idee* is a word which is extremely significant throughout Grass's work – both literary and non-literary. In the following statement from 1961 Grass delineates a position from which he has not wavered:

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<sup>99</sup> *Hundejahre* (5: 389).

Und die Askese, die ich mir heute auferlegen muß, liegt einfach darin, daß ich allem, was ich nicht anfassen kann, was ich nicht riechen kann, was ich nicht schmecke, allem, was mit Idee behangen ist, von vornherein mit Mißtrauen gegenüberstehe und daß ich, so lange mir nichts darauf einfällt, auch nicht darüber schreibe ('Diskussionsbeiträge' 43).

In his 1990 lecture, 'Schreiben nach Auschwitz' (16: 235-256) Grass provides a concise history of his literary work, setting various pieces of his prose and poetry within the context of the times in which they were written. He begins, as he often does, with a short autobiography, highlighting once again that his biography is the source from which he derives his authority to write and speak as he does. The word *Idee* comes up a number of times at crucial points. After reciting his 1960 poem 'Askese', he proceeds to describe his first encounter with Adorno's famous proscription from *Minima Moralia*: 'Nach Auschwitz ein Gedicht zu schreiben ist barbarisch [...]' (16: 239). Grass says he rejected the idea as his creative impulses overrode any such restraint. 'Geradezu widernatürlich kam mir Adornos Gebot als Verbot vor; als hätte sich jemand gottväterlich angemaßt, den Vögeln das Singen zu verbieten' (16: 239). It was a reaction shared by many of his contemporaries who, like Grass himself, had not taken the time, as Grass observes, to really ponder on the 'herausgepflückte Zuspitzungen' within the context of the reflections within which they were written (16: 239). Had they done so, the words would have been understood not as a 'Verbot', he says, but as a 'Maßstab' (16:239).

Yet looking back, Grass sees his 'Askese' as an indirect response to 'Adornos Gebotstafel', as an indirect assertion 'daß das Adorno-Gebot – wenn überhaupt – nur schreibend zu widerlegen war' (16: 241-42). 'Askese' means rejecting the

absolutes of black and white ideologies, shunning belief, and subjecting everything to doubt (16: 242). These same three principles may be brought to bear on our consideration of various aspects of *Unkenrufe*: the fictitious and real events, the actions and thoughts of the characters, and Alexander and Alexandra's *Idee*.

In the same lecture Grass also cites from *Hundejahre* a litany of things which are not pure, including the *Idee* which does not remain pure, and was not even pure in the beginning:

[...] Die Idee, die bleibt rein? Selbst anfangs nicht rein. Jesus Christus nicht rein. Marx Engels nicht rein. Die Asche nicht rein. Die Hostie nicht rein. Kein Gedanke hält rein. [...] (16: 249).<sup>100</sup>

This litany continues for three paragraphs. Written in relation to the bones from Stutthoff concentration camp victims, piled high near the anti-aircraft battery at Kaiserhafen, it rushes to a frenetic crescendo before reaching its conclusion, in the cheap, pure soap, which will be made from the bones: 'doch selbst Seife wäscht nicht rein' (16: 250). Grass also recites the poem 'Am Ende' from *Der Butt*. The last seven lines of the poem combine the reference to 'steiler Idee' with one of the fundamental issues which *Unkenrufe* addresses, namely, the question as to whether there can be an 'end to Auschwitz'. It also includes one of the 'objective correlatives' found in the work – 'Pantoffeln'.<sup>101</sup>

Männer mit Überblick  
denen Bedeutung nachläuft,

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<sup>100</sup> See also *Hundejahre* (5: 389).

<sup>101</sup> See also the poem, 'Es war einmal ein Land' (1: 339), and Chapter 5 below.

große verstiegene Männer,  
die niemand, kein warmer Pantoffel  
hat halten können,  
Männer mit steiler Idee, der Taten platt folgten,  
sind endlich – fragen wir uns – am Ende? (16: 254).

*Unkenrufe* is the story of an *Idee* and its 'grotesque incarnation'. The narrator's metaphoric use of 'Fleischwerdung' (12: 78 and 150) for the implementation of Alexander and Alexandra's *Idee* is but one of a great number figures of speech and metaphors used in connection with the word *Idee*. However, the first mention of the word *Idee* is quite straightforward. In Reschke's letter to the narrator he refers to 'unserer großen, die Volker versöhnenden Idee' (12: 14). With the benefit of hindsight, and given what has been said above about Grass's attitude to ideas, especially 'great' ones, the reader might already become sceptical, and, as Grass would put it, 'auf Zweifel setzen' (16: 242). For the next ten pages the narrator leaves us in suspense as to what Alexander and Alexandra's idea might be – ten pages in which the historical background which give birth to the *Idee* is laid out in the form of the narrator's commentary on Reschke's account of his meeting with Alexandra.

What then follows, and continues throughout the book, is a series of metaphors in which the *Idee* is often given physical form, and even sound. Furthermore, the physical form chosen to describe the *Idee* at each stage represents the state and the function of the *Idee* at that particular time. At first, for example, before the *Idee* has really formed in the protagonists' minds, it is described as something 'in the air': 'Vielleicht nahm ihre Idee erste Gestalt an, um sich mit dem Zigarettenrauch wieder zu verflüchtigen. Jedenfalls lag sie in der Luft, wollte ergriffen werden' (12: 25). Finally, when 'the penny drops', as the narrator says, the idea is 'born'

and becomes a melody that one cannot get out of one's head: 'Jetzt erst klickte es, fiel der Groschen, wurde, ohne Schmerz, ein Gedanke geboren, gelang es dem Witwer und der Witwe, eine Idee abzustimmen, deren einfache Melodie sich als Ohrwurm erweisen sollte' (12: 32). Then the narrator says that Alexandra and Alexander give their *Idee* a name (12: 35), which is an extension of the 'birth' metaphor just cited. Significantly, it is not only the narrator who uses the 'birth' metaphor. Reschke, too, writes of 'unsere, kaum gezeugt, schon geborene Idee' (12: 45). Other references which give the *Idee* physical form include the narrator's comment that the *Idee* is 'lädiert' when the couple fails to discover a site for the project on their first attempt; his view that Reschke's new computer is to help 'bei der Fleischwerdung ihrer Idee' (12: 78); and Reschke's conviction, 'Nur mit Hilfe der Deutschmark können wir unsere Idee zu ansehnlicher Gestalt verhelfen' (12: 79). Moreover, the narrator is just as much captive of the *Idee* as are the protagonists, for he says, 'Jetzt, nachdem die Idee raus ist, kann ich nicht mehr zurück' (12: 34).

The practice of portraying the abstract concept in concrete terms is then enhanced by a series of metaphors which imbue the *Idee* with a life of its own. While the last-cited mention of the *Idee* may appear harmless enough, the narrator soon puts it in context when he anticipates future developments and says: 'Das war später, als ihre Idee schon wie selbsttätig um sich griff' (12: 34). Like a living creature, the *Idee* that has been born, and named, soon becomes 'flügge' (12: 35). There is amusing imagery of the idea of learning to walk 'freihändig' or 'with no hands' (12: 98). The *Idee* develops its own unstoppable momentum, scorning half-hearted attempts to keep it under control. 'Die Idee zahlte sich aus. Bald sollte die erste

Million rund sein' (12: 96). With implicit criticism of Alexander and Alexandra, the narrator comments: 'Aber das Paar hat seine Idee freigegeben; schon läuft sie und ruft Personal auf den Plan' (12: 70). Similarly, when the narrator says that Alexander, Alexandra and Chatterjee all 'follow their ideas' (12: 174), the impression that Alexander and Alexandra have allowed the *Idee* to rule them, rather than vice-versa, is reinforced. Sometimes Grass uses a humorous combination of metaphors to describe the *Idee*. The narrator says, for example, that Reschke's idea stinks, then immediately follows this by calling it a 'Furzidee' (12: 45).

Alexander and Alexandra's *Idee* is not presented in isolation in *Unkenrufe*. Grass juxtaposes Reschke's idea and its incarnation with a number of other 'ideas'. Chatterjee tells Reschke of an expected influx of economic refugees from the subcontinent: 'Schon sind wir unterwegs. Vorerst nur einige Hunderttausend, arm an Gepäck, doch reich an Ideen' (12: 156). To many, a threatening vision, whether 'rich in ideas' or not. Reschke, too, although he engages in business dealings with Chatterjee, finds him 'bedrohlich' (12: 166).

Other ideas which the reader is invited to weigh up in *Unkenrufe* are those of Lenin, 'der kein Schiff gebaut, nur Ideen gehabt hat' (12: 167). However, the allusions to all of these ideas provide no guidance to the reader as to how they are to be evaluated. The narrator's comments are consistently relativized by his equivocal stance in regard to Alexander and Alexandra's venture, and cannot be used as guidance. He vacillates between such statements as: 'Reschke handelte richtig' (12: 171); and 'seine Idee stank mir von Anfang an (12: 175). By

portraying his narrator as confused and helplessly perplexed, yet very assertive in his views for as long as he holds them, Grass encourages the reader to look at issues independently of received notions about them. He reinforces the three-fold lesson drawn from his consideration of the ‘Adorno-Gebot’ cited above: reject ideologies, discount belief, exercise doubt .

This advice applies not only to ideas and ideologies in themselves, it also applies to the presentation of the facts. Alexander says that he has chosen the narrator as the best person to tell the story of the Reconciliation Cemeteries because he is a person who likes to be more factual than the facts: ‘Nur Du kannst das. Dir hat es schon immer Spaß bereitet, tatsächlicher als alle Tatsachen zu sein’ (12: 241). It seems that the ‘facts’ alone will not yield up the story as Alexander would like it told. He wants a history of the Reconciliation Cemeteries Association which will put everything in the right light (12: 240). By highlighting the narrator’s interpretative role, and having him invent facts that blend with the ‘documented’ basis of his history, Grass is showing how easily historical accounts can be coloured, as well as emphasising that one should take nothing at face value. The historical report which the narrator produces cannot be seen as an objective recounting of the truth. His own description of his efforts to make sense out of the documents he receives from Reschke even suggests that it may be impossible to construct a complete history retrospectively – a problem about which more will be said in Chapter 6 of this thesis.

As it turns out, the *Unkenrufe* narrator’s history of the Reconciliation Cemeteries Association is pieced together as the result of the fruitful, albeit sometimes



reluctant, collaboration between chronicler and historical actor, narrator and protagonist. It is a joint venture. Reschke is fond of the ‘Zauberwort “Joint venture”’, as is seen in his discussion with the health fund representative who is looking for holiday homes in Poland (12: 47). So is the Board of the Reconciliation Cemeteries Association. The term is trendy and promises gains to both parties, but the examples that come to light in *Unkenrufe* suggest the morality underlying them might be questionable. Like Reschke’s first letter to Alexandra, with its beautiful fountain pen script and perfect margins, they may be full of obscenities. It is the age-old discrepancy between *Sein und Schein*.

## THE TITLE METAPHOR

In *Unkenrufe* Grass also uses metaphor extensively as a means of establishing the historical and cultural framework, and as a means of indicating some possible resolutions to the uncertainties the book depicts. The title, *Unkenrufe*, translates literally as ‘toad-calls’. In English a ‘toad-call’ is just an animal sound. But for a German the first association would be that of the metaphorical meaning of toad-calls as ‘prophesies of doom’.<sup>102</sup> As well as referring to a kind of toad, the noun *Unke* means ‘Schwarzseher’, a person who always expects the worst. In the *Brockhaus Wahrig* the verb *unken* is defined as ‘Unglück prophezeien’. Common usages are: ‘Du bist eine alte Unke, du siehst alles nur negativ’; ‘Das geht schief, unkte er’; ‘Mußt du ständig unken?’ A search for the word ‘Unkenrufe’ in the

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<sup>102</sup> The work was translated by Ralph Mannheim as ‘The Call of the Toad’- The obvious, powerful and specific associations of the title of the work for the speaker of German are impossible to convey in English without losing the relationship between the title and its metaphorical treatment in the text which I explore in this section.

internet, for example, yields hundreds of dismal prophecies from all kinds of sources.

Thus, because of its title, this optimistic love story and its protagonists' reconciliatory venture must be described as only seemingly optimistic, and the venture only seemingly reconciliatory. From the outset, and despite its apparent optimism and Grass's wry humour, it is a story under a cloud, for not only does the title create tension by putting the reader in a state of apprehension concerning the outcome of Alexandra and Alexander's relationship and their venture, it also casts a long shadow over developments as it functions like an allegory of the shadow cast over Germany's relationship with its neighbours by its past crimes against humanity.

It is in the nature of things that 'toad-calls', like Cassandra's warnings, are not taken seriously until it is too late, and often enough subsequent events show that the prophet was right. Such is the case, for example, in *Hundejahre* with Tulla and Harry. When Harry chides Tulla for jumping off the moving tram while she is pregnant, she retorts: 'Daß du immer unken mußt' (5: 418). Then it is not long before, exiled from innocence – as symbolised by the closed 'Weißes Lamm' restaurant – Tulla's pregnancy ends in a miscarriage (5: 418).

However, *Unkenrufe* is by no means an unmitigated prophecy of doom. If this were all Grass had to offer he would have long since ceased to roll his Sisyphus stone. Instead, *Unkenrufe* is a continuation, in artistic form, of what Grass has always understood as the writer's task: 'Ich glaube, es ist unter anderem Aufgabe der Schriftsteller, dieses Zwiedenken und Falschreden der Politiker und Militärs,

der Industriebosse und Kirchenfürsten bloßzustellen [...]’ (‘Notwendiger Dialog’ 187). In *Unkenrufe* he does this by presenting the reader with a number of constellations which are open to conflicting interpretations.

I have said that the metaphor of the title casts a cloud over the story. Yet as the story unfolds so fortuitously, it seems as if we do not need to take the title metaphor at its word, and that the shadow it casts may be a false warning. This is not only because the relationship between Alexandra and Alexander develops with such ease, despite the differences in their backgrounds, but also because of the way Grass manipulates and plays with the word *Unke* – one of the most interesting aspects of *Unkenrufe*. Grass’s first strategy is to distract the reader from the sense of doom engendered by the metaphor by separating the *vehicle* of the metaphor (the toad) from its *tenor* (prophesy of doom). He does this by introducing real toads as a substantial element of the story, beginning at the very beginning – on the front cover. Here a toad with an indefinable expression on its face, and eyes that look in opposite directions – indicating, perhaps, the open-endedness of the work – squats behind a fountain pen. His exotic-looking colleagues squat on the pages facing each new chapter. Literal, or real toad-calls occur at important junctures in the story, and are emphasized not only by their relationship to the events with which they are linked, but also by the fact that Reschke, who is an amateur natural historian, goes to a great deal of trouble to record them on tape when he goes on excursions into the lowlands near Gdańsk. His diary includes several entries about toads – their role in folklore, biological information about toad species, their habits and habitats, the variations in the sounds they make, and there is even a reference to finding four flattened toads on a German road (12:

133).

By consciously undermining the metaphorical meaning of the toad-call Grass gives the reader the impression that the title's gloomy connotations are not to be taken too seriously. This manipulation is particularly apparent when Alexander makes the rational observation in his diary that the sound of the toad-call is so melancholy that it is no wonder that it came to be understood as a prophesy of doom. Drawing his inspiration from Grimm's *Wörterbuch* Grass has Reschke comment:

Kein Wunder, daß der Ruf der Unke, mehr noch als Kauz und Eule, Aberglauben gefordert hat. [...] Die Unke unkt Unheil herbei, wird gesagt. [...] In früheren Zeiten jedoch ist der Unke Weisheit angedichtet worden; erst später, bedrängt von immer schlimmeren Gang der Zeitläufte, wird ihr, nicht etwa der Erdkröte, die Rolle der Ruferin zugedacht, die kommendes Unheil einläutet (12: 15).

In this way the toad-call in its figurative sense is firmly, but only provisionally, relegated to the realms of old fashioned superstition.

Grass's use of the toad-call in its literal sense serves yet another purpose, and that is to draw attention to environmental degradation. Toads are threatened with extinction and their melancholy call, if there is no intervention, may not survive into the future – except, perhaps in the reproduction of their call which Chatterjee uses as the warning bell on his rickshaws. The flattened toads, too, have both literal and metaphorical functions, reinforcing the ecological message that the expansion of human activity into the natural habitat is destroying the species, as well as indicating that things for Alexander and Alexandra's project are deteriorating.

Yet Grass's biological 'Unken' are never allowed to completely distract the reader from the metaphor. The bleak future which it suggests is supported when narrator says he is 'neugierig auf [Alexandra and Alexander's] Scheitern' (12: 45); and when his comment to Alexandra's cry: 'Geht schon schief!', is that: 'die Schwarzseher, nach Lage der Dinge, meistens Recht behalten' (12: 142). In an interesting twist with the metaphor Konsistorialrat Karau counters Alexandra's fears that Poland will be devoured by German capitalists – 'Deutsche sind hungrig immer, auch wenn sie sind satt schon' – with the comment: 'Aber verehrte Frau Piątkowska! Was sollen denn diese Unkenrufe?' (12: 203).

No matter how such strategies tempt the reader to feel that perhaps all may turn out well in the end, the reassurances never last long. Grass's exploitation of the toad metaphor in all its variations reaches a climax in the scene in which Alexander and Alexandra, having parted company with the Reconciliation Cemeteries Association in protest over the commercialization of their *Idee*, are in the Pantheon in Rome.<sup>103</sup> Here, with his heart swelling with delight at the perfect, generous dimensions of Hadrian's monument, Alexander performs an act that would be a tragicomic highlight if ever Grass's *Erzählung* were to be turned into a film. Styling Alexander as something of an Old Testament prophet or 'Rufer', Grass draws together the various implications of the toad metaphor in a significant, economically crafted passage. It is rather long, but needs to be quoted in full.

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<sup>103</sup> Coincidentally, or perhaps not, it was through Pantheon Books and Kurt Wolff that Günter Grass gained access to his audience in America. (Neuhaus 1997: 80).

[...] ein älterer Herr, sichtlich englischer Herkunft, begann plötzlich, aus der Mitte des beglückenden Raumes heraus, zu singen. Seine schöne, wenn auch leicht zittrige Stimme erprobte anfangs zaghaft, dann waghalsig die Kuppel. Etwas von Purcell hat er gesungen und bekam Beifall dafür. Danach sang eine junge, bäurisch amutende Italienerin bravourös, natürlich Verdi. Auch ihre Arie wurde beklatscht. Ich zögerte lange. Schon zupfte Alexandra an mir, wollte gehen, da stellte ich mich unter die Kuppel, nein, nicht um zu singen, das konnte ich nicht, doch ließ ich zum Rund der Kuppelöffnung empor eine einzelne Unke rufen: kurz, lang, lang – kurz, lang, lang. Immer wieder. Und die Pantheonkuppel war erbaut für den Unkenruf, vielleicht weil Höhe und Durchmesser von einem Maß sind. Meine Darbietung soll, sagte mir Alexandra später, allen Touristen im weiten Rund Stille befohlen haben, selbst den Japanern. Kein Klicken der Kameras mehr. Doch nicht ich bin der Rufer gewesen. Vielmehr hat die Unke aus meinem Innersten heraus ... zwar stand ich da wie das Bild eines Rufers: den Kopf in den Nacken gelegt und – geöffneten Mundes – den Hut beiseite gehalten, doch ist der Unkenruf von mir aufgehoben gewesen bis hoch zur Scheitelöffnung und über diese hinaus ... mit ihren Worten hat Alexandra alles gesagt: “Die Leute waren ganz stumm gemacht und haben nicht gewollt klatschen ein bißchen (12: 242-43).

In this one scene the many implications of the toad metaphor – established by the title and relativized by its use in the literal sense – illuminate each other. For although he is not aware of it, the nickname Alexander’s students have given him is ‘Unke’ (12: 88). Good English equivalents would be Jeremiah, Cassandra, or the Prophet of Doom. This nickname, while perhaps appropriate in connection with Reschke’s negative remarks about the future, the chaos on the roads, or reunification (12: 88), would seem to conflict with the optimism required for his achievements with the Reconciliation Cemeteries. The significance of this conflict is drawn out even further by two more aspects of the Pantheon scene.

The first concerns the two people whose spirits are so seduced by the harmonious spaciousness of the ancient building’s interior that they burst into song. The Englishman sings something from the quintessentially English composer Purcell.

The Italian woman sings something from the quintessentially Italian composer Verdi. Even if somewhat eccentric, these responses to the uplifting interior of the Pantheon can be understood as belonging somehow to the natural order of things, as being appropriate. The public applause confirms this. But how does the response of the German visitor to the two- thousand-year-old monument fit into this order? Neither a Bach cantata nor an aria from Mozart, nothing from Germany's rich musical tradition issues from Alexander's lips. Instead it is an animal sound which rises to the occula and beyond. The German's contribution is a toad-call, a distortion of the natural order of things, a travesty which shocks the by-standers into stunned silence.

The second important aspect of the scene is Grass's close juxtaposition of the notion of Alexander as the prophet of doom, as derived from his nickname, his perversion of that role as he makes his literal toad-call, and his abdication of responsibility for his actions in connection with the Reconciliation Cemeteries Association. He says that he perceives the toad-call as something separate from himself, explaining in his diary that he stood there like the *image* of the prophet. That is to say, he gave the appearance of being a prophet. But there is no indication that his innermost feelings coincide with the image he presents. The *Rufer*, or voice 'crying in the wilderness' ('*Rufer*'), traditionally calls for repentance as a prerequisite for reconciliation. The structural perfection of the Pantheon which Grass clearly stresses in this paragraph, together with the high culture demonstrated by the other two singers, show that Reschke is anywhere but in the wilderness which is the true prophet's home.

Although Reschke is aware of the need for repentance, or at least of the necessity of recognising the historical facts which had given rise to the need for reconciliation, he has not included this dimension of Polish-German relations in his business plan for the Reconciliation Cemeteries. In the Pantheon scene Reschke's true status is made clear. For just as he is merely the image, rather than the real thing in this context, so, too, is his reconciliation project merely a representation of reconciliation (by virtue of its name and the associated rhetoric), rather than a genuine attempt to heal the wounds of the past. Although the prophet's warnings are traditionally disregarded by an ignorant populace, this in no way diminishes the prophet's duty to warn. Alexander's utterance, however, is not a warning, nor a call for the admission of sins, and repentance, but an animal sound, an abomination which has no meaning for those who hear it. In escaping, like Goethe, to Italy, and to Rome and Naples in particular,<sup>104</sup> he has taken himself far away from the audience to whom he should be making his voice heard, and the place where he should be undertaking whatever he can to ameliorate the effects of the 'dreadful incarnation' (12: 181) of his idea.

The metaphor of the toad-call as a prophecy of doom, and the two literal usages of toad-calls – those which can be heard in the countryside near Gdańsk, and Alexander's imitation of this sound in the Pantheon – apply to plot and characters. This constellation is balanced by Grass's treatment of the narrator, which involves not only links with the toad as 'prophet of doom' metaphor with which we are

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<sup>104</sup> Cf. Saine 2-3.



now familiar, but also with a second, quite different toad metaphor. Here it must be pointed out that everyday German has two nouns for ‘toad’. The noun *Unke* which appears in the title and is used in the ‘prophet of doom’ metaphor refers only to the relatively small family of the order Anura, *Bombinatoridae* or fire belly toads. The other noun which means ‘toad’ is *Kröte*, and it refers to the much larger family *Bufonidae* or true toads.<sup>105</sup> This is the noun which is used in the metaphor which both English and German share, namely the metaphor of ‘toad-eaters’ for people who have to do unpleasant things because they are indebted to, or dependant on someone. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines ‘toad-eater’ as ‘a humble friend or dependant’, and quotes the following literary example:

David begged an Explanation of what she meant by Toad-Eater  
... Cynthia replied, .. It is a Metaphor taken from a  
Mountebank’s Boy’s eating Toads, in order to show his Master’s  
Skill in expelling poison. It is built on a Supposition .. that  
People who are .. in a State of Dependance, are forced to do the  
most nauseous things that can be thought on, to please and  
honour their Patrons’ (Def. 2b).

My description of the narrator, which was begun in Chapter 2 and will be taken up again in Chapter 6, will show that a remarkable correlation exists between the narrator’s relationship to his ‘patron’ and all of the components of this definition.

The *Brockhaus Wahrig* defines ‘eine Kröte schlucken’ as ‘etwas Unangenehmes ohne Sträuben hinnehmen, sich damit abfinden’. The imagery is well founded if we consider Brehm’s quotation from Gesner regarding toads, a species of which he says, ‘Kein Tierfamilie hat [...] mehr unter dem allgemeinen Abscheu der

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<sup>105</sup> For *Bombinatoridae* see *Brehms* 678 and Frank and Ramus 38. For *Bufonidae* see *Brehms* 681 and Frank and Ramus 38ff.

Menschen zu leiden gehabt, keine ist unerbitterlicher und mit größerem Unrecht verfolgt worden' (681):

Dise thier sind gantz schädlich und verletzlich mit ihrem giff:  
dann so yemants mit jrem seich berührt, so sol sölches ort  
faulen: vnd nit on große arbeit widerumb heilen. Innerthalb dem  
leyb ist sy tödtlich. Ir ankuchen und gesicht ist schädlich, davon  
die menschen auch gantz bleych vnd ungestalt werden söllend  
(681).

'Krötenschlucker' is certainly an apt description of the *Unkenrufe* narrator. He makes it abundantly clear that he does not want to tell Alexander and Alexandra's story. From the beginning he performs the role of the proverbial toad-eater, immediately revealing his reluctance to address the real issues, as he dwells on shoe sizes, the colour of a scarf and other seemingly irrelevant details. The narrator resents having to follow the couple around in his mind as he reads the pile of documents Alexander sent him. But for some reason, perhaps those suggested above in the section on the narrator, he cannot refuse to do the task.

The narrator mentions Alexander's claim that as a schoolboy he, the narrator, is supposed to have swallowed toads and regurgitated them, a trick his school fellows are supposed to have admired (12: 34). Once again Grass combines the literal and the metaphorical meaning of eating toads. The narrator's telling of the story is analogous to his schoolboy trick in every way. As an adult he has not found a way of escaping the role which he adopted as a child. The narrator admits this himself (12: 34). Yet his extensive use of modal verbs when referring to statements made by Alexander shows that he is not prepared to accept that Alexander's recollection of his swallowing toads is accurate. It is not until later that he finally admits unconditionally to having swallowed toads: 'Also gut, ich

habe als Schüler auf Wunsch Kröten geschluckt' (12: 51). He must also admit that, not only did he swallow the kind of toads known in German as *Kröten*, which he brought up again, but that once he even swallowed the more revolting *Unke*, and did this without bringing it up again (12: 37). The intertwining of the two different toad metaphors which Grass achieves in this way is emphasized by the positioning of the narrator's admission at the very beginning of the second chapter. The narrator is associated with metaphors pertaining to both kinds of toads – as someone who swallows toads (*Kröten*) – and as an *Unke* or Jeremiah, for the story he tells is punctuated from the beginning with his negative interjections.

The fatal car crash with which the narrator ends his account of Alexander and Alexandra and the Reconciliation Cemetery Association confirms the doom-filled expectation set up by the title. The tension which has existed throughout the work between the title and the seemingly positive story of personal and economic gain is resolved by means of a final metaphor. This ending seems to suggest that, despite Grass's best hopes, there may be a dreadful inevitability in the course of German-Polish relations. This ending is hinted at very early in the work, when Alexandra expresses her regret that she has never been to Italy (12: 29), although this can only be appreciated in retrospect when the protagonists announce their intention to go to Naples for their honeymoon. When asked why she wants to go to Naples, Alexandra replies, 'Weil man sagt so' (12: 149). A little later she is more explicit: 'Na, wenn ich schon gesehen hab' Neapel, kann ich ja sterben gleich' (12: 150). Alexandra and Alexander see Naples and die – or at least there is a single-vehicle accident in which the two victims are burnt beyond recognition.

The only clues to the victims' identity are a crocheted shopping bag and a slipper, thrown clear of the vehicle before it is engulfed in flames.

The seeming inevitability of Alexandra and Alexander's deaths might be seen as a parallel for the way in which German-Polish relations are harmed by the maintenance of entrenched positions on both sides. But there are alternatives, as Grass shows in his fantasy of multi-ethnic and multicultural harmony in which the seemingly contradictory co-exist and enrich each other, as symbolised by Alexander's utopian vision of Kali co-existing with the Black Madonna. The future need not be as bad as the tone set by the pessimistic title suggests. Nor need the 'Naples' saying be interpreted so negatively. Goethe's rendering of the Neapolitan saying, 'Vedi Napoli e poi Muori', as 'Siehe Neapel und stirb!' (*Goethes Werke* 11: 189), leaves out one small word – poi – which means 'then'. Once you have seen Naples, *then* you can die because you will never see anything as wonderful ever again, or: before you die you must experience the wonder of Naples. Following this reading of the saying – which seems to be the sense in which Alexandra means it – and the reading of the car crash as the real end of Alexandra and Alexander's story, one could say that the fiery ending of *Unkenrufe* is a happy one, that Alexandra and Alexander had done all there was to be done, achieved their goals, and died contented.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> In *Der Butt* Grass provides us with the opposite of this reading of the saying, holding the poverty and filth of Calcutta up against the beauty of Naples (at least as it was in the 18th century when the saying was coined): 'Kalkutta sehen und weiter leben' (8: 239).

## NOVEMBER LAND

It is not only the title that casts a cloud over the love story in *Unkenrufe*. In the previous chapter I drew attention to the *Novemberland* cycle of sonnets because of the relevance of the 7th sonnet to the debates dominating German intellectual circles at the time *Unkenrufe* was written. Now I would like to draw attention to some other aspects of the *Novemberland* cycle in their relationship to *Unkenrufe*. The cycle is, as indeed is all of Grass's lyric poetry, intimately linked with his prose fiction. Poetry constitutes the channel through which Grass feeds his impressions. His poems function as 'Landvermessungsmarke innerhalb einer wüsten Geröllmasse von Stoff (Zimmermann). In his analysis of *Novemberland* Hans Adler calls Grass's lyric works 'prägnante Abbiatorioren, Vorformen' of his dramatic works and novels (93), and yet, perhaps because of restrictions on the length of his article, Adler makes no mention in his analysis of *Novemberland* of the two novels which are most closely connected with the cycle, namely *Unkenrufe* and *Ein weites Feld*. However, the succinct and accurate synopsis with which Adler begins his analysis of the individual sonnets can be read (with the exception of the sonnet about the arson attack at Mölln which took place after *Unkenrufe* had been completed) as a list of the themes of *Unkenrufe*. After the first sonnet, which evokes Germany as a beautiful land that has fallen victim to parasitic capitalism, the sonnet most intimately connected with *Unkenrufe* is fourth. Its focus is on the consequences of the reunification of Germany for Poland. The ninth sonnet, too, is concerned with the consequences for Poland of choices made in Germany, a land which seems to be trying to fashion itself as a 'Festung der Reichen' at the cost of its poorer neighbours, especially Poland (97).

The day of the meeting, All Souls Day 1989, is of programmatic importance. Religious feast days occur regularly in Grass's work, as he uses them as deictic devices to locate events not only in the calendar year, but also in relation to the mythic and religious connections that the feast days have assumed over the centuries in the area in his homeland.<sup>107</sup> In the Church calendar November is the melancholy month in which the departed souls are commemorated on three occasions: All Saints' Day, All Souls' Day and *Totensonntag*. The feast of All Souls or *Allerseelen*, the day on which Alexandra and Alexander meet, falls on the second of November, exactly seven days prior to the 'cursed' ninth.<sup>108</sup> The date lends triste overtones to Alexandra and Alexander's meeting which seem to be justified by their seemingly the inexorable movement from that day, through their occupation with the dead and dying, grave stones, charnel houses, cemeteries, exhumations, sarcophagi, to their own presumed deaths by accident. On All Souls' Day requiem masses are celebrated 'in suffrage for the deceased to help them attain final purification' (Cornides 319). Throughout the Middle Ages it was a popular belief that departed souls in purgatory could appear on this day, as will-o-the-wisps, witches or toads, to persons who had wronged them during their lives (Cornides 319). For Grass the legacy of German crimes is that the dead are watching him as he writes, dictating his theme:

Wer in den zwanziger Jahren dieses Jahrhunderts geboren  
wurde, [...] wer aus deutscher Erfahrung weiß, daß keine noch so

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<sup>107</sup> Werner Frizen ('... weil wir Deutschen') has demonstrated that Grass's indebtedness to Christianity includes the negation of Christian content, at the same time as the partial incorporation of Catholicism's hidden sensuality.

<sup>108</sup> See quotation from *Ein weites Feld* below.

unterhaltsame Gegenwart die Vergangenheit wegschwätzen  
kann, dem ist der Erzählfaden schon vorgesponnen, der ist nicht  
frei in der Wahl seines Stoffes, dem sehen beim Schreiben zu  
viele Tote zu ('Von der Überlebensfähigkeit der Ketzer' 16:  
447).

As both Harscheidt and an Huef have shown, mediaeval and folk superstitions form an important element of Grass's work. To grasp the implications of All Souls' Day for Grass we need only consider act 4, scene 1 of his play, *Die Plebejer proben den Aufstand*. Here Erwin compares the mood following the suppression of the workers' revolt with that of All Souls Day: 'Fragen stellst du! Verglichen mit heute ist Allerseelen ein heiterer Tag' (2: 413). *Allerseelen*, therefore, is day with dismal overtones, and it certainly seems to be a rather inauspicious day for the beginning of a love story. Indeed, the whole dark, damp and cold month of November traditionally constitutes a literary topos of melancholy, matched with reflection and personal stocktaking. Grass evokes these November attributes in his *Novemberland* cycle. The grey November weather is like a mournful dirge in the background of each of the sonnets as Grass counts off the things that are weighing on his mind, including the racially motivated tragedy of Mölln, only a few kilometres away from his home.

Historical events have added to the burden of these connotations. Germany is a 'November' land because so many things have happened in the Novembers of its troubled history. The narrator of Grass's novel, *Ein weites Feld* calls the ninth of the month in particular 'dieses tragische, düstere, blutige, so üble wie verfluchte Datum' (13: 510). The 9th of November is the date of the failed revolution in 1918, and of Hitler's 'Bier-Hall Putsch' in 1923, which resulted in the short-lived proscription of the National Socialist German Workers' Party. A mere three years

later, also in November, Hitler was to declare, 'Heute, im November 1926, steht sie wieder im gesamten Reich frei vor uns, stärker und innerlich fester als je zuvor' (Qtd. in Adler 95). In 1938 the 9th of November is the 'Night of Broken Glass', *Kristallnacht*. In 1989 it is the date of the opening of the Berlin Wall, an event for which Grass foresaw dire consequences, many, but fortunately not all, of which have since been fulfilled.

The gloom of these dark connections with contemporary German and European issues is coupled in *Unkenrufe* with optimism and human warmth – qualities not readily associated with some of the author's work of the preceding decade. Indeed the contrast to its pessimistic predecessor, *Die Rättin*, could not be greater. Not only is it eminently 'readable' with an almost unilinear chronological structure that contrasts starkly to the multiple strands of the earlier work, it is simultaneously tragic and humorous, and suffused with warmth and humanity as it embraces the age-old themes of love and death, the conflict between mammon and morality, and the difficulty of realizing an ideal in an imperfect world. In *Unkenrufe* the new *Länder* of the Federal Republic, and the realignment of Europe following the 'Velvet Revolution', and the closer proximity of the Federal Republic to Poland following the collapse of the East German state, are factors that contribute substantially to the story, while at the same time references to problems such as the Gulf War, the Chernobyl accident, and global warming locate Germany and its responsibilities towards its neighbour in the wider international context.

Far from burying Danzig and German-Polish history, as Radish suggests, Grass is



compelled by the unification of Germany to return in his literary, as well as in his essayistic work and public speaking, to the issue of his homeland and why it was lost, and to the legacy of a century of mass expulsions ('Jahrhundert der Vertreibungen').

## 5. DANCES OF DEATH AND NUMBERS

In this section I will consider the Dance of Death motif in *Unkenrufe*, the origins of the motif, and Alexander's understanding and instrumentalization of it. Some aspects of the origins of the motif suggest intertextual connections between certain Bible passages and *Unkenrufe*. This will lead to the discovery of Grass's *Zahlenspiel* in the work, which is built upon the 'perfect number' seven, and its components, the numbers three and four.

The success of Alexander and Alexandra's cemetery scheme is predictable given its ability to tap into and combine two rich reservoirs. The first is a capitalist, free market ethic according to which everything has a monetary value and can be bought, sold and traded – not only commodities and services, but also allegiances and values. The second reservoir is the emotional appeal of the lost *Heimat*. Death – whether as a subject of contemplation for those who are nearing the end of their life, or as an event in the family which places obligations on the surviving family members – is instrumentalized in Alexander and Alexandra's cemetery scheme as the conduit between the two reservoirs of *Heimat* and capitalist market forces, so that a huge pool of monetary wealth is established.

Alexander and Alexandra's scheme for the dead and dying is able to integrate the new Polish and the old German capitalist potential so successfully that even before the project is really off the ground, expressions of interest are converted into large down-payments of cash, with well-heeled Germans paying in advance to

be buried in the homeland they have not seen for forty or more years. There is no shortage of 'burial candidates', or 'Beerdigungswilligen'. However, the 'bemessene Stück Heimerde' (12: 124) that is the initial object of the scheme is but the thin end of the wedge once the scheme begins operations. It is not long before more market possibilities are discovered, especially as a new generation of 'young managers' gains ascendancy in the Board of Management of the Reconciliation Cemeteries Association. The boundaries that separate the ethical from the practical and profitable are continually tested by a capitalist imperative clothed as an humanitarian service that allows for elderly refugees and expellees to spend the evening of their lives in their old homeland. The modest burial plot originally envisaged soon gives way to visions of grandeur. More and more land is acquired as the scheme snowballs. Nursing homes need to be built to house those waiting for death. Accommodation needs to be provided for visiting relations who come over to keep Oma and Opa company while they are waiting to die, and who want to see the homeland of their families; land is acquired for holiday villages with golf courses for the entertainment of waiting relatives. A maternity wing is added to an aged-care facility in order to cater for the needs of the pregnant relatives, who are now producing the Neu-Danziger-Erdenbürger (2: 221). Soon the cemeteries and the infrastructure surrounding them are coming up like mushrooms all over Poland. No market opportunity is left unexplored, and capitalist spin-doctoring leads to the acceptance of projects which Reschke must evaluate as 'mit dem Versöhnungsgedanken kaum in Einklang zu bringen' (12: 191).

Despite Alexander and Alexandra's initial rejection of some of the suggestions for

lucrative projects for the Cemeteries Association, Reschke's choice of words indicates quite clearly that he is willing to compromise and adapt projects to make them fit in with the reconciliation idea. Eventually, even those *Heimatvertriebenen* who died in the west before the Reconciliation Cemeteries were established can, for an appropriate fee, be exhumed and reburied in their homeland. But, as a conciliatory gesture, this special service is only available to those who died after the first of December 1970, the date on which Willy Brandt signed the historical agreement which recognised the Oder/Neisse line as the western border of Poland (12: 160). The *de facto* (as the Federal republic did not have a common border with Poland) agreement was actually signed on the seventh, not the first of the month, so even here the boundaries are being pushed outwards.<sup>109</sup>

In *Unkenrufe* the transportation of corpses, fresh and not so fresh, is not without logistical problems. Soon Poland's limited cool-storage facilities are unable to cope with the avalanche of corpses, and a more compact form of packaging needs to be considered. A further option which is suggested, but not implemented in *Unkenrufe*, is burials at sea in the Bay of Danzig. While much of the *Unkenrufe* story is 'Stranger than Fact' (Taylor), some of the things it describes have since taken place. Six years after the publication of *Unkenrufe*, for example, *Der Spiegel* published a report by Christian Neef about burials at sea for former residents of

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<sup>109</sup> Grass accompanied Willy Brandt to Poland for the occasion. See 'Politisches Tagebuch. Betroffen sein' 15: 80-82. Regarding Grass's changing of historical times and dates, see below in this chapter under the heading 'Of Threes, Fours and Sevens'. See also Harscheidt 249, note 6.

the lost provinces. Rickshaws now queue for passengers outside Bahnhof Friedrichstraße in Germany's capital city. Although conceived and written in the earliest days of German reunification, sections of *Unkenrufe* read today as if it were written with the confidence and knowledge of a work of hindsight.

### ***DANSE MACABRE***

*Unkenrufe* is a tale told with the same grimly mordant humour that underlies the mediaeval motif of the *Todestanz*, and Reschke aligns his project with what he believes to be its underlying principles. The *Idee*, he says, is committed to serving the dead, not the living. He also attributes to their plan a life-affirming element which, like the principal of equality underlying the mediaeval Dance of Death motif, imbues death with a joyful, as well as a macabre reverence (12: 74). Most importantly, however, Reschke links the mediaeval tradition explicitly to the present day when he ends his description of the famous depictions of the Dance of Death at Lübeck and Reval with the words: 'dieser endloser Reigen der Stände, vom Patriziat bis zu den niedrigen Gewerken, ob König oder Bettler, sie tanzen alle in die Grube, so bis heute' (12: 74-75). The choice of these two depictions of the Dance of Death has historical significance, for they have both been lost. The once German city of Reval is now Tallinn, the capital of Estonia. The Lübeck *Totentanz* was destroyed during the war that Germany initiated.

In this context the Dance of Death motif also calls to mind Paul Celan's *Todesfuge*. Celan, Grass's 'schwieriger, kaum zugänglicher Freund' who gave him the courage to portray ordinary Jews like Fajngold, Sigismund Markus and Eddie Amsel in his early fiction (16: 248), who survived Auschwitz, but could not

survive being a survivor and ended his own life, has forged a seemingly unbreakable link between the Dance of Death and Auschwitz: ‘stecht tiefer die Spaten ihr einen ihr andern spielt weiter zum Tanz auf’ (Celan 83).

Like the *Singspiel*, mentioned in the section entitled ‘Alexander and Alexandra’ above, the Dance of Death is believed to have at least some of its origin in the mediaeval morality plays (Clark).<sup>110</sup> The name of the motif, which has been exploited extensively in all art forms since the Middle Ages, is somewhat misleading, in that it is not a dance of personified Death, but rather, a procession of individuals from all stations in life being led by the hand to the grave. Sometimes they are led by their own individual counterparts, and sometimes a single allegorical figure of Death leads the procession. Pictorial representations of the Dance of Death were most frequently executed in places where burials took place – crypts, charnel houses and so on, where the dead might rise from their graves to invite living individuals to be their partners in a final dance (Röll). The Dance of Death message, as well as the obvious *memento mori*, is, as Reschke quite correctly points out, the equality of all men in the face of the Grim Reaper. But beyond that, it is a representation of a dialogue between the living and the dead. In *Unkenrufe* there are a number of scenes in which Alexander and Alexandra are in the very places where such dialogue might take place. The fact that the first place to which Alexandra and Alexander go together is a cemetery is

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<sup>110</sup> One of the numerous musical references in *Unkenrufe* is the narrator’s supposition that Reschke hums ‘irgendetwas zwischen Kleine Nachtmusik und Holbergssuite’ (12: 38), one wonders whether he might be thinking of Saint-Saëns’s *Danse Macabre* (1874) or Liszt’s *Totentanz*.

only slightly macabre, because the visit takes place in daylight in sunny weather. However, they enter the cemetery through a hole in the fence, rather than through a gate. This suggests their departure from the outside world, or the world of the living, a suggestion which is emphasized in the narrator's description of their leaving the cemetery: 'Durch das Loch im Friedhofszaun wechselten sie in die frühmittägliche Gegenwart' (12: 26). Representations of the Dance of Death remind the living that they cannot escape the call from the grave. But, as seen above, some representations are also a reminder that we walk hand in hand with their those who have passed on. Reschke suggests that a similar relationship might exist between him and Alexandra and their dead brothers: 'Wenngleich verscharrt irgend- und nirgendwo, hocken sie dennoch in uns, wollen nicht aufhören, vielmehr gelebt, von uns gelebt werden' (12: 217). However, when Reschke has a vision which reminds him of his own mortality, his reaction is sheer panic. Grass uses forms of the verb *to run* five times in four lines of text to convey Reschke's panic-stricken flight from his own gravestone (12: 53).

The principal of equality underlying the Dance of Death is also relevant to Alexandra and Alexander's project. Despite Reschke's show of 'Lastenausgleich' in his decision to provide cheaper burials for less well-off former citizens of the Danzig area, and the former German Democratic Republic (12: 79), the scheme does not really offer equality, for it proves unable to satisfy the aspirations of the Polish expellees. Furthermore, the fact that the organization turns such a hefty profit that Reschke is able to invest in Chatterjee's rickshaw industry without anyone noticing that funds are missing is evidence that it is not operating with the sole aim of facilitating burials in the homeland. If that were really the case it could

reduce its fees substantially, thus making the scheme more equitable. The question of equality has another important aspect as well. If social station becomes irrelevant in the face of death, as the Dance of Death tells us, then so too, surely, must nationality. This certainly seems to be Alexandra's view when she says, 'mit Tod hört Feind auf, Feind zu sein' (12: 22) and, 'wo Politik aufhört und Mensch anfängt, nämlich wenn tot ist' (12: 33).

Despite Reschke's claim that the scheme is devoted to the dead, it is in fact a scheme very much devoted to the aspirations of the living. Its very *modus operandi* is based on distinctions which death annuls, and the scheme's profits go to the living, of course. Moreover, the profits are not used to 'equal the burden', but instead to provide more luxuries for those who can afford them, as well as to buy back land in the lost territories under the guise of leasing it. A poignant illustration of where the profits go is also to be seen in the difference in the type of food Alexandra and Alexander take with them on their first and second picnics. On the first picnic they enjoy simple, homely fare like garlic sausage, radishes and hard boiled eggs (12: 119), on the second, delicacies imported from New Zealand, Greenland and Norway are the order of the day (12: 226).<sup>111</sup> If Reschke were really interested in reconciliation he would be a little more willing to support the

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<sup>111</sup> Other writers have also used the strategy of having characters eat imported food rather than the local fare to illustrate their lack of commitment to the foundering local economy. See for example, in relation to former East Germany, Delius, *Die Birnen von Ribbeck*. Eating imported food is also a means of showing off wealth, or adaption to western values. This strategy is also used by Gabriele Wolff in *Rote Grütze*.



Polish economy with the large amount of money he has at his disposal, instead of buying imported food for the picnic.

One of the most significant aspect of the Dance of Death motif in *Unkenrufe* has to do with its etymology. A plausible explanation is that the term ‘Dance of Death’ (originally the French *danse macabre*) is derived from the ‘Dance of the Maccabees’, and refers to the shocking story recorded in 2 Maccabees 7 (Cabanis; Clark). The Dutch term ‘Makkabeusdans’ is cited in support of this theory (Clark). It is also possible that the Maccabees have been regarded as patron saints of the dead because they were believed to be the first to offer intercessionary prayers for the dead (Spivak 321-22). These intertextual connections suggest a number of interesting linkages with *Unkenrufe* between the content and construction of the Bible story, Grass’s game with numbers, and with the theme of historiography.

Bartlett observes that, for all its theological concern, 2 Maccabees is an important historical document, the text of which is preserved in the fifth century CE Codex Alexandrinus (479). This valuable Greek manuscript, which bears the same name as the hero and heroine of *Unkenrufe*, was named thus because it was brought to Europe from Alexandria where it had been the property of Cyril Lucar, Patriarch of Alexandria. In 1621 he was transferred to Constantinople, from whence he is believed to have sent the Codex to King James I of England as a present. The first of the great uncials to become known to the learned world, it is now in the British Museum. The Apocryphal books 1 and 2 Maccabees begin with the story of Alexander the Great, who, in 331 B.C., routed the Persians and became ‘master of the world’ (Neil 327).

Before I elaborate further on the relationship between *Unkenrufe* and the Bible, I would like to make a detour and describe an interesting precedent. It is Dieter Stolz's interpretation of *Ein weites Feld* in an article entitled 'Nomen est omen', which is especially relevant because *Unkenrufe* and *Ein weites Feld* began their gestation simultaneously during the six months that Grass and his wife Ute spent in India from August 1988 until January 1989.<sup>112</sup> I will refer only to those points in Stolz's article which are most relevant for my discussion of *Unkenrufe*.

Observing quite correctly that seemingly trivial items in Grass's works often lead straight to their core, Stolz describes the clues he followed in *Ein weites Feld*. His first observation is that the words of the title are made up of 13 letters, a number which often augurs ill. He suggests that this small detail provides one point of access to the labyrinthine narrative construction of the work. One might well wonder whether the numerical connections that we find in Grass's work are anything but 'freundlicher, aber blinder Zufall' – a question to which Harscheidt's answer is unequivocal: 'Letzteres kann eindeutig verneint werden' (253). John Reddick has observed that far from being simply 'an irritating mannerism' Grass's use of number is highly significant: '*Number* is fundamental to Grass's creative imagination' (194. Original emphasis). With these comments, and Stolz's observation in mind we note, then, that the number of letters in the title of

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<sup>112</sup> Amongst the books that weigh down the Grasses' luggage are Fontane's collected works, Joachim Schädlich's *Tallhover*, and Thomas Mann's *Joseph und seine Brüder*. The echo of the first two of these books is, of course, unmistakable in *Ein weites Feld*. The last of the three was a strong influence of Grass's construction of Chatterjee for *Unkenrufe* – Grass calls Chatterjee his 'bengalischer Joseph'. 'Mein [...] Joseph heißt Chatterjee und Subhas Chandra mit Vornamen'. ('Die Fremde als ausdauernde Erfahrung' 16: 454-55). The relationship between *Unkenrufe* and Mann's four-volume work suggests a rich field of enquiry that is not attempted in this thesis.

*Unkenrufe* is nine, which, according to Harscheidt is an equally unpropitious number. Harscheidt's examples include the orphic concept of the nine parts of Hell in Vergil and Dante, the demonic preponderance of the number nine in the witch scene in *Macbeth*, and the superstition that the nine of Clubs means death (310).<sup>113</sup> The number nine also occurs in the text of *Unkenrufe* where, as noted above in the section on the identity of the *Unkenrufe* narrator, the Number 9 tram provides an intertextual link to Grass's earlier work, *Katz und Maus*, and the problems of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*.

Stolz also turns his attention to the number of times Grass contrives to use the word 'Feld' in the work. These include compounds from 'Schußfeld' to 'Feldpostbrief' and 'Feldherrenhalle', and a number of others as well. This appears to be a similar strategy to that which I identified in *Unkenrufe* in relation to the number of times Grass uses the verb *to kneel* in relation to the angel. Then it is the rather uncommon name Hezekiel (Ezekiel), occurring three times in the text<sup>114</sup>, which catches Stolz's attention. The first time it appears, it is the name of a long forgotten editor of the *Kreuzzeitung* (13: 37). The second time the name is used, it is in reference to the editor's daughter, Ludowica Hezekiel (13: 259), and the third time it is the name of Fonty's dog. Emmi explains that although the dog answers to the name of 'Fifi', its real name, is "He-se-ke-il", wie's inner Bibel

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<sup>113</sup> In *Hundejahre*, in particular, the 'böse neun' can hardly be overlooked. Just a few examples cited by Harscheidt are the nine SA men involved in Amsel's beating; nine children who attack Jenny; nine crows which make nine black holes; and Grandmother Matern, who is stuck in her chair for nine years. There are many, many more.

<sup>114</sup> The number three is, of itself, an important number in Grass's work in general, as will be shown below under the heading 'Of Threes, Fours and Sevens'.

steht' (13: 455). When the second syllable of the priest's name, Matull, is reversed, you get the first syllables of the name Martin Luther. These clues led Stolz to the book of Ezekiel in the Lutheran Bible where he read, in the 37th chapter (the 37th because *Ein weites Feld* has 37 chapters) about the prophet being led by the Lord to a 'weites Feld' which is littered with the bones of the dead. The sub-title reads: 'The reunification of Israel under one shepherd'. For Stolz, the interpretive consequences are clear. The allusion to Fontane's *Effi Briest* with which everybody has associated the title, is a red herring. The 'broad field' is a field of the dead ('Totenfeld'). Stolz therefore concludes that *Ein weites Feld* depicts reunified Germany as a field of the dead; the crimes of the German people will be always present; and the countless victims will always lie in the cellars of the newly enlarged and restored state. Grass also uses the number 37 in *Unkenrufe*. It is reported that 37 thousand applications for 'Umbettung' are received (12: 173).

There is further feature of the three references to 'Hezekiel' in *Ein weites Feld* that may have escaped Stolz's attention, but which certainly add support to the contention that their placement is intentional, and that is the symmetry of their placement. The name Hezekiel occurs in chapters two, twelve and twenty-two. Each reference is separated from the next by ten chapters. The greatest intensification is reached in the twenty-second chapter. The number twenty-two is 'stets die Zahl des Universums', but as Harscheidt has shown in relation to *Aus dem Tagebuch einer Schnecke* and *Hundejahre*, Grass's use of the number in his previous work reflects not the perfect world of mediaeval theology, but the imperfect, fallen world (248-89). In *Ein weites Feld* therefore, and in combination

with the imagery of the field of the dead, it is suggestive of the new 'fallen' state in which Grass believes Germany finds itself as a consequence of having ignored the lessons of history and rushed into reunification.

In *Unkenrufe*, however, it is the number seven which is of greatest significance. Also very important are the numbers three and four, the sum of which is seven, as well as various multiples of seven. The combination of three, four and seven is also found in Grass's non-fiction work, and the context in which he uses it lends the sharpest of contours to observations of the functions of these numbers in *Unkenrufe*. Speaking on the fortieth anniversary of Germany's defeat, Grass declared that despite all of Germany's achievements, the country had still not done all in its power to address its crimes. He says that it is as if the curse of the victims hangs over them: 'Alttestamentlich, bis ins dritte, vierte, ins siebte Glied' ('Geschenkte Freiheit' 16: 152).

If the method used by Dieter Stolz to discover the relationship between *Ein weites Feld* and the Old Testament is followed with *Unkenrufe*, the link established between *Unkenrufe* and the Old Testament book of 2 Maccabees, suggested above, is further strengthened. *Unkenrufe* has seven chapters and, as seen above, it is in the seventh chapter of 2 Maccabees that the term *danse macabre* is said to have its origin. The seventh chapter of 2 Maccabees tells the story of the gruesome martyrdom of seven brothers and their mother. Furthermore, the historical events which are the subject of 1 and 2 Maccabees share many characteristics with the history that is the *raison d'être* of the Reconciliation Cemeteries Association. These include the expulsion of a people from their homeland. Jason's fate, as

described in 2 Maccabees, resembles that of the Germans whom Alexandra and Alexander's scheme purports to serve: 'Und wie er viele Menschen aus ihrem Vaterland in die Fremde getrieben hatte, so kam er selbst in der Fremde um [...]' (2 Macc. 5.9). The significance of the geographical location of the nation is also a consideration in 2 Maccabees: 'Aber der Herr hat nicht das Volk erwählt wegen des Ortes, sondern den Ort wegen des Volkes' (2 Macc. 5.19). The nation is punished for apostasy (2 Macc. 4.13-16). The abandonment of religious faith in the Bible story can be equated with the abandonment of Enlightenment values in Germany. Furthermore, in the crucial seventh chapter, the sixth of the seven brothers who perish under the most brutal of circumstances says: 'Denn wir sind selbst schuld an unserem Leid, weil wir gegen unseren Gott gesündigt haben. Darum konnte so Unfaßbares geschehen' (2. Macc. 7.18). The crimes against humanity and total war, flight, and deportation to forced labour camps are also described in 2 Maccabees:

Er befahl seinen Soldaten, alle, die ihnen begegneten, rücksichtslos niederzuhauen, und auch die zu erschlagen, die sich auf das Dach ihrer Häuser geflüchtet hätten. Sie richteten unter jung und alt ein Blutbad an; junge Männer, Frauen und Kinder kamen um, man erstach Mädchen und Säuglinge. In nur drei Tagen verlor die Stadt achtzigtausend Einwohner; vierzigtausend fanden im Kampf den Tod, ebensoviele, wie man ermordet hatte, wurden in die Sklaverei verkauft. (2 Macc. 5.12-14).

Even the construction of 2 Maccabees as a narrative has some similarities with *Unkenrufe*. Both the narrator of *Unkenrufe* (12: 188 and 194), and the narrator of 2 Maccabees rearrange the sequence of some events in order to facilitate a better rendering of the events as a story (Bartlett 479). Both narrators also enjoy storytelling. The *Unkenrufe* narrator must suppress 'romanhafte Ausflüge' (12:

245), and the narrator of 2 Maccabees finishes his history by expressing the hope that he has written a good story: ‘Ist [die Erzählung] gut und geschickt erzählt, habe ich mein Ziel erreicht; ist sie aber schlecht oder mittelmäßig erzählt – ich habe mein Bestes getan’ (2 Macc. 15.38). He also comments on the narrative process, just like the *Unkenrufe* narrator: ‘Nach dieser kurzen Abschweifung aber wollen wir mit der Erzählung fortfahren’ (2 Macc. 6.17).<sup>115</sup> It has been said that although 1 and 2 Maccabees tell the same story, there are some essential differences between them. The latter is historically less accurate, but is more readable ‘and certainly more entertaining’ (Neil 329). Furthermore, whereas the narrator of 1 Maccabees attributes military victories to astute leadership, the narrator of 2 Maccabees attributes such successes to the intervention of God. I hope to show in Chapter 6 of this thesis that the world views Alexander Reschke and the narrator of *Unkenrufe* are similarly divergent. The telling of Alexander and Alexandra’s story is influenced by the same contests between readability and accuracy as the story in the two biblical accounts of the same events. This fact, together with the competition between human endeavour and divine intervention as explanatory paradigms in both stories, show the universality of the concerns which face the hi/story teller.

## OF THREES, FOURS AND SEVENS

The number seven as the foundation number underlying the construction of *Unkenrufe* is suggested by the fact that the book is made up of seven chapters.

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<sup>115</sup> The topic of the *Unkenrufe* narrator’s construction of his account will be addressed in greater detail in Chapter 6 of this thesis.

However, the significance of the number seven for the text goes well beyond this. Grass could hardly have found a more suitable number than the number seven (which can be read as the balanced combination  $3 + 1 + 3$ , or the volatile  $3 + 4$ , ) to reflect the balanced and open structure of *Unkenrufe*, and the still open choices that Germans have to make in relation to their place in the world. In Harscheidt's analysis of number symbolism in the *Danziger Trilogie* seven is characterised as both 'bose' and 'heilig' or 'sakral' (558). The seven unites the profane with the sacred, the worldly four with the divine three, into a supranatural perfection of which God's rest after the six days of creation is the reflection. For the seven as an evil number Harscheidt refers to the seven-part hell of ancient Egypt, the Babylonian Ishtar myth with its Underworld surrounded by seven walls, the seven demons which were driven out of Mary Magdalene, and seven as the number of Cain's generations (292; 558).

While these connotations arise from traditional number symbolism, there is also a historical number seven that is very important in relation to the theme of *Unkenrufe* and that is the 7th of December 1970 – the date on which Brandt knelt at the site of the Warsaw ghetto, an event which, as shown above, was a significant move towards the reconciliation of Germany and Poland. As noted above in this section Willy Brandt's *de facto* ratification of the border with Poland was signed on the 7th of December, not the first of the month. Of course the change may just be a slip, but this is unlikely, as Harscheidt has shown in regard



to such discrepancies in the *Danziger Trilogie* (249).<sup>116</sup> It is therefore possible that the number seven is being intentionally avoided because the agreement, welcome though it was, was not 'perfect', not binding, as Germany had no common border with Poland at the time.

Both of the ways of constituting the number seven cited above (3 + 1 + 3, and 3 + 4), play a role in *Unkenrufe*. The seven chapters consist of three chapters leading up to the turning point in the fourth chapter, and three chapters following it (3 + 1 + 3). It is a matter of interpretation whether the fourth chapter is counted as belonging to the first three or the last three chapters of the work to make up the number constellation 3 + 4, or 4 + 3). This structure is mirrored in the number of members and structure of the Reconciliation Cemeteries Association Board of Directors: three Germans, three Poles, and Erna, whose journey in the company of the Association leads her to discover that her true home lies not with the first, but with the latter three. The seventh of Grass's thirteen *Novemberland* sonnets similarly refers to an uneasy symmetry, this time between potentially conflicting philosophies of art surrounding *Gesinnungsästhetik* debate, the place of 'committed' literature in united Germany, and the balance between aesthetics and morality.

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<sup>116</sup> In relation to *Die Blechtrommel* and *Der Butt* Dieter Arendt also observes that 'Namen und Zeichen nicht selten durcheinander geraten'. He attributes this to Grass's 'Spielchen', the aim of which is to reveal 'das inhumane Gerangel der Macher' and 'die Absurdität ihrer gemachten Gechichte' (553-54).

Each of the seven chapters of *Unkenrufe* is divided into a number of sections.

These vary in length, and the number of sections varies from chapter to chapter.

There are nine in the first chapter, seven in the second, thirteen in the fifth, eleven in the sixth, and, once more highlighting the importance of the three-four-and-seven constellation, ten sections in the third, fourth, and seventh chapters.

According to early Christian number symbolism the consideration of 3 and 4 as first principles not only accounts scientifically for the meaning of 7, but also of 10 (Hopper 85). The total number of sections in *Unkenrufe* is 70, or  $10 \times 7$ . The relevance of the number of sections for each of the chapters is worthy of further examination, but that will not be carried out here.

The number seven, as the structural principle for the whole work, is supported by numerous uses of the number in smaller matters. Chatterjee has seven rickshaws when Reschke meets him (12: 49). Reschke writes from ‘Siebenjahresdistanz’ (12: 216), and ‘sieht [...] sich seit nunmehr sieben Jahren glücklich verheiratet’ (12: 218). The Reconciliation Cemeteries Association’s conference room is on the seventeenth floor of Hotel Hevelius (12: 98). In early Christian number symbolism all numbers are reduced to their roots for explanation, and adding numbers sums up their significances into a single unit (Hopper 82). Thus seventeen is  $10 + 7$ . Harscheidt’s explanation of the significance of seventeen, as the sum of ten and seven, is particularly interesting in relation to the espoused philosophy of the Reconciliation Cemeteries Association. He notes the agreement amongst the early Church Fathers, Augustine, Gregory and Hrabanus Maurus, that the symbolic number seventeen reflects the harmonious union between The Commandments in the Old Testament and the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament,

and that this has been interpreted as follows: 'Das Gebot (10) kann ohne die Gnade (7) nicht erfüllt werden, dies ist die Lehre des numerus 17' (352). The fact that the digits of the year in which Alexander the Great became 'master of the world' – 331 B.C. – (Neil 327), add up to seven, on the other hand, is simply an interesting coincidence.

In *Unkenrufe* there are also numerous references to multiples of seven. In early Christian number symbolism, multiplying a number diffuses a property into a given number of directions or objects; squaring gives extension, and cubing produces solidity, height or godliness (Hopper 82). In *Unkenrufe* Reschke's room is on the fourteenth floor of the hotel, i.e.  $2 \times 7$ . An interesting progression of the number seven occurs in the context of the first meeting of the Reconciliation Cemeteries Association. From a bank statement in Reschke's documents, the narrator discovers: 'zweimal wurde das Mittagessen für vierzehn Personen aus dieser Kasse bezahlt' (12: 98). The number fourteen, however, does not appear to bear any relation to the number of people present – Alexander and Alexandra, the three German board members and a lawyer, the three Polish members and Erna Brakup – which is nine. We might therefore assume that Grass's use of the number fourteen could serve another function, and I would like to suggest the following: It has already been established that the number on which the whole of *Unkenrufe* is based is the seven. Fourteen is twice seven; and the total number of meals ordered is twenty-eight. This gives us the progression 7, 14, 28. The twenty-eight is repeated in the amount of start capital Alexander and Alexandra see as guaranteed: 28 Million (12: 79). It is interesting to note that Kjeld de Fine Licht, in his detailed description of the Roman Parthenon – the site of Reschke's own

literal toad-calls – refers to the same progression, calling attention to ‘the rhythm of recesses up through the building 7 – 14 – 28’ (200). Furthermore, the arrangement of recesses on the lowest zone of the interior structure, as described by de Fine Licht, consists of the same arrangement as the chapters of *Unkenrufe*, and the membership of the Board of the Reconciliation Cemeteries Association. There are eight large recesses, one of which is taken up by the portal. The remaining seven are distributed in the pattern 3 + 1 + 3. Then, in the upper zone, there are fourteen windows. De Fine Licht comments that normally there would have been sixteen, but that two, which should have been there theoretically, have been omitted for aesthetic reasons concerning the portal and the main apse. In the cupola there are five horizontal rows, each containing twenty-eight coffers. Grass’s familiarity with such details concerning the construction of the Pantheon may be assumed from Reschke’s reference to its dimensions: ‘Höhe und Durchmesser von einem Maß’ (12: 243), and the ‘sich verjüngenden Kassettfelder’ (12: 242).

Alexandra’s birthday is on the seventh of the month (12: 129). Her sixtieth birthday is celebrated on the 7th of August ’90 (12: 129), which gives rise to the number sequence 6, 7, 8, 9, 0. The sum of these digits is thirty, which is the ‘age of maturity’ (Daalen 562). To assume that this is an indication of Alexandra’s maturity, however, would be to disregard the fact that we can add a number to the

beginning of the sequence. The first part of Alexandra's surname, Piątk(a) refers to the number five in Polish, extending the sequence to 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 0.<sup>117</sup>

As indicated above, it is not only the number seven as such that is important in *Unkenrufe*, but also the fact that it is achieved by adding three and four, both basic numbers in Gnostic theology. The first numbers to be mentioned in *Unkenrufe* are Alexandra and Alexander's shoe sizes. The fourth sentence in the work reads: 'Schuhgröße dreiundvierzig neben Schuhgröße siebenunddreißig' (12: 7). The digits of Alexander's shoe size, 3 and 4, add up to seven. Alexandra's shoe size, on the other hand, reminds us again of the 37th chapter of Ezekiel, and corresponds directly with the number of applications for reburial, as mentioned above.

Of the greatest significance, however, is the correspondence between the way in which Grass views the guilt or debt for Germany's crimes as falling on successive generations of Germans, and his reference to the third, fourth and seventh generations cited above. As we have seen, these are the very numbers which are given such prominence in *Unkenrufe*. They can be read as a cipher for the debt of responsibility which falls to successive generations of Germans who were too young to be amongst the *Täter*. In Grass's view, 'Ein Rückstand, der – um es auf Neudeutsch zu sagen – nicht entsorgt werden kann' ('Vom Recht auf Widerstand' 16: 63). Significantly, four, three and seven are the numbers used for the size of Alexander's, not Alexandra's shoes (i.e. Germany, not Poland). The numbers used

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<sup>117</sup> For this information I am grateful to Alexander Papij.

for Alexandra's shoes evoke the 'field of the dead' which Poland became in the course of the war.

When the narrator first describes the scene at the market when Alexander and Alexandra meet, he says that the market woman has three buckets of flowers (12: 7), but on the following page he refers to 'drei oder vier Eimern' (12: 8).

Moreover, Alexander's action begins just as Alexandra pulls a fourth aster from one of the buckets (12: 8). The numbers three and four in combination occur again in *Unkenrufe* in the seven months Alexandra spent in Germany – three in Cologne and four in Trier (12: 34). Finally, we see the combination of three and four in the number of little frogs the narrator says he swallowed, brought up, and let hop away, while at his school's annexe in the country: 'Manchmal drei, vier zugleich' (12: 37). Here we are again reminded of a scene described in the 30th 'Frühschicht' of *Hundejahre* in which the schoolboys find amusement in tormenting the little frogs that live in a damaged swimming pool. The pool measures 'etwa sieben mal sieben' (5:129). There are also little lizards at this site, and Amsel swallows 'sieben quicke Schwänze nacheinander' (5: 131). Once again we see repetition being used by Grass as a means of emphasis.. The narrator adds that Amsel swallows seven times, then regurgitates the seven tails, and finally, the 'sieben geschluckten und wieder gespienen Molchschwänze schlafen langsam ein' (5: 131-32). Harscheidt identifies the 'böse' number seven in *Die Blechtrommel* and *Hundejahre* as 'Symbol des Todes, verursacht durch Krieg' (293). He also relates Grass's use of the number in the 32nd 'Frühschicht' in *Hundejahre* to 'dem Bedrohtsein der Grenze zwischen Polen und Deutschen' (300). Efta is the word for seven in the language of the Roma (293).

Huch, wie ist es im deutschen Wald so dunkel! Das Barbale geht um. Schrate betuppen sich. Huch wie ist es im polnischen Wald so dunkel! Gakkos wechseln, die Ballertmenger. Aschmatei! Aschmatei! [...] Balderle tritt auf Moos: Efta mal Efta zählt neunundvierzig . – Huch! Aber am dunkelsten ist es im deutsch-polnischen Wald [...]. Im Farn läuft die Grenze auf einem Bein (5: 134).

Finally, All Souls' Day, the day on which Grass contrives to have Alexander and Alexandra meet, is exactly seven days before the 9th of November, described in detail above, under the heading 'November Land'. In Grass's view, this anniversary will always over-ride any joy associated with the same date in 1989 unless his countrymen and women understand that the story of the victims will never be blessed with closure.

As well as their significance of components of the number seven, the numbers three and four are important in *Unkenrufe* individually. The number three, which is widely regarded as a divine number, and represents the 'triune principle of God' in early Christian number symbolism (Hopper 84), is prominent in *Unkenrufe* from the very first page, already occurring three times in the second paragraph.<sup>118</sup> As well as the shoe sizes, 43 and 37, mentioned above, there are three buckets of flowers. Fate is evoked as the third person present when Alexandra and Alexander meet (12: 7). This is followed by the mention of three kinds of flowers in the three buckets – dahlias, asters and chrysanthemums (12: 7) – which are described as being third rate (dritte Wahl) (12: 8). The flowers are of three colours – 'rostrot', 'blaßviolet' and 'weißliche' (12: 8). Alexander and Alexandra take three things

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<sup>118</sup> Harscheidt gives an extensive account of Grass's 'Dreizahlfreude' in the *Danziger Trilogie*. See esp. 258ff.

away from the market – the asters, mushrooms, and parsley (12: 12). Alexandra lives on the third floor, and both she and Reschke live in three-room apartments (12: 28). Three smells pervade Alexandra's kitchen on Alexander's first visit – the aroma of mushrooms cooking, varnish and Alexandra's perfume (12: 30). There are three projects by foreign investors to which Reschke attributes a common purpose: 'Alle drei Projekten ist eines gemein. Sie dienen den Menschen, insbesondere ältere Menschen. Sie sind sozusagen Seniorenfreundlich' (12: 50). When Reschke leaves the hotel after his first night with Alexandra there are three rickshaws and three rickshaw drivers waiting outside (12: 68).

In his examination of the *Danziger Trilogie* Harscheidt notes the 'besondere Beweiskraft of "'Trio"-Stellen' (266). In *Unkenrufe* the most important trio is that formed by Alexandra, Alexander and the narrator. Although the three do not present as a triangle at first glance, the narrator makes statements that permit their relationship to be constructed as such. There is, for example, the enigmatic unfinished remark, 'Vielleicht weil die Witwe ...' (12: 26). The narrator also says, 'Alexandra kommt mir näher, als dem Berichtenden erlaubt sein darf, doch meine Einschätzung, nach der ihr ein anderer Kerl als Reschke zu wünschen wäre, zählt nicht' (12: 73). The Board members are also constituted as trios of professions – not 'the butcher, the baker, the candlestick maker', but the priest, the banker and the public servant on the Polish side, and the parson, the businessman and the 'professional expellee', or ( '*Berufsvertriebener*' ) – Frau Johanna Detlaff is appointed at the suggestion of an expellee organization (12: 98) – on the German side.



Harscheidt notes countless instances of the secularization of the 'heiligen Drei' in the *Danziger Trilogie* in *Hundejahre* (258). In *Unkenrufe* Alexandra's gifts to Alexander can be read as a secularization of the three gifts of the magi to the infant Jesus. When they part for the first time Alexandra gives Alexander three items from her store of domestic treasures: a jar of beetroot, a piece of amber and some dried mushrooms threaded on a string (12: 66).

All three items that Alexandra gives to her lover have to do with conservation and can be read as an expression of her desire that their relationship be maintained despite their physical separation. They can also be understood as symbolic of a more simple way of life that is under threat, and which has in fact, almost disappeared in first-world countries. The home-conserved beetroot in particular is reminiscent of that simpler life style portrayed with such fondness in *Die Blechtrommel*, where the link between the produce of the land and the nourishment of families in the town was not made via the multinational supermarket chain, but rather through relatives and friends who brought produce from the country to their relatives in the town. It also evokes the Matzerath 'Kolonialwaren Laden' where sugar, honey and other commodities are hand packed by the shop keepers for their customers. No ready-made, cunningly contrived packaging intervened between producer and consumer.

The second of Alexandra's gifts, a walnut-sized piece of amber, has even more far-reaching connotations. Amber is the preserved sap of trees that were growing in Europe up to 100 million years ago. It is unique among gems as it comes into being, not from the process of magmatic smelting, but from the fossilization of

resin. Until comparatively recently it was generally thought that amber was only found along the Baltic coast, and it has therefore become synonymous with this region. It has inseparable links with the Slavic and Germanic peoples of the area, with excavations of ancient burial sites revealing that the precious ‘gold of the sea’ has been highly regarded there since the Neolithic Age. To the Greeks and Romans amber was also a highly valued item. The first written reference to amber is to be found in Homer’s *Odyssey*, and the Roman natural scientist Pliny recorded that such was the value of amber in his time that a tiny human figure of amber was worth more than a strong, living, human slave. In more recent times, in the 17th century, for example, Danzig and Königsberg became centres for the production of amber objects with many beautiful and costly pieces being commissioned as diplomatic gifts.<sup>119</sup> Thus, when Alexandra makes her gift of amber to Alexander, the transaction must be seen in this context.

Fascination with this extraordinary material is apparent in several of Grass’s works. In *Die Blechtrommel* Niobe, the fateful wooden figurehead called ‘de griehne Marjell’, who wreaks havoc from her place in the museum, has amber eyes that ‘look straight ahead’ (3: 240). In his satirical exploration of the mechanisms that we use to allocate responsibility and shift guilt, Oskar explains that for several centuries all kinds of ills, from the sinking of ships to the early death of the poet Opitz, are attributed to Niobe’s influence (3: 240-242). In *Der Butt*, too, Grass incorporates amber into his account of the early inhabitants of the

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<sup>119</sup> This information about amber is from the Amber Museum at Ribnitz-Damgarten.

Vistula region, drawing on their fascination with amber. The narrator of *Der Butt* collects seven (!) pieces of amber from the shore, pierces the soft stones with a glowing needle and, with appropriate incantations, threads them onto a cord for his partner, the 10th century priestess Mestwina (8: 19). In this story Grass imbues his amber with the power to increase virility. When the cord on which he has threaded the amber breaks, the stones fall into the soup and melt. In his manifestation as Bishop Adelbert of Prag, the narrator eats the soup and becomes ‘stößig wie ein Bock aus Aschmateis’ Stall’ (8: 19).

Reschke, however, does not ingest his piece of amber, nor does he appear to need its help as an aphrodisiac. In *Unkenrufe* the piece of amber that Alexander receives from Alexandra has a mosquito enclosed in it. Such ‘Inklusen’ are especially highly valued because of their comparative rarity. The motif of the insect enclosed for ever in a piece of amber has also been used in Siegfried Lenz’s *Heimatismuseum*. Zygmunt says, ‘[...], denn in den Dingen war etwas eingeschlossen – wie tief im Bernstein eingeschlossen’ (325). The *Unkenrufe* narrator uses it as an simili for Alexander and Alexandra’s relationship, saying of Alexander: ‘Er will wie die Mücke im Walnußgroßen Stück Bernstein sein: “Bin ich doch eingeschlossen in Dir ...”’, to which Alexandra replies, ‘Und ich in mein Alexander’ (12: 97). In this work of fiction the encased mosquito might also suggest the entrapment of individuals in historical processes, as much as the lasting union of individuals.

In contrast to Alexander and Alexandra’s modest single, walnut-sized piece of amber, and the counted pieces of amber in *Der Butt*, Frau Johanna Detlaff, the

overbearing bank director's widow on the German side of the Reconciliation Cemeteries Association Board, wears a 'Bersteinkette aus rundgeschliffenen Klunkern (12: 75), suggesting ostentatious wealth without aesthetic appeal. Her amber adornment is in keeping with her use of politically correct statements as a cover for morally questionable intentions.

Alexandra's third gift, the dried mushrooms, serves to reinforce the erotic connection between Alexandra and Alexander which began with their purchase of fresh mushrooms at the market and continued when they cooked and ate the mushrooms in Alexandra's flat. The dried 'Steinpilze' therefore combine the ideas of the nourishing earth, of culinary and sexual pleasure, and the promise that these can both be enjoyed again in the future.

The positive aspects of the number three as it is presented in Alexandra's gifts carries through to the time when Reschke finally responds to the Reconciliation Cemeteries Association's hijacking of his idea. It is under 'Ziffer drei der Tagesordnung' that Reschke finally gets to his feet to oppose the over-commercialization of his project (12: 201-2). Sometimes the number three appears in its squared form – nine. Rather than interpreting these instances in relation to the 'böse neun' which is so prevalent and so appropriate in Harscheidt's commentary on the *Danziger Trilogie*, I prefer to see them as instances of events that are open to conflicting interpretations. This aspect of the nine letters of the title of *Unkenrufe* has been discussed above. Another instance is when 'the penny drops' and Alexander and Alexandra's idea begins to take shape, which is 'kurz vor Schlag neun', i.e. 3 x 3. Here the reader is faced with choosing between

Reschke's euphoric, teleological view of events and the narrator's cynical one (12: 32). Coincidentally, it was on the third day of third month of 1787 that Goethe committed the saying 'Neapel sehen und sterben' to paper (*Goethes Werke* 189).<sup>120</sup> It is less unlikely, however, that the date Grass chooses for Alexandra's birthday is coincidental. As noted above, her birthday is on the seventh of the month.

Finally, the number three is intimately associated with Alexander and Alexandra's presumed deaths and the narrator's obligation to Reschke. Even when it was raining without let up, the narrator remembers, the school children had to stay out in the fields collecting potato beetles until they had filled three one-litre bottles, and several times it was Alexander who topped up the narrator's second bottle, and gave him the third one when he was, as noted above, a 'fauler Hund, der immer sonstwo mit den Gedanken war' (12: 244). According to the narrator, the fatal accident occurs three days after Alexander and Alexandra leave Rome, and the car plunges over 30 metres down a cliff (12: 245).

I will conclude my brief account of Grass's play with numbers in *Unkenrufe* by looking at the number four, which represents the 'quadruple principle of man' (Hopper 82). Alexander and Alexandra's meeting on All Souls' Day, which is so impressed upon the reader by the narrator, provides an immediate intertextual link to the sonnet of that name in the *Novemberland* cycle. *Allerseelen* is the fourth sonnet in the cycle. In *Allerseelen* Grass writes, 'umsonst war alles hoffen:/ Die

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<sup>120</sup> See above, under the heading 'The Title Metaphor' for the potential ambiguity of this saying.

Gräber alle stehn auf Allerseelen offen' (1: 288). It is a message that coincides very closely with the 'Totenfeld' imagery of *Ein weites Feld*, which, as shown above, is repeated in *Unkenrufe* in the seemingly gratuitous mention of the size of Alexandra's shoes (12: 7). It is also closely aligned with the Dance of Death motif, and therefore to the seventh chapter of 2 Maccabees. In Germany, for Grass, the graves of the victims of National Socialism in particular are open; they cannot be forgotten.

The ideas expressed in the fourth sonnet of *Novemberland* are reinforced visually by means of the graphic which Grass has made for each facing page. For the fourth sonnet the graphic is first and foremost a representation of the number four, denoting that *Allerseelen* is the fourth sonnet in the cycle. However, it is executed in such a way as to make further associations strikingly obvious. The figure four is stylised so as to embrace the form of the Christian cross. Behind it numerous crosses of diminishing size give the impression of an endless cemetery, a field of crosses that stretches into the distance, without end, a 'Totenfeld'. Simultaneously the stylised figure four evokes in its angularity the hooked cross of the swastika. It is no coincidence (or, 'no wonder') that Grass has chosen to make his All Souls' Day poem the fourth in the cycle.

In *Die Blechtrommel*, in the chapter entitled 'Kein Wunder', Oskar reflects on the word 'cross' and lists all of the different kinds of crosses he can think of. Harscheidt points out that these examples total forty in number, and that this is not simply coincidental. He explains that the figure four is structured very closely on the 'signatura crucis', and that the 'Urbild' of the cross reflects not only the

number four but also the number 10 ( $1 + 2 + 3 + 4 = 10$ ). Both numbers are the factors of the 'cross-composition' in *Die Blechtrommel* ( $4 \times 10 = 40$ ) (310). The symbolism which Harscheidt discovers in Grass's use of the number four in the *Danziger Trilogie* is of relevance for the study of *Unkenrufe* as well. Here the number four is stressed time and again, as is the 'four-ten' constellation. Alexandra and Alexander meet at 'Schlag zehn' (12: 7 and 9) and the first place they go together is the cemetery which, as we see in Grass's illustration in *Novemberland*, is symbolized by the number four. Alexander and Alexandra buy four mushrooms on the day they meet. The combination of three and four is also present in relation to these mushrooms, as the fact that there are four of them is mentioned three times: Alexander says he would like to present Alexandra with 'diesen hier, den, den und noch den', then the narrator describes a photograph of them lying 'zu viert' (12: 11). At the third mention of the four mushrooms they are described with three adjectives: Alexandra cleans the 'dickbäuchigen, breitrempig und bucklig geschirmten Steinpilze' (12: 29). Another four occurs in the number of people involved with the Reconciliation Cemeteries Association. If we count Alexander and Alexandra – who, for some inexplicable reason, 'sich [...] ohne Stimme im Aufsichtsrat verstehen wollten' (12: 99) – there are four Polish and four German representatives at the meetings of the Reconciliation Cemeteries Association. Erna is in the middle, as shown above.

The number four receives further emphasis in the central, fourth chapter of *Unkenrufe* when the narrator reports that he finds amongst Reschke's documents photographs of four flattened toads, flattened from having been run over numerous times. The narrator observes, while viewing the photographs of the four flattened

toads, that they have four fingers on their front feet, and four fingers on their back feet (12: 133). Although the narrator believes, from looking at the photographs, that the flattened creatures are the kind of toads called *Erdkröten* (Family *Bufo* *Bufonidae*, or True Toads), Reschke, who is supposed to be the expert on toads, writes in his diary that they are *Unken* (Family *Bombinatoridae*, or Firebelly Toads), that is to say, the toad that is the Cassandra equivalent, rather than the one that is the ‘toady’ equivalent. The two possibilities thus suggested allow the four flattened toads to function figuratively and biologically simultaneously – possibilities that may well have arisen from Grass’s dual encounters with flattened toads, firstly in ‘plattgedrückten Form’ in Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm’s *Deutsches Wörterbuch* (1082), and secondly in real life. As shown above, they function as omens of bad times to come, showing in their impotence that the voice of the warner has been silenced. On the environmental level they showing that increased use of motor vehicles and global warming are taking a heavy toll on the native wildlife. Grass also depicts four ‘plattgefahrene Unken’ in *Fundsachen* where four flattened toads (in this case ‘Kröten’) lie spread across the page for the poem ‘Aus dem Tagebuch’ (138-9). It is in the fourth chapter of *Unkenrufe* that the less attractive side of Alexandra and Alexander’s venture asserts itself.

In *Unkenrufe* August, the eighth month (i.e. twice four) is the ‘Krisenmonat’ (12: 127) during which the tourists – whose spending would be a boost to the Polish economy – fail to come to Poland. The Polish Złoty, although ‘stabilized’ and convertible, is of little value and prices skyrocket; the Gulf Crisis, brought up close by television, adds to the gloom, as do the crises in Georgia, Lithuania and Yugoslavia. Crises in the fictitious Reconciliation Cemeteries Association parallel



those in the real world. Against Alexandra and Alexander's wishes the cemetery is enclosed by a wire mesh fence which the Polish press immediately equates with concentration camp fences.

Finally, a strong link exists between *Unkenrufe* and the Fourth Month in *Der Butt*. The figures who constitute this link form a bracket around the story of Alexander and Alexandra's project. At the beginning of the story there is the baroque poet Martin Opitz, whose memorial stone Reschke visits the day after he meets Alexandra (12: 52). At the end there is Anton Möller, whose painting, *Der Zinsgroschen*, forms the backdrop for Alexander and Alexandra's wedding (12: 239). Both Opitz and Möller are lovers of the cook of the Fourth Month in *Der Butt*, Agnes Kurbiella, who loves them both with equal intensity. The narrator of the Fourth Month is simultaneously poet and painter, which, as Siegfried Mews observes, corresponds closely with Grass's own artistic bent as both writer and graphic artist (166).

Grass's play with numbers in his literary works is not confined to any particular theory of number symbolism. Individual numbers and combinations of numbers are not fixed as symbols or ciphers for any particular things or ideas. If one were to try to press them into service in this way we would find that 'Die Dinge widersprechen einander', as Grass formulates his view of reality (Durzak, 'Geschichte' 12). Instead the numbers that appear in his texts evoke both congruent and conflicting ideas and constellations of ideas within, between and beyond the multi-layered reality which he portrays. They contribute to the unity of his oeuvre while simultaneously evading fixed interpretation.

### **‘IN POLEN KIRCHE IST ALLES’**

While Grass remains fascinated by the ritual, the liturgy, and the more ‘pagan’ side of Catholic mythology, as shown above, he also has concerns about the role the Catholic Church is playing in the new Poland.<sup>121</sup> In *Unkenrufe* he wastes no time in creating a situation in which his characters must carry out their business well within the sphere of influence of the Polish Catholic Church. The action commences under the eye of the Church (or its bricks-and-mortar representations), and the basis of Alexander and Alexandra’s first interaction with one another – that is, the buying of flowers in keeping with religious ritual – paves the way for overt statements regarding the Church’s role in modern Poland. As Alexandra says, ‘in Polen Kirche ist alles’ (12: 72). In *Unkenrufe* Grass gives recognition to the role the Polish Catholic Church has played historically. According to Misztal, the Church has been the bearer of Polish national cohesion and aspiration, even – or especially – during times when the Polish state as such had temporarily ceased to exist (75-77). Norman Davies’s account of the relationship between the Polish people and Rome makes it very clear that it was not action from above, that is to say, from Rome, that was responsible for the special significance of the Catholic Church in Poland, for Rome has tended historically to take the part of the temporal powers against the Poles. Instead, it was the way the people themselves clung to their faith as a last consolation against alien oppression that was responsible for its pre-eminence. Alexandra’s comment, ‘in Polen ist Kirche immer da und

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<sup>121</sup> This is one of the aspects of Grass's work which has interested me since I wrote my honours thesis on the role of the narrator in *Unkenrufe* and the historical context of the work in 1995.

Regierung mal da und mal weg' (12: 74), echoes Bishop Wincenty Urban's assessment of the situation with regard to the Church in Poland: 'Kingdoms, dynasties, republics, parties and regimes have come and gone; but the Church seems to go on for ever' (Qtd in Davies 208). The percentage of practising Catholics in Poland exceeds that of any other country in Europe (Davies 636). Grass thematizes the relationship between the Poles, their Church – whose 'path is strewn with ambiguities' (Davies 225) – and the developing Polish free-market economy.

As a symbol of one of the aspects of the Polish Catholic Church, Black Madonna of Tschenstochau (mentioned above as one of Poland's 'saviours') stands not for the Church as an institution, but for the simple faith of the believers. In *Katz und Maus* Grass represents Mahlke's dual allegiances to the Church and to Poland by making a medallion bearing her image one of his most precious possessions. According to Polish Catholic doctrine (based on the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the World Today – Gaudium et spes*):

Love for one's country, patriotism, is an important, inherited social virtue [...]. A nation [...] differs from a state because a nation is a communion of souls, it may exist, at least to a certain extent, independently from a territory and without its own state (Misztal 75).

During the time when there was no Polish state, the Polish Catholic Church was the only institution which could offer the persecuted Poles protection. Under the communist regime it was a spiritual leader and a protector of national values and moral principles, even for people who did not believe in God (Szczypiorski, 'Katholische Festung' 140). In *Unkenrufe* Grass portrays the comfort that the Church provides to non-believers by means of Alexandra's relationship to the

Church which consists in her assimilation of the behaviour of Catholic ritual. Reschke's observation of Alexandra's apparently devout behaviour at Erna Brakup's funeral leads him to conclude that the 'in Polen gelebter Unglaube katholisches Verhalten nicht ausschließt' (12: 211).

It was the Polish Solidarity movement, *Solidarność*, and the people around Lech Wałęsa who, by their opposition to Moscow, started the process which eventually led to the sweeping political changes in eastern Europe, and it is ironic that this opposition was possible because there was a Polish Pope in Rome 'who was there like a lighthouse for the new political orientation' (Thies 77). There were great expectations of the Polish Pope, especially when he visited his old homeland from the 1st to the 9th of June 1991. But Grass says that he has disappointed those hopes 'auf einer grauenhaften Art und Weise' (*Günter Grass. Martin Walser*). Grass's integration of the Pope's 1991 visit into the fiction of *Unkenrufe* sums up this disappointment with the 'Polish Pope' with epigrammatic crispness. The narrator comments that upon arrival in Poland he kissed the concrete tarmac over the Polish soil (12: 242). In this way he says that the Pope is not in touch with the Polish soil or the needs of its people, and Alexandra, unlike the naive Wróbel, is neither surprised nor disappointed. Grass also criticises the church for attempting to rewrite history by teaching that Danzig had always been Polish (12: 122).<sup>122</sup>

The Church's assimilation of worldly values also comes in for criticism in *Unkenrufe* in the shape of Bieroński, the priest in jeans. He not only dresses to

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<sup>122</sup> Cf. also 'Scham und Schande' 16: 219.

blend in with the temporal world, he also engages in the bartering of favours in a manner which is quite out of keeping with the church's spiritual mission. Like some church leaders in the past, Bieroński is silent when he should be taking a stand. He virtually sells himself for the promise of 'die Finanzierung eines "echt spätgotischen" Gewölbes' (12: 148). He makes room available in his church for minority groups for the same reason, rather than embracing or rejecting the minority groups on principle (12: 191), and sleeps through Board meetings which do not touch on this subject. Although Bieroński's desire for a new dome for his church is not wrong, the fact that it has to be 'echt spätgotisch' (12: 148), that is, another deception like all the other deceptions and restorations, reflects the view that the church too is practising deceit. Making room for minority groups is a laudable act, but Bieroński's motive is wrong, just as Cemetery Association's decision to reject revanchist headstone inscriptions is based on the wrong motives.

Alexandra is well aware of the temporal power of the Church: 'Fragen werd ich, aber vorsichtig, denn mit Kirche muß man vorsichtig sein immer' (12: 72); and 'denn in Polen ist Kirche immer da, und Regierung mal da und mal weg' (12: 74). In fact, fears have been expressed that, with the weakness of the Polish government, the country was in danger of becoming a 'Glaubensstaat'. With the end of Communism and the establishment of a market economy in Poland, the Church is in a state of crisis. It is having difficulty coming to terms with a pluralist environment that does not recognize the monopoly of one, single, valid truth (Szczypiorski, 'Katholische Festung' 141). Like Poland's other 'saviours', the church has been a benefactor, but now the trust that has been placed in it may well

be misplaced. In a list of ills that are besetting Poland – the unemployment and poverty, children begging in the street, the breakdown of public services such as lighting and roads, the increase in crime, the rapid drop in the value of the złoty – Reschke includes ‘den Machtzuwachs des katholischen Klerus’ (12: 45). The narrator is also worried about it: ‘das freie Polen überließ sich nun mehr den Zwangsverordnungen der Kirche’ (12: 226). This trend could be understood as another betrayal of the Polish people, for until recent times the Polish Catholic Church had been ‘eine Festung der Bürger- und Menschenrechte’ (Szczypiorski, ‘Teufelsstunde’ 276) and the Poles had been able to draw strength from its teaching on the integrity of the individual (Szczypiorski, ‘Katholische Festung’ 141). In circumstances such as these Grass’s evocations of the Polish national anthem (12: 204 and 241) emphasise once again the fragility of Polish existence.

The churchmen on the Board of the Reconciliation Cemeteries Association, with their respective Polish Catholic and German Protestant allegiances, fail to show any interest in the well-being of the souls of their respective flocks, and Karau, the German man of God, is shown to be supporting revisionist tendencies.<sup>123</sup> This is particularly obvious at the scene of the first burials. ‘Tact’ rather than true reconciliation determines the choreography of the event (12: 115). Frau Detlaff is not told that her speech is contrary to the whole concept of reconciliation, she is merely requested to save it for another occasion (12: 114). Of Karau, the narrator

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<sup>123</sup> In the English translation of *Unkenrufe* Karau is referred to as a ‘Doctor of Philosophy’. In the original he is a ‘Doctor of Theology’. There are a number of similar problems with the translation, not all of which have been commented upon by Butler.

says: ‘Etwas zu lang, die Predigt des Konsistorialrates Karau, der überbetont die Wörter “Heimaterde” und “Rückkehr” in seine immerfort Gleichnisse suchenden Sätze schummelte’ (12: 114).

Grass also comments on the role of the Church in the secular world by means of the insertion of two paintings, one near the beginning, and one at the end of the story. The first is a reproduction, a ‘gespentischer Ensor’ (12: 30). The title of the painting by Ensor (1860-1949) is *Christi Einzug in Brüssel*, and it hangs in Alexandra’s flat. The second is an original. It is Anton Möller’s painting *Der Zinsgroschen* which will be discussed in a greater detail below. Both artists position Jesus in the centre of financial capitals of Europe. James Ensor’s allegorical picture in graphite and Conté crayon on off-white woven paper (Howe) contrasts sharply with the sumptuous colours of the much earlier painting which Grass positions at the end of *Unkenrufe*. Ensor depicts the second coming of Christ, seated on a donkey, as in the Biblical entry into Jerusalem. It is as if the event is choreographed for the public. Banners welcoming Jesus as ‘King of Brussels’ mingle with those proclaiming commercial, sectional and political interests. Christ almost blends in with the crowd, and is only discernable because of the darker colouring used. *Der Zinsgroschen* is to be the subject of the next section of this thesis.

### ***DER ZINSGROSCHEN***

The narrator of *Unkenrufe* tells us that Alexander and Alexandra make their marriage vows in front of a painting entitled *Der Zinsgroschen* – ‘für einen Kunsthistoriker, der eine Vergolderin heiratet, der gemäße Rahmen’ (12: 239).

Although the reference to the painting is very brief, Grass's inclusion of the painting at this point is worth exploring because of the web of intertextual references that open out from the narrator's seemingly off-handed comment. In one of the three scholarly articles on *Unkenrufe* (cited above, under *Unkenrufe* – Reception) Chloe Paver uses the painting as a springboard into her discussion of 'Ethical Capitalism' in *Unkenrufe* ('Jesus'). However, the article in question by no means exhausts the allegorical and intertextual readings that the narrator's reference to the painting offers.

Paver identifies the painting as a depiction of the incident recounted in the Bible in Matthew 22.15-22, Mark 12.13-17 and Luke 20.20-26. "Zinsgroschen", she explains, 'is Luther's title for the Gospel passage in which Jesus and the Pharisees discuss the question of paying tax (more modern translators render it as 'Die Steuerfrage')' (82). In the story to which Paver refers, Jesus is being questioned about paying a tax demanded by the Roman rulers, Caesar's tax, or *die kaiserliche Steuer*. The question elicits Jesus's frequently cited dictum: 'Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's', which he justifies by referring to the fact that it is Caesar's head which is depicted on the coin.

Paver's argument, however, is not concerned with Jesus's ruling on the subject of taxes, but rather, with the manner in which the painting itself has been executed, for she finds that it presents a 'conflict of values of which the contemporary viewer was presumably unaware' (71). In Paver's view the painter, by placing Jesus on the Langer Markt, the hub of commercial activity in 17th century Danzig, and by alluding to Jesus's comments on paying tribute to Caesar, 'suggests that



the son of God endorses the mercantile spirit of Danzig's prosperous traders and the tax-raising powers of its civil administration' (71). In Ensor's work, in contrast, one has the feeling that Christ is dwarfed, even overwhelmed, by the commercial interests which surround the tiny figure at the centre of the composition.

*Der Zinsgroschen* and other painted allegories by Danzig's *Stadtmaler* Möller are familiar features of some of Grass's earlier works.<sup>124</sup> In *örtlich betäubt* Möller is described as an 'in manneristischen Allegorien schwelgende(r) Künstler' who is indebted to his future father-in-law, the Mayor of Danzig, for securing him a commission to paint *The Last Judgement* (6: 274). The anecdote told in *örtlich betäubt* suggests that social commentary on the relationship between God and Mammon may not have the most pressing issue on the mind of a 17th century *Stadtmaler*, dependent, as he was, on the good will of the city fathers for his living (6: 274-276).

Eberhard Starusch, the narrator of *örtlich betäubt*, uses his 'Gleichnis vom Maler Möller' as an allegory to help him explain his own love-triangle after the dentist has refused to hear another word about the triangle involving Starusch, Sieglinde and Schlottau. Möller's triangle consists of himself, the voluptuous *Flissackenmädchen* whom he uses as model for the naked figure of Sin in his allegorical painting *Jüngstes Gericht*, and his fiancée, who is the daughter of

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<sup>124</sup> Both of Möller's paintings discussed in this section are referred to in the respective texts as allegories (6: 274 and 8: 143). *Das Jungste Gericht* displays 'allegorische Verspieltheiten' (8: 323), and Möller himself is said to become 'allegorisch' (8: 322).

Danzig's mayor, viz. the commissioner of the painting. The story is told in *örtlich betäubt* as an example of artistic compromise (Bruce 54-55), and does not need to be elaborated further here. It is the outcome that is of interest for the present discussion. In the final version of Möller's painting, according to Starush's anecdote, the voluptuous figure of Sin bears the face of his fiancée, the mayor's daughter (although it had to be rendered unrecognisable as it was hardly fitting for her to be depicted in this role); the city fathers are in the boat with Sin, on their way to Hades with her; and the painter Möller is represented as the saviour, who prevents the boat holding the city fathers and the mayor's daughter from going to Hell.

The reference to Möller's painting, *Der Zinsgroschen*, in *Unkenrufe* is, as pointed out above, not nearly as comprehensive. Chloe Paver suggests that the cursory description may be accounted for by the fact that Grass had already described it in some detail in *Der Butt*, in which, as mentioned above, the painter shares the sixth cook, Agnes Kurbiella, with the poet Martin Opitz. She notes that the *Butt* narrator is disappointed at Möller's lack of social realism in this painting which is believed to be such a precise representation of 17th century Danzig that it is being used as a guide for the reconstruction of the city after World War II (just as Canaletto's work was used to aid in the reconstruction of Warsaw).<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Tycner notes that it is 16th to 17th century Danzig, not pre-war Danzig, that has been reconstructed by the Polish government. He also describes the ageing German tourists in a manner wholly consistent with Grass's commentary in *Unkenrufe*. The narrator in *Der Butt*, however, says that the 'bauliche Einheit aus dem vierzehnten Jahrhundert' has been restored (8: 153).

Another intertextual connection exists between *Der Butt* and *Unkenrufe* in relation to Möller, the painter of *Der Zinsgroschen*. It is the existence of an art historian. In *Der Butt* the art historian is called by the flounder as an expert witness in his defence. Not surprisingly, given the association I have already described between *Unkenrufe* and the Fourth Month in *Der Butt*, the case under consideration is that of the kitchen maid Agnes, whom the flounder had recommended to the ‘erloschenen Künstlern’ Anton Möller and Martin Opitz as a Muse. She was to warm their ‘half-empty’ beds and, as they were both in need of inspiration, dispense sensual encouragement. ‘Es fehlten den beiden Abgestorbenen die ideelle Mundzumundbeatmung. Es mangelte der sprichwörtliche Mußenkuß’, says the flounder in his defence (8: 320). The art historian is able to confirm what the flounder says, with his testimony concerning ‘wie bemerkenswert Möller vor seiner etwa um 1610 erlahmenden Schaffenskraft gewesen sei und welche größere Hoffnung sein malerisches Talent durchaus habe erwecken können’ (8: 323). Although young Agnes was not able to warm up her ‘zwei kalte Öfen’ (8: 318), with her cooking and her cosiness in their respective beds, the same cannot be said of the gildress Alexandra, whose inspiration and support enable Alexander to escape the stagnation of the university and achieve astounding success in Gdańsk. Not surprisingly perhaps, Alexander is moved to comment on the very restoration work referred to in *Der Butt* (12: 26). When Alexandra enchants his students with an impromptu lecture on her craft, he notes: ‘Mit all ihrem Charme überspielte sich die jede Rekonstruktion zugrunde liegende Fälschung’ (12: 96) – an attitude that Grass invites the reader to think about, for Alexandra has already questioned Reschke’s view: ‘Ist Kunst nicht Fälschung immer bißchen? Aber verstehe, daß

deutsche Kunst muß hundert Prozent sein' (12: 93).<sup>126</sup>

While Möller's painting of Danzig, as an historical document in the form of an artistic representation, makes it possible for a faithful reconstruction to be carried out, one certainly could argue that both the original and reconstruction are 'gilded'. Möller's is an idealised representation of Danzig as it does not show the ravages of the plague, which, as the narrator of *Der Butt* notes, was ravaging the town at the time: 'Aber keine Sterbelaken hangen aus Fenstern. Keine überlandenen Karren beleben den Hintergrund. Kein Arzt geht vermummt mit der Klapper um. Nirgendwo wird Stroh verbrannt. Kein warnendes Gelb herrscht vor' (8: 143).

Similarly, the physical and social reconstruction of Danzig as post-war Gdańsk has been 'gilded' or 'sanitised' to suit the philosophy of its rulers. Where Möller did not admit signs of the plague into his paintings, presumably because it was not in the interests of the city fathers for him to do so, the reconstruction of Gdańsk is characterised by efforts to erase or falsify the German aspects of its historical heritage. As Alexandra says: 'Schande für Polen ist das. Haben weggeräumt alles, wo bißchen stand deutsch drauf' (12: 21). It is the heritage which Alexander is in the process of uncovering in the overgrown cemeteries – Germans, Jews, French prisoners-of-war, and 'polonisierter Tartaren' (12: 144-45). Jerzey Wróbel begins to go against the tide of falsifying history by omission. He searches out oral

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<sup>126</sup> This remark is of general relevance, but was actually made in connection with the painter Malskat, whose story is told in detail in *Die Rättin*.

history in the form of Erna's recollections of pre-war Danzig (12:182), and when he searches in the city's archives he comes up with information that belies what he has been taught by teachers and priests, namely that the Gdańsk area has always been Polish (12: 122).

Ironically, it is another aspect of the same heritage that Alexandra is in the process of gilding: Hans Düringer's astronomical clock (12: 83), the organ (12: 25), and the kneeling angel. The situation is highlighted in the disagreement between Alexander and Alexandra concerning the angel's origin. Alexandra believes the angel to be typical Krakow school, while Alexander thinks it is South German, possibly by the famous wood carver, Riemenschneider, or perhaps Bohemian (12: 208-9).

In *Der Butt*, Grass introduces the reader to the graphic artist Richard Strya (like Alexandra, a refugee from Vilnius) as a virtual antidote to Möller's 'gilded' depictions of Danzig. His 'multi-layered' works include representations of lepers and the plague: 'Aussätzige, denen sich mit der Haut das zweite Gesicht pellt. [...] Die Hochzeit unter der Pestglocke' (8: 157). The narrator in *Der Butt* also notes: 'In Sankt Trinitatis stehen Gläubiger und Touristen auf der Abdeckung über Anton Möller's Stadtmalergebein' (8: 156). This provides a clue as to why Grass may have chosen to use the *Zinsgroschen* painting as a backdrop for the *Hochzeitspaar*. In reality the real painting does not even hang in the Red Hall, where Alexander and Alexandra marry. Grass has put it there for the sake of his story. Paver has discovered that the work is actually in the municipal finance office which once served as a customs office. She also suggests that Grass could

have cited another painting in the Town Hall instead – *The Apotheosis of the Development of Gdańsk under the Wings of the White Eagle*, which forms the centrepiece of the Red Hall ceiling (82). Had he done this, however, or had Alexander and Alexandra make their marriage vows in the Municipal Finance Office where the painting *Zinsgroschen* painting hangs in real life, the meaning would have been entirely different, and perhaps fitted better with Paver's interpretation of the painting's significance in *Unkenrufe* as well.

I would like to suggest that painting is a not a depiction of the 'render unto Caesar' story, but of a different incident altogether, one which is recorded only once in the New Testament, in Matthew 17.24-27. The modern translator's heading of the story of *Der Zinsgroschen* is 'Von der Tempelsteuer'.<sup>127</sup> The crucial difference between this story and the one which Paver cites, is that they relate to two different taxes, one applied by foreign rulers, and one by the Temple.

In the story to which I believe the painting alludes, Jesus's disciple Simon Peter is being questioned not about *die kaiserliche Steuer* but rather, about the tax raised by the Temple (*die Tempelsteuer*) described in the Law of Moses (Exodus 30.11-16) which was levied on all adult males for the upkeep of the temple in Jerusalem.<sup>128</sup>

Matthew tells the following story:

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<sup>127</sup> The reason that the incident is recorded only by Matthew is probably that he wrote for the early Jewish Christians and it is Jewish law with which it is concerned. Cf. Commentary in *The New Testament* 1901. N. pag.

<sup>128</sup> Cf. *The New English Bible. Companion to the New Testament*, 70-71.

24. Da sie nun gen Kapernaum kamen, gingen zu Petrus, die den Zinsgroschen einnahmen, und sprachen: Pflegt euer Meister nicht den Zinsgroschen zu geben?

25. Er sprach: Ja. Und als er heimkam, kam ihm Jesus zuvor und sprach: Was dünkt dich, Simon? Von wem nehmen die Könige auf Erden den Zoll oder Zins? Von ihren Kindern oder von den Fremden?

26. Da sprach zu ihm Petrus: Von den Fremden. Jesus sprach zu ihm: So sind die Kinder frei.

27. Auf das aber wir sie nicht ärgern, so gehe hin an das Meer und wirf die Angel, und den ersten Fisch, der herauffährt, den nimm, und wenn du seinen Mund aufstust, wirst einen Stater finden; den nimm und gib ihnen für mich und dich.<sup>129</sup>

One explanation for Jesus's response to Peter is that it is an analogy. When Jesus speaks of the earthly monarchs, the early Christian Jews to whom he was speaking would have understood this to mean the lesser kings whom the Romans allowed to administer parts of Palestine under the general jurisdiction of the Roman Empire. The taxes were levied on the subjected peoples, who were aliens in the eyes of the Romans, and the Romans themselves were exempt. Jesus's answer implies that just as the Romans are exempted from the taxes they levy, the Jews should have a similar immunity with regard to taxes from their own institutions. In the commentator's view, the fact that Jesus says they should pay the tax anyway probably shows firstly, his desire for his disciples not to cause offence, and secondly, that he may have been objecting to the notion of the tax being a formal obligation instead of a voluntary offering (*The New English Bible* 70-71). An earlier commentator puts forward the view that because Jesus is the Son of God,

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<sup>129</sup> *Die Bibel*, 1954. The 'stater' to which this text refers is the coin with which the temple tax had to be paid. Because many visitors to the temple did not have this particular coin, there were money changers in the temple who would change whatever coins the visitors had for the one which was required. Because many of the people who visited the temple were simple country folk who normally did not deal with money they were often cheated. This is said to be the background of the scene in Mark 11.15-19, in which Jesus drives the money changers from the temple.

he would not have to pay a tax which was paid to God for the service of his temple, but that once again, Jesus's priority was not to cause offence (*The New Testament*, 1901. N. pag.).

As an allegory, the situation in which Jesus and his disciples find themselves as they enter Capernaum can stand for the situation in which the Germans find themselves in the former German provinces – where they may see themselves as 'Die Kinder', and not 'die Fremden', because this is where they were born. In *Unkenrufe* a quotation from Reschke's diary recording his son-in-law's response to the Reconciliation Cemetery Association captures the kind of attitude that does cause offence:

Das hätten ihr den Polen entscheidend billiger abkaufen müssen. Pachtvertrag, das bringt doch nix. Jetzt, seit Anerkennung ihrer Grenze, wäre die Forderung nach Eigentum durchaus berechtigt, zumindest das Friedhofsgelände betreffend. Schließlich hat das alles mal uns gehört (12: 153).

In response, Reschke admonishes his daughter and her husband: 'Ihr vergeßt, daß wir – und auch unsere Toten – dort Gäste sind' (12: 153). But for those who do not see the situation as Reschke does, the *Zinsgroschen* suggests a way of coming to terms with the dilemma. By paying generously for the burial plots, even though it might be thought of as a 'Naturrecht' to be buried where one has one's roots (12: 33), these people can avoid 'causing offence'. Furthermore, as Reschke states repeatedly, there is plenty of money available. The money is easy to come by, just as it was easy for Simon Peter to come by. He was a fisherman, and all he had to do was to practise his trade. The Germans can do the same. So while I differ with Paver as far as the identification of the Bible story which is depicted in the *Zinsgroschen* painting is concerned, I certainly agree with her that *Unkenrufe* is



concerned with ethical capitalism, and the question as to whether Germany's abundant wealth (at least in comparison with the economies of its eastern neighbours) can be put to use in a way that is morally acceptable.

Peter's discovery of the coin in the mouth of a fish in the Bible story is a reminder of an expression used by Pilenz in *Katz und Maus*, which, as noted above, has deep connections with *Unkenrufe*. Near the end of this work Pilenz is playing with the idea that Mahlke may have tossed the *Ritterkreuz* discreetly into the sea, and asks himself, 'Welcher Fisch bringt ihn mir?' (4: 174). Pilenz describes the *Ritterkreuz* as a 'Bonbon, dessen Süße Bitternis zum Zwilling hatte' (4: 175). The emotions associated with the return, or even the possible return of the exiled Germans to be buried in their lost homeland must also be sweetness 'twinned' with bitterness; and in an ideal world, shame with forgiveness.

Möller and his allegorical painting is reused in *Unkenrufe*, its allegory recycled, as it were, to serve new purposes, with new meanings being loaded onto the original object. Given all of the associations and functions that can be attributed to the seemingly casual mention of the *Zinsgroschen* painting towards the end of *Unkenrufe*, it could really be described as a 'static cipher', 'neither evolving with, nor propelling characters and plot' (Leonard, qtd. Neuhaus, *Günter Grass* 16). Like the '(Zahn)-Stein, Trass, Zement' in *örtlich betäubt*, the *Zinsgroschen* painting is static, yet it stands for quite a cluster of intersecting meanings. It can be added, therefore, to the inventory of Grass's motifs, and viewed in the light of Neuhaus's advice: 'Grass' "Dinge" wollen beim vieldeutigen Wort genommen sein, zu dem sie im Laufe des Gestaltungsprozesses werden, und sperren sich

gegen die einfache Übersetzung' (*Günter Grass* 16-17).

I would like to conclude this section with one final intertextual association. Judith Ryan has observed that in *Das Treffen in Telgte* Grass exercises an indirect critique of its predecessor, *Der Butt*.

By moving beyond analogy to a more dialectical understanding of the past-present relation, *Telgte* exemplifies what Grass calls "progress in stasis" and restores the future directedness that in *The Flounder* was separated from the reflections on the past by the sceptical figure of Ilsebill ('Beyond' 45).

A similar relationship exists between *Unkenrufe* and the work that preceded it, the dystopian *Rättin*. At the same time as he countenances the possibility of a future that is socially and ecologically more sustainable than the present, Grass cancels out one of the more poignant images of 'the end' from *Die Rättin*. We recall that in that work, after the Big Bang, the narrator finds the mummified bodies of Anna Koljaiczek and Oskar in the great hall of the Roten Rathaus. They lie in the very place in which the Möller's *Zinsgroschenbild* used to hang (11: 468). By restoring the painting to that position in the fiction of *Unkenrufe*, Grass seems to be asserting that he has revised *Die Rättin*'s dismal prognosis. Yet at the same time the view of Polish-German relations conveyed by *Unkenrufe* would not have led readers to expect the productive relationships that exist in many fields today such as are facilitated by 'sister-cities' (for example, Gdynia and Kiel; Gdańsk and Bremen), German-Polish associations, and the Europa-Universität Viadrina which straddles the Oder with campus in Poland and Germany.

I have cited above the view that unification offered the Germans 'a return to and an escape from history', that, in historical perspective, 'unity was both a homecoming and a departure' (Jarausch, *Rush* 182). *Unkenrufe*, too, is both a

homecoming and a return to history for Günter Grass and his characters. Grass has brought Danzig/Gdańsk back out of the shadow of human kind's immanent self-destruction (*Die Rättin*). He has taken us, with Alexander and Alexandra, on a walk through the streets and squares of Gdańsk, already so familiar to us from previous works, in a way that evokes his introduction to *Das Treffen in Telgte*: 'Gestern wird sein, was morgen gewesen ist' (9: 7). The new facades of the restored buildings are already decaying, the fiscal misfortunes of its inhabitants increasing. Alexander and Alexandra's experiences show that although new departures are possible, even desirable, there is no escape from history, at least not while maintaining moral integrity. In the following chapter I will attempt to put Alexander and Alexandra's experiences, and the way the narrator deals with the documented trails they leave behind, into the wider context of history writing by addressing the significance attached to the narrator's reflections on his task of writing a formal history of the venture undertaken by Alexander and Alexandra.

## 6. THE *UNKENRUF* NARRATOR AS HISTORIOGRAPHER

In this section of my thesis I will describe the techniques which Grass uses in *Unkenrufe* to depict the process of history writing. I shall begin by outlining some interesting aspects of the *story* of *Unkenrufe*, which, following Chatman, as cited above, consists in events (actions and happenings) and existents (characters and setting). I shall then turn to the main focus of this chapter, the work's *discourse*, or *how* the *story* is conveyed to the reader. My description of this process will demonstrate Grass's concern with metahistory which, as indicated in the introduction, takes a new form in this, his first post-reunification work. I shall be drawing on the work of Hayden White in order to provide a theoretical explanation for Grass's treatment of the problem of historiographic representation in *Unkenrufe*.

I call the narrator of *Unkenrufe* an historian, because his task is to write the story of Alexander and Alexandra's venture on the basis of the documentary material that comes into his possession. As indicated in the introduction, history writing has always been one of Grass's central concerns. His expression 'gegen die verstreichende Zeit schreiben' has become a commonplace in Grass literature, especially in relation to the Third Reich and the obligations of memory. Grass's writing is not only a means of keeping the present in historical context, however; it also demonstrates the control of the teller of history over historical stories, as can be seen, for example, in *Hundejahre* in Liebenau's description of interruptions the children caused in Oswald Brunies's history lesson. For Liebenau it is not the

teacher's rendition of the historical story that is interrupted. The actual historical occurrence is suspended. He says: 'er brach die Völkerwanderung ab, ließ Ostgoten und Westgoten am Schwarzen Meer sauer werden' (5:294). It is as if the next stage of the great tribal migration will not take place until Brunies resumes his history lesson. Liebenau's description shows very clearly the enormous power held by those who are in a position to tell the stories of history over their recipients' grasp of the stories. Another aspect of this power concerns choices historians make as to how their historical accounts will be constructed. It is with these choices that the *Unkenrufe* narrator is concerned. Here my view differs markedly from that of the reviewer who wrote that *Unkenrufe* is a satire which 'entlarvt nichts, was irgendwas mit der Welt und Wirklichkeit zu tun hätte', and in particular: 'Es versteht sich, daß die beiden Helden am Ende der Geschichte Neapel besuchen. Es versteht sich, daß sie nach diesem Besuch sterben. Es versteht sich ohnehin alles von selbst [...]' (Schirmmacher, 'Danziger Versöhnungswerk').

*Unkenrufe* begins with the following short paragraph:

Der Zufall stellte den Witwer neben die Witwe. Oder spielte kein Zufall mit, weil ihre Geschichte auf Allerseelen begann? Jedenfalls war die Witwe schon zur Stelle, als der Witwer anstieß, stolperte, doch nicht zu Fall kam (12: 7).

Did Alexander and Alexandra simply meet by chance, or were they destined to meet on that sunny morning in Gdańsk? Each of these alternatives precludes the other. The concept of *sous rature* is a useful tool for explaining the operation of mutually exclusive states of affairs as they can be portrayed in works of fiction. The term means 'under erasure' and is used by Derrida in *Of Grammatology*.

Derrida places a large X over some words so that they are crossed out, but remain legible. When reading the sentences in which such words occur, the crossed-out words must still be read. The English translator of *Of Grammatology*, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, explains in the 87-page *Translator's Preface* that Derrida uses the strategy when words or concepts are still valuable as tools, although their truth value is rejected (xiii-xix). 'It is a process of using the only available language while not subscribing to its premises, or operating according to the vocabulary of the very thing that one delimits' (xviii). Spivak also refers to 'the schizophrenia of the "sous rature"' (lxxviii).

Brian McHale draws on Derrida's practice and writes of 'Worlds Under Erasure', by which he means a narrative technique in which 'mutually-exclusive states of affairs are projected by the same text' (101). That is, just as in the case of Derrida's treatment of such terms as *objecthood* and *existence*, which continue to be indispensable for a discourse which itself demonstrates their invalidity, McHale says, 'They both cannot be admitted, yet cannot be excluded' (100). However, in his analyses the concept of erasure is applied to objects in the projected world of fiction, not to signifiers of concepts in a philosophical discourse, such as in Derrida's work. Erased sequences need not be confined to events. 'Projected *existents* – locales, objects, characters, and so on – can have their existence revoked.'<sup>130</sup> As McHale explains:

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<sup>130</sup> See Paver, Chloe: *Narrative and Fantasy in the Post-War German Novel A Study of Novels by Johnson, Frisch, Wolf, Becker and Grass*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1999, for an examination of Grass's *ortlich betäubt* from this aspect.

First one state of affairs is projected: “someone opens the door. It’s Dale who stands there.” Then that state of affairs is recalled or rescinded, “unprojected”: “I erase him.” Yet the “erased” state of affairs still persists, if only as a kind of afterimage (99).

McHale comments that the ‘dual effect’ or ‘narrative self-erasure’ is not necessarily as explicit as in the above example. It may remain implicit, with mutually exclusive states of affairs being projected by the same text without any of them being placed explicitly under *sous rature*. He also notes that it is especially striking that narrative sequences placed under erasure are often highly charged, sensationalistic, or appeal to their readers’ ‘lowest instincts’, with the aim of luring the reader into making an emotional investment in the sequence under erasure, by arousing anxiety, for example, or fascination with a taboo or prurient interest (102). When the reader ‘becomes “involved” in the representation’ only to have it removed, or erased, tension is heightened between its presence and its absence (102). For McHale, pornographic titillation is not the only mode of reader-engagement. I will show that in the case of *Unkenrufe* the ‘titillation’ is provided by the seductive world view that understands history as evolving stage by stage towards a certain paramount idea. This concept can be called Destiny or, in *Unkenrufe*, *Fügung*, and finds perhaps its most simple expression in the lovers’ exclamations that they were destined to meet, as we see in *Unkenrufe*. Yet it is also a world view that absolves the individual of personal responsibility, for all events are part of a greater evolution, if not a master plan.

The reader is alerted in the crucial first paragraph of *Unkenrufe* that there are *two* exigencies to be considered in the search for meaning – not just that of *story*, but also that of *discourse*. The tandem functioning of the two elements continues

throughout the work. At the same time as he presents information that prompts the reader to ask questions about the *story*, the narrator provides information about the *discourse* aspect of the novel. He is certain as far as the event is concerned. But he is uncertain as to how to explain the event. The narrator's presentation of an event and a *search* for a cause opens out, as the work progresses, to embrace some of the problematic distinctions and affinities between historical and literary or fictional discourse, as well as the challenges involved in making an account of, and accounting for, historical events. Moreover, the parallels between the structure of the *story* and that of the *discourse* that we have just observed in the first paragraph continue as a persistent unifying feature of the work.

### THE STORY ASPECT

On the *story* level of *Unkenrufe* the liberal use of historical personages (Josef Piłsudski, Willy Brandt and Helmut Kohl are but few of many), significant dates in German history (the signing of the *Ostverträge*, for example), widely discussed contemporary events (the Gulf War, the fall of the Berlin Wall, Chernobyl, global warming), as well as recognisable real locations, encourages one to read the work as an historical novel. For the most part the fictional events are slipped like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle into the ready-made slots of European, or more specifically, German-Polish history, like the Pope's and the Federal President's visits to Gdańsk. The presence of these real figures operates to validate the fictitious events. Indeed, the whole concept of Alexander and Alexandra's reconciliation cemeteries can be read as a grotesque parody of a true event, namely, the return of the remains of Frederick II to Berlin. In Grass's view Frederick the Great was responsible for much of Poland's suffering in the past because of his contribution



to the First, Second and Third Partitions of Poland in August 1772, January 1793 and October 1795. Grass referred to the ceremonial reburial as ‘Dummheit [...] gepaart mit Instinktlosigkeit’, and held the whole affair up to ridicule with alliterative satire, referring, for example, to the ‘Sonderzug, beladen mit königlichen Knochen’ (Chodowiecki zum Beispiel’ 16: 313). The special train organized to transport the mortal remains of the long dead Prussian finds its echo in the charter flights arranged for the exhumed corpses of expellees in *Unkenrufe*.

The *story* aspect of *Unkenrufe* also has some elements that could take it, along with several of Grass’s earlier works, into the realm of magic realism. These relate in particular to Reschke’s time-consciousness. This aspect of the work is presented in such a way as to allow readers who may be thus disposed, to interpret it as Reschke’s quasi-psychotic delusions. To do so, however, would be to subvert more appropriate readings in which the single time plane of *Vergegenkunft* is employed as a means of illustrating the inseparability of past, present and future. *Vergegenkunft* is the ‘fourth tense’ appropriated by Grass as early as 1972 in *Aus dem Tagebuch einer Schnecke*, the tense which he uses to describe the parallel existence in his fictional world of past, present and future. This is where, once again, the significant distinction which sets the *Unkenrufe* narrator apart from his predecessors in Grass’s works comes into play. We have seen that the *Unkenrufe* narrator is not at the centre of the action he is describing. Reschke’s experience of time is not the same as the narrator’s. If Reschke were telling his own story he would be able, like the narrator of *Der Butt*, for example, to take the reader *with him* in his simultaneous experience of different ‘time zones’. But he is not telling his own story. This task is entrusted to a narrator with an *exterior* perspective. In

the final analysis it is the narrator and his existential relationship to the story he is telling that determines how he will tell the story and, therefore, how he will guide the reader through the fictional world of the novel. Thus his reaction to Reschke's *Zeitsprünge* will serve as the reader's orientation point.

In his letter to the narrator Reschke shows clearly that he has the ability not only to know, but also to actually experience the future. The first reference to Reschke's special gift is the narrator's simple observation that the letter is post-dated: 'Er hat sich vorausdatiert. Sein Brief gibt als Datum den 19. Juni 1999 an' (12: 14). If the narrator finds anything untoward in this there is certainly no indication of it at this stage. When Reschke starts writing about things that have not yet happened in the narrator's experience of time – nor in the contemporary reader's – preparations for the millennium, and the dawning of a new era, for example (12: 14) – the narrator is moved to add the adverbial phrase, 'bei sonst klarer Diktion' (12: 14). While this hardly amounts to a dismissal of Reschke's accounts as delusional, it certainly would indicate that the narrator thinks that there might be something strange going on in Reschke's mind. Nevertheless, he provides the reader with no firm indication that Reschke's visions of the future are not to be taken at face value. He certainly never suggests that they should be dismissed. Then, in the following chapter, the narrator cites, without any qualifying comment at all, Reschke's conviction that he can see the future reflected back at him: 'Mein Vorwissen, besser, meine schon früh ausgeprägte Gabe, Kommendes rückgespiegelt zu sehen' (12: 39). Moreover, as the past is integrated increasingly into the narrator's understanding of the present, as a consequence of his work on Reschke's project, it is this very peculiarity that Reschke possesses that helps him identify Reschke

from among his former schoolboy friends, for the young Reschke, too, possessed the gift (or the burden) of prescience. In his youth this is specifically in relation to the burning of the city of Danzig, to which the narrator remarks, ‘dabei hat er alles richtig vorausgesehen’ (12: 117). This sentiment of the narrator’s, which is repeated only one paragraph later (12: 118), is given so many airings that it becomes something of a theme for the rest of the short novel, as if to say, ‘Und die Schwarzseher haben doch recht gehabt.’ For a while the narrator appears to write in all seriousness of Reschke’s notes, ‘die nun häufig der Zeit voraus sind’ (12: 177), before he is once again assailed by doubt. Towards the end of the second last chapter of *Unkenrufe* the narrator says:

Spätestens jetzt fällt mir auf, daß sich in den Papieren meines Mitschülers Einbrüche von Wirrnis breitzumachen beginnen. Zeitsprünge werden üblich. Bei gleichbleibender Schönschrift verändern sich Abläufe mitten im Satz. Plötzlich liegt, was gerade geschehen ist, weit zurück’ (12: 213).<sup>131</sup>

As this is not the first time that the narrator has noticed Reschke’s ‘Zeitsprünge’ this statement can be read as an indication of his existential motivation (as a first-person narrator), as well as a prompt to the reader to continue the search for the ‘inner life’ to which, as Cohn tells us, *yells* for interpretation.<sup>132</sup>

As an historian the narrator must find an interpretation for Reschke’s understanding of time which is suitable for that discipline. When Reschke sees the

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<sup>131</sup> This is a strategy to represent *Vergegenkunft* that Grass uses differently in *Ein weites Feld*, where Fonty/Wuttke (in his own mind, at least), appears to live in both epochs simultaneously, so that he moves without obvious transition from one epoch to another and back again. An important difference consists in the fact that Reschke moves between the present and the future, whereas Fonty/Wuttke moves between the past and the present.

<sup>132</sup> See section titled ‘Motivation’ in Chapter 3 above.

‘Bungagolf’ settlement reflected in the lake, the narrator’s immediate reaction is to attribute Reschke’s experience to his ‘Vorwegsiht’ or prescience. However, he then thinks the better of it and abandons the loaded word for the more flexible term ‘Vision’. This he later replaces with the even more prudent word ‘Vorraussicht’ (12: 230). Yet his faith in Reschke’s prescience is clear: ‘Das konnte nur er. Nur du hast Weitblick bewiesen. Nur er war der Zeit voraus’ (12: 228). The narrator’s involuntary change from third to second person reference is an indication of the high level of emotional investment in his relationship with Reschke and the writing-up of the history of his project.

These adjustments that the narrator makes show clearly that he is taking the sensibilities of his audience into account more and more as he nears the end of his story. It is as if he can understand, although he does not share, Reschke’s perception of time. The narrator’s anticipation of the reaction of his potential audience is also obvious in his discussion of the taped toad-calls with which Reschke accompanies his resignation speech. He imagines how the assembled board members would have reacted to Reschke playing tapes of toad-calls. He assumes that the younger members would not have come up with more than an amused shake of their heads. Vielbrand would have clapped his hand to his forehead, and Frau Detlaff would have called in an undertone for a psychiatrist (12: 230).

Given that each part of Grass’s oeuvre can be seen as ‘Bruchstück einer großen Konfession’, als ‘Fragment im romantischen Sinne, das über sich hinausweist, vor und zurück in einen größeren Zusammenhang’ (Neuhaus, *Günter Grass* 1), it

would be appropriate to search for clues to the phenomenon of prescience in his earlier work. One does not have to look far. In the preceding work, *Die Rättin*, Grass employs a related narrative strategy in the sections dealing with Oskar Matzerath's video of Anna Koljaiczek's 107th birthday party. The bewildering aspect of the related scenes is that the video is made before the party actually takes place, but the real events of the party are identical to those shown on the video. However, it is only bewildering if time is conceived of in a linear fashion. The topos of non-linear chronology that Grass has used before is expanded in *Unkenrufe* so that not only the times, but also mutually exclusive worlds exist in parallel. These are, firstly, the contemporary world of German-Polish relations at the time of reunification, which is anchored firmly in the ontological space of empirical reality. Secondly, there is the world of the imagination in which it is possible for Reschke to live in an imagined (or is it the real?) future world, while not letting go of the world of empirical reality. The contemporary world and the world of the imagination come together for Grass in his concept of 'expanded reality'. As he explains:

Was ich sicher möchte, ist dies: den Realismusbegriff erweitern, das Einbeziehen des Unterbewußten, der Phantasie, des Traumhaften, des Phantastischen; – lauter Dinge, die oft genug diffamiert werden als angeblich nicht real, weil nicht sichtbar auf den ersten Blick ('Die Ambivalenz der Wahrheit zeigen', WA 1987 X: 181).

The narrator's first reaction to Reschke's habit of speaking of events that postdate the receipt of the letter in which they are mentioned is to call them Reschke's 'Zeitraffende Spekulationen' (12:13). Reschke writes of the consequences of the car accident well before the accident takes place. This is similar to Oskar's video. The difference between events in *Die Rättin*, and those in *Unkenrufe*, is that the

narrator, who, as will be shown more clearly below, feels bound to give a plot-like structure to his account of the Reconciliation Cemeteries Association, does not take the reader through the realization of the post-car-crash events written about by Reschke. Instead he uses the car crash as his 'ending'. In *Die Rättin*, on the other hand, we see the videoed events taking place. In *Unkenrufe* the narrator's presumption of Alexander and Alexandra's deaths in the accident disrupts and complicates and also challenges our understanding of Reschke's portrayal of future events, and must also contribute to our perception that the narrator is 'unreliable'. Yet, remarkably, the critical disjuncture between the narrator's and Reschke's accounts of Alexander and Alexandra's fates seems to have gone totally unnoticed in the scant literature cited above. This would suggest that the type of ending which the narrator chooses satisfies not only his needs as an historian, as will be shown, but also the reader's need for a good, unambiguous ending. But in satisfying this need the reader must ignore Reschke's 'von Zeitsprüngen überdehnten Zustand' (12: 243).

### THE DISCOURSE ASPECT

As indicated above, the juxtaposition of contradictory elements in the content of the *story* is echoed, or paralleled in the *discourse* aspect of the work. When viewed from the perspective of its *discourse* *Unkenrufe* can be read as a dramatization of the process of history writing. I call the narrator of *Unkenrufe* a historian because of the task he undertakes, rather than because he is identified as such in the text. In fact his profession is not defined. We know only that he is a

gifted writer. As Reschke writes: 'In anderen Fächern warst Du gewiß keine Leuchte, aber Deine Aufsätze ließen schon früh erkennen...' (12: 14).<sup>133</sup> It is the narrator's task to write a history, albeit a small one, and in approaching this task he is confronted with similar choices and challenges to those which face the professional historian. This aspect of the work's *discourse* parallels the realist, historical elements of the *story*. The narrator communicates to the reader the fact that he is commissioned by Alexander Reschke to write a chronicle of the Reconciliation Cemeteries Association on the basis of documents that he receives in the mail. The choice of the word 'chronicle' is significant, for the chronicle, as will be explained below, is a specific kind of historical discourse. Other elements of the *discourse* aspect of *Unkenrufe* include the narrator's reactions to the task – his alternating unwillingness and grudging involvement in it, his use and abuse of the conventions of historiography, his reliability or otherwise as an historian, and his position as the reader's only source of information about the fictional world. These matters reach the reader through two channels. Firstly by means of the narrator's continuous commentary on the process of his writing of the history, and secondly by the manner of narration itself.

It might be argued that this view of the narrator implies a blurring of the ontological categories of reality and fiction. But this is not the case. The 'otherness' of the fictional world remains intact, while at the same time it is understood that the fictional world refers outside of itself to the real world. Thus

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<sup>133</sup> I have not been able to find anything in the text to support the contention that the narrator is 'der bekannte Schriftsteller' (Neuhaus, *Günter Grass* 187).

the narrator's implicit presentation of himself as an historiographer within the fictional world of the text is mimetic, that is, it is 'die Interpretation des Wirklichen durch literarische Darstellung oder "Nachahmung"' (Auerbach 494). This understanding is in keeping with the views of Stanzel and Chatman as described in the introduction to this thesis, where the distinction between mimesis (*showing*) and diegesis (*telling*) was addressed. The narrator presents himself to the reader in a 'drama-like presentation' by means of his monologue (Stanzel, *Theory* 65), which, like dialogue, must be considered to be 'totally mimetic' as it is not merely that 'the choice of words, syntax, and the like purport to copy exactly what characters say', but they *are* what the narrator says (Chatman, *Coming* 112). As an historiographer at work, the narrator *shows* himself engaged in the process of writing history with all that this activity entails in terms of the treatment of documents, the search for corroborating evidence, and the considerations of personal preferences. The narrator's utterances can be understood, to use Käte Hamburger's term, as 'fingierte Wirklichkeitsaussage' or 'feigned reality statements' (271-277).<sup>134</sup>

Thus, at the *discourse* level, Grass strengthens the 'historical' feeling of the novel that arises from the real events and personages described above, by making the nature of many of the narrator's statements conform very closely to that of the real historiographer or biographer. This gives some parts of the work an air of

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<sup>134</sup> This is in direct contrast to Grass's technique with the *Novelle, Katz und Maus*, where the narrator draws attention to the fact that he himself is a fictional entity, thus violating, from his side, the 'suspension of disbelief' that is part of the contract in reading the work of fiction.



historical authenticity which derives from the cultural contract between the writer and the reader that relies on specific types of discursive encoding. In her 'Fictional *versus* Historical Lives' Dorrit Cohn observes that 'the reason why a biographer tends to favor the must-have construction [for example, sentences like, 'He must have longed to be back at home', or 'They must have known that they were out of earshot.'] is that it allows him to look inside his subject's mind without transforming him into an imaginary being' (10). She points out that 'the *form* of an inferential statement puts a stamp of historicity on the text that contains it' (10). On the other hand, Cohn observes that 'in a novel, it is the reversion to quasi-factual discourse [...] that draws attention to itself (9). Thus our attention is drawn to the *discourse* aspect of *Unkenrufe*. The narrator portrays himself as operating within the epistemological constraints that would apply to a biographer or historian who writes within the discourse of history. He often admits, for example, that he does not know certain facts because he can find no record of them in the documents. These unknown 'facts' range from the make of Reschke's car to information about Reschke's feelings and intentions, and the reactions of other people to events going on around them. In such cases the narrator's recourse is to the kind of conjectural and inferential statements that Cohn describes. He writes, for example, 'Ich frage mich, ob er seine Währung kopfrechnend in Vergleich zu den vielstelligen Zahlen der Złoty-Scheine gebracht [...] hat' (12: 12); 'Das Spielen mit dem Computer muß Reschke Spaß bereitet haben' (12: 94); and 'Was mag sich Reschke gedacht haben, als er dem Leichenschmaus im Hevelius einen Nachruf lieferte, [...]' (12: 116). Other examples include, 'Dann schwiegen sie. Oder richtiger: Ich vermute Schweigen zwischen dem Paar'

(12:25); ‘Es muß ein langes Gespräch [...] gewesen sein’ (12: 32); ‘Ich vermute, daß Professor Reschke [...]’ (12: 33); and ‘Da die Fotos nicht, wie sonst üblich, mit Ortsangaben beschriftet sind, kann ich nur mutmaßen. [...] Meine Annahme stützt sich auf [...]’ (12: 133). Speculations and assumptions, as much as proven fact, form the basis for the narrator’s historical work.

The narrator’s use of such inferential statements combined with what appears to be adherence to verifiable sources sometimes allows the reader to perceive subtle moves in the construction of his history, in which the imagined, or assumed, rather than the proven, or substantiated, is allowed to gain the upper hand. The reader can observe the gradual transformation of a piece of information from the status of an individual’s assumption to the status of a fact. Let us take an early example:

‘Angenommen, es war kein weiterer Rotwein im Haus, auch Wodka nicht, dann fand sich bestimmt in einer Flasche, wie aufgespart, ein Rest Honiglikör – grad zwei Gläschen voll. Damit stießen sie an’ (12: 35-36). This shows how the narrator starts with an assumption, then, in the absence of any proof that his assumption is correct, begins to build action onto it, until the hypothetical origins are forgotten, and the assumption assumes the status of objective truth. Alexander and Alexandra are clinking glasses in the narrator’s mind even though he has no evidence that the glasses, let alone the honey liqueur were there in the first place.

In this instance, because the assumption and the statement are closely juxtaposed, the narrator’s ploy is obvious. But later, when the narrator writes, ‘Soeben hat sie ihn, nach zwei Gläschen Honiglikör, an der Tür verabschiedet ...’ (12: 37), and later on again, ‘Der bulgarischer Rotwein, das Gläschen Honiglikör, drei Flaschen

Dortmunder Export hatten dennoch dem Witwer nicht zu ausreichender Bettschwere verholfen [...]’ (12: 43), the invented origins of the honey liqueur are forgotten. This is one of several examples in *Unkenrufe* in which the role of the historian’s imagination in historical writing is demonstrated. However, it is not the historian’s prerogative to add to the historical record in this manner, even though it may make the account more interesting, and more likely to satisfy the curiosity of people like the *Unkenrufe* character Jerzy Wróbel. He wants to know more about the history of Gdańsk/Danzig than the documentary records could provide:

Die verschnürten Akten voller deutschsprachiger Rechtshandel  
um Grundstücksgrenzen und Wegerecht, verjährte Besitztitel  
und Erbnachfolge, der gestapelte Mief seit Jahrhunderten  
angestammter Rechthaberei machten ihn nicht satt. Doch  
Einzelheiten, die Geschmack und Geruch hatten, konnte ihm die  
Brakup liefern (12: 146).

This description of Wróbel’s needs encompasses both of Grass’s concerns about historical documents expressed above. The ‘Rechthaberei’ of the documents suggests that they have survived because they were consistent with prevailing ideologies, the documents of the winners of historical contests. Wróbel’s desire for information with taste and smell reflects Grass’s continuing interest in ‘genauere Fakten’. However, the additions Erna makes to the knowledge stored in the archives is valid and, unlike the narrator’s conjured up honey liqueur, highly valued, as she experienced and remembers the ‘tastes and smells’ which Wróbel craves.

To some readers it may seem that the narrator’s account of the Reconciliation Cemeteries Association and the activities of its founders is encumbered with a large amount of gratuitous detail. The above examples show, however, that even

small details have a function to perform in the text. Moreover, the narrator's observation and use of detail allows us to see him as operating within the tradition of a kind of historiography that shows the influence Anglo-American social history and the French Annales school. West German historiographers started much later to include details of social, economic and cultural matters into their accounts.<sup>135</sup>

Episodes such as the glass-clinking scenario just described can be seen as the narrator's attempt at empathy with the people about whom he is writing. The narrator works hard at trying to 'feel himself into' the physical surroundings of his protagonists' lives, and to make them come alive for himself. Information about clothing, perfumes, interior decoration of apartments, and so on falls into this category, as does information about the idiosyncrasies of the characters. On a number of occasions the narrator describes how Reschke takes off his glasses, folds them and places them in their case. But on one occasion the narrator says that he does not want to make Reschke perform this ritual again: 'Ich will ihn nicht noch einmal die Brille aus dem Etui holen, entfalten, behauchen, putzen lassen' (12: 43). The narrator's repetition of the steps of Reschke's ritual in this form serves at least four functions, two in the realm of *story* and two in the realm of *discourse*. In terms of *story* the attention to detail enables the narrator to make Reschke, who is known to him only from vague memories from his school days, and from the lifeless pages of his notebooks, more real and present in his

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<sup>135</sup> Cf. Heydermann 25f.

imagination; it also reinforces for the reader the image of Reschke as an overly fastidious type. At the same time, in terms of *discourse* the specific way in which certain items are woven into the narrative demonstrates the narrator's control over what details go into his historical story. The reporting of certain actions or events, such as Reschke's glasses ritual, or the invented honey liqueur, highlight the place of the imagination in historical writing, and raise questions concerning the extent to which historians' stories are actively constructed, rather than passively, uncritically received from the evidence. This is a matter which will be addressed in greater detail later in this chapter. The fourth function of the narrator's use of detail in *Unkenrufe* is that it is a contribution to the kind of history writing that most appeals to Günter Grass himself. Such details in the historical report also convey a richer picture of past times, which, in Grass's view, should not be concerned merely with great men and their deeds, but the details of everyday life, such as he himself integrated into his history of food in *Der Butt*.

Another of the conventions of the real-life historian or biographer which the narrator of *Unkenrufe* adopts is the reference to source material as evidence. He intersperses his commentary with quotations from historical sources. Usually these are longish quotations from Reschke's note books, but often the quotations flow over into passages in the narrator's own words. However, in these embellished quotations the narrator is at pains to present the events from what he assumes to be Reschke's point of view, as if he were letting the voice of the historical figure, i.e. Reschke, speak directly to the reader. His efforts to make Reschke come to life for himself, as an old man, rather than a dimly remembered schoolboy, also serve the purpose of making him more real to the prospective reader of his historical

account. In this way the narrator's work with Reschke's documents serves the dual purpose of helping the narrator himself to come to terms with certain aspects of his past, as well as informing an interested (fictive) reader about the background of the Reconciliation Cemeteries Association.

One might well ask why the narrator worries so much about the Reschke he knew in his youth instead of writing only about matters that pertain directly to the establishment and operation of the Reconciliation Cemeteries Association. This, after all, is the task with which he was entrusted. As it turns out, of course, there is a significant event in the past which determines not the outcome of the story told by the narrator, but the very essence of the conflict between the two survivors of Hitler's Germany, as is soon to be shown. Grass therefore gives his narrator an interest in what went *before* the events of the history he is supposed to write as a means of illustrating a point he made very clearly in *Aus dem Tagebuch einer Schnecke*, where, within the fictive construct, Grass tells his children that it is more important to ask what went before, than what happened next.

Nicht die Fragen "Dann? was war dann? Und was kam danach?", sondern davor, und was war vordem, und was ging vor alledem vor, bis etwas nachkam und benannt wurde (7: 141).

This is also the strategy that the narrator of *Unkenrufe* employs. He not only tells what happened next with the Reconciliation Cemeteries Association, but goes back into Reschke's past to find what went before. Thus the historical sources that the narrator uses include not only Reschke's notebooks and newspaper articles (supplied by Reschke), but also anecdotal information gleaned from interviews with Reschke's former students. These techniques accentuate the fact that the narrator is, as he calls himself, only an 'Außenstehender' (12: 92), a

‘Berichtender’ (12: 87), rather than a player, as well as imbuing the narrator’s account of the *fictional* reality of his world with an air of historical authenticity. At the same time, however, they point up a certain weakness in the narrator’s method, for in his search for answers to such important questions as, ‘Warum sich Reschke und die Piątkowska nur als Gesellschafter im Aufsichtsrat verstehen wollten, auf welche Rechtsgrundlage verhandelt wurde’ (12: 99), he neglects to canvas the opinions of the original board members whom he could have sought out and interviewed. In other words, he seems to be neglecting the present in favour of the past, just as Grass himself is frequently accused of doing in his rejection of German reunification.

It was noted above that the *discourse* aspect of *Unkenrufe* parallels the fantastic elements of the *story*. The *Unkenrufe* narrator’s mimicking of the language of historical discourse, with its implications of impartiality, objectivity and authenticity, is frequently undermined both by his apparent inability to approach his task dispassionately, and by the freedom with which he handles his ‘props’. His handling of Alexandra’s string bag and more especially Alexander’s beret (12:13, 15, 16, 19, 41, 54, 60), for example, is quite whimsical. The possibility that certain aspects of his version of events may be of his own invention is suggested by the narrator’s ingenuous description of how he integrated the bag and the beret into the story at an early stage, although he had no actual evidence that the bag had been present during the scene under discussion. He says that although he did not invent the string bag – ‘Das Einkaufsnetz ist keine Erfindung’ (12: 15) – its early introduction into the story is his own doing: ‘doch die früh, schon beim Kauf der Steinpilze plazierte Einführung des gehäkelten Erbstücks – die Witwe

fand das Netz im Nachlaß ihrer Mutter – ist meine Zutat, wie die vorweggenommene Baskenmütze' (12: 15). At the same time, however, the narrator also follows established historiographical methodology by having the existence of the beret confirmed by a third party – namely one of Reschke's former students (12: 88). Another dimension to the treatment of the beret lies in the element of play involved, for, as mentioned above in the section on the narrator's identity, Grass equips his hero with several of his own attributes, one of which is the beret.

Another strategy which the narrator uses is the suspension of the passage of time. An example of Grass's use of this strategy in *Hundejahre* in relation to Liebenau's characterization of the suspended history lesson was described above. Idris Parry has commented on a similar tactic in *Die Blechtrommel*. Here, too, the narrator exercises absolute power over his subject matter. Parry writes:

In this present the writer is all powerful. As Koljaiczek has to wait, poised on his raft, left immobile in a static river, we are reminded that Oskar is doing this, and telling us that he is doing it, that he, the narrating consciousness, is the arbiter of events (101-2).<sup>136</sup>

The *Inkenrufe* narrator makes such remarks as, 'So bleiben sie stehen. Oder: so stehen die beiden mir, damit ich mich gewöhne, ein Weilchen und noch ein Weilchen Modell' (12: 11-12). The narrator's terminology also allows us to see how the historiographic text presents a 'still shot' of a past moment so that we can examine it more closely than we can in real life, as it is happening. But more than

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<sup>136</sup> Parry uses the word 'writer' to refer to the narrator.



that, as they are contemplated in their suspended state, the historical figures function as models, as ciphers for something beyond themselves. In the third and the thirteenth sonnets of the *Novemberland* cycle Grass's uses the word 'Modell' in a similar fashion. 'Späte Sonnenblumen', in the third sonnet, stand for the ravages of D-Mark capitalism in the former German Democratic Republic: 'Noch tauglich, stehn sie mir Modell, / weil ausgesägt vor Himmel, deren Grau / im Ausschnitt und total zerfließt, / drauf eine Meldung sich als Botschaft liest' (1: 287). In the thirteenth sonnet, too, 'die letzten schwarzen Sonnenblumen stehen Modell' (1: 297).

This treatment of characters and objects by the narrator constitutes a number of transgressions against the traditional narrative conventions which apply to first-person narrators. As shown in the introduction to this thesis, statements made by first-person narrators mimic the statements of real life. They are 'feigned reality statements'. The conditions which apply to first-person narrators as a consequence of their presence in the fictional world of their characters determine that they are subject to the same ontological restrictions as those which apply in real life as far as our ability to manipulate events and people is concerned. The first-person narrator's function is to describe the behaviour of the characters, not to determine it. However, in the passages cited above the narrator is exercising power over the fictional characters, a privilege which, as Stanzel points out, is reserved only for the authorial, or third-person narrator (*Theory* 105).

In flaunting this narrative convention, the *Unkenrufe* narrator draws attention to himself, and to the specific narrative strategy of the work. In his role as historian,

he continually draws attention to the way in which he exercises power over the components of his narrative. The very volatile relationship between the form and the content of the historical text that the narrator is to create is highlighted in several other places as well. The narrator confides to the reader, for example, that he ‘compresses’ the duration of Reschke’s secret meeting with Chatterjee at the overgrown Klawitter grave (12: 165).<sup>137</sup> He talks of ‘putting’ Alexander and Alexandra in various places, for example: ‘Doch bevor ich das Paar vor den Tisch eines Standesbeamten stellen kann’ (12:232). As shown above, he also rearranges the order of events for his narrative.

Such manipulations give the impression that the protagonists are not part of an historical complex being treated by an historian, but puppets that he can manipulate at will, in much the same way as an external, or third-person narrator can do with the characters of fictional discourse. Thus the narrator transgresses not only the boundaries which apply to a fictional first-person narrator, but also those which are associated with the epistemological constraints that apply to the historian.

It seems to me that the juxtaposition of the real and the fantastic on the *story* level, and the quasi-historical with the more fanciful on the *discourse* level of *Unkenrufe* is a means of making these procedures hold mirrors up to each other, and the reflections in these mirrors highlight the constructed nature of historical discourse,

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<sup>137</sup> Klawitter and his ship building also belong to the *Danzig Trilogy* complex. See, for example, *Hundejahre* (5: 64).

and its affinity to the discourse of fiction. *Unkenrufe* is, therefore, much more than merely the story of Alexander and Alexandra and the Reconciliation Cemeteries, as it has been *re-presented* by most critics. Our focus on the story *teller* reveals that the text is a presentation of two interrelated concerns both of which relate to the central importance of history as a motivating force for the text. Firstly, there is the narrator's presentation of himself in his activity as historian (although, as noted, he does not describe himself as such), and secondly, the narrator's 'experience' of history. An examination of the narrator's historical method as he composes his report on the Reconciliation Cemeteries Association reveals that the operation on the surface level of the text of linguistic markers that serve to differentiate the two discourses of factual and fictional writing that has been described above is augmented or supported at the structural level by an approach to historiography that has been described at length by Hayden White.

White's main theoretical concern since the appearance of *Metahistory* in 1973 has been with the relevance of literary theory and practice to historical writing. In this section I will be looking at Grass's fictional text, with its concern with historiography, in the light of White's observations, as it would seem that much of the *Unkenrufe* narrator's activity as an historian can be seen as a fictional illustration of some of White's observations. While *Unkenrufe* is clearly a work of fiction, the piece of writing that its narrator has been asked to produce within the fictional world that Grass creates in *Unkenrufe* is to be 'history', a factual account within that fictional world. Contrary to what one would expect after reading the many reviews and the sparse secondary literature on *Unkenrufe*, the reader is not privileged with a view of the narrator's finished work of

historiography. As a (hi)story of Alexander and Alexandra's Reconciliation Cemeteries Association *Unkenrufe* is not the finished product. We find out about Alexander and Alexandra and their cemeteries, that is true, but we find out through the unnamed narrator's efforts to compose the historical account by making sense of information from archival material and other resources.

*Unkenrufe* is an account of his travails, as much as a (fictional) historical report; it shows the planning and the scaffolding used by the narrator in the construction of his report, not the final historical work.

Grass's *metahistorical* concern in *Unkenrufe* has a *metafictional* precursor in his 1980 work *Kopfgeburten oder Die Deutschen sterben aus*. Here, too, Grass left the scaffolding in place. John Irving was so enthralled by Grass's achievement in this work (which found little appreciation among German critics) that he wrote a long essay praising it as a mixture of handbook, story, and film script that was never realized. He admired the way Grass allows the work to reveal the structures that are rarely accessible, but rather, are usually intentionally covered over by the novelist as the work is completed. Irving writes that Grass is shown as the good artist taking notes and tidying up his study. But in *Unkenrufe* it is not Grass who is leaving traces of his method behind, but the fictitious narrator who is composing an historical work.

### **UNKENRUFEN AND HISTORICAL DISCOURSE**

Hayden White defines the historical work as

a report of facts discovered in research, of the historian's beliefs about the truth of these facts, and of the best argument he can envisage regarding the causes, meaning, significance, or import of these truths for the comprehension of the domain of occurrences that he has studied (*Figural Realism* 14).

White makes the following common sense distinctions: Past reality is the historian's object of study. Historiography is the historian's writing about his/her object of study; every history is a 'verbal artefact, a product of a special kind of language use' (*Figural Realism* 4). The historian's work is thus divided into the activity of historical research and the activity of historical writing. During the first of these activities the historian studies archival material and tries to find out the truth about the past, and to make sense of it. The second activity entails the composition of a discourse and the translation of it into a written form. Between the two activities a number of transformative operations must be performed.

White describes this process as follows:

In the passage from a study of an archive to the composition of a discourse to its translation into a written form, historians must employ the same strategies of linguistic figuration used by imaginative writers to endow their discourses with the kind of latent, secondary, or connotative meanings that will require that their works be not only received as messages but read as symbolic structures. The latent, secondary, or connotative meanings contained in the historical discourses is its interpretation of the events that make up its manifest content (*Figural Realism* 8).<sup>138</sup>

With regard to the interpretation of events, White argues that the kind of interpretation produced by historical discourse is such that it endows what would otherwise remain a chronologically ordered series of events with the kind of formal coherency found in the plot structures of narrative fiction. White's thesis is that historiography, which claims to be a 'realistic' mode of representation, includes elements of 'literariness'.

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<sup>138</sup> The 'symbolic structures' to which White refers in this quotation are derived from Barthes 230-32.

An examination of the *discourse* aspect of *Unkenrufe* shows that White's thesis also obtains in this fictional representation of the historian at work. In *Unkenrufe* we witness the process by which the historian constructs a written discourse about past events, a process in which the 'events may be given, but their functions as elements of a story are imposed upon them – by discursive techniques more tropological than logical in nature' (*Figural Realism* 9). The historical method employed by the narrator of *Unkenrufe* is the same as that of the narrative historian as described by White, consisting, as it does, in 'the investigation of the documents in order to determine what is the true or most plausible story that can be told about the events of which they are evidence' (*Metahistory* 27). But as White shows, the task is much more complex.

The simplest arrangement of historical data is the chronicle. Here events are merely arranged in the temporal order of their occurrence. White describes the chronicle as a comprehensive, coherent form of historical account which has a central subject – the life of an individual, town or region, or some great undertaking, such as a war or crusade – for example. The chronicle typically lacks closure. It is not a *story*. It begins at any event the chronicler chooses, and goes on until he chooses to stop. There is nothing significant about the first or last events recorded in a chronicle (*Metahistory* 6).

White observes that the historian makes a chronicle into a story by further arrangement of the '*already constituted*' chaotic mass of events, so that a beginning, a middle and an end can be discerned (*Metahistory* 6. Original emphasis). This entails the selection and rejection of events, as well as processes

of subordination and stress. Some events need to be characterised as ‘inaugural’, some as ‘transitional’ and some as ‘terminal’ motifs (*Metahistory* 5). Events which do not contribute to this explanatory structure – What happened next? How and why did it happen? – do not need to be included.

The processes of subordination and stress, and selection and rejection of events, are carried out ‘in the interest of creating *a story of a particular kind*’ (*Metahistory* 6). White calls this method of providing ‘meaning’ ‘emplotment’ (*Metahistory* 7). The main modes of emplotment, or kinds of stories, that he identifies in historical writing are, following Northrop Frye’s *Anatomy of Criticism*, Romance, Tragedy, Comedy, and Satire. Although an historical account will be cast in one of these modes, or archetypal forms, it is likely to contain aspects or stories cast in another. Comedy and Tragedy are the two modes that suggest that it may be possible for man to be freed from the condition of imprisonment in the world that resulted from the Fall, and be at least partially released from his divided state in this world. In comedy there is hope of occasional reconciliations of the forces at play in the social and natural worlds, and the Comic writer would end his account of change and transformation with festive occasions. But in Tragedy there are no festive occasions, except for false or illusory ones. The Tragic mode can be seen as ‘a revelation of the nature of the forces opposing man’, and the reconciliations that occur at the end of Tragedy are more in the nature of ‘resignations of men to the conditions under which they must labor in the world’, conditions which ‘set the limits on what may be aspired to and what may be legitimately aimed at in the quest for security and sanity in the world’ (*Metahistory* 9). Because these conditions are believed to be ‘inalterable

and eternal', man must learn to work within them. White also notes that the fall of the protagonist and the shaking of the world he inhabits which occur at the end of the Tragic play are not regarded as totally threatening to those who survive the agonic test. There has been a gain in consciousness in the spectators of the contest. Tragedy and Satire are modes of emplotment which are consonant with the interests of those historians who conceive of events as belonging to 'an ongoing structure of relationships or an eternal return of the Same in the Different' (*Metahistory* 11).

According to White, plot is that aspect of narrative which 'imposes a meaning on the events that make up its story level by revealing at the end a structure that was immanent in events all along' (*Content* 20). The 'historical narrative, in contrast to the chronicle, reveals to us a world that is putatively "finished" [...]', a world 'the completeness and fullness of which we can only imagine, never experience' (*Content* 21). White argues that if historical stories are written as if their story is completed, that is to say, they are given narrative closure, and are shown to have had a plot all along, they give to reality 'the odor of the ideal' (*Content* 20). For this reason he sees plot as an embarrassment to historical narrative:

The embarrassment of plot to the historical narrative is reflected in the all but universal disdain with which modern historians regard the "philosophy of history" of which Hegel is the modern paradigmatic example. This [...] form of historical representation is condemned because it consists of nothing but plot; its story elements exist only as manifestations, epiphenomena of the plot structure, in the service of which its discourse is disposed. Here reality wears a face of such regularity, order and coherence that it leaves no room for human agency [...] (*Content* 20-21).

Narrative simply cannot be a neutral discursive form used by historians to



represent real events and their part in developmental processes. It demands ontological and epistemic choices, and these have distinct ideological and even specifically political implications (*Content* ix). The demand for closure is a demand for moral meaning, a demand that the narrator assess the sequences of events he reports as elements of a moral drama. 'Has any historical narrative ever been written', White asks, 'that was not informed not only by moral awareness but specifically by the moral authority of the narrator?' (*Content* 21).

This brings us back to the question of authority broached in the introduction. The question of authority pertains not only to Grass in his role as the inventor of tales, but also to the narrators, those fictional constructs who tell the stories in his fictions. In the section on 'Grass and History' in Chapter 2 of this thesis reference was made to Grass's view that the inability of the surviving documents to reveal the whole story can be compensated for by fiction writers, for they are able to fill the gaps left by conventional historiography. Their task is 'genauere Fakten zu erfinden, als die, die uns angeblich authentisch überliefert wurden' ('Als Schriftsteller immer Zeitgenosse' 16: 178). This is the task that Grass addressed in all of his pre-*Wende* fiction writing. Historical data was not only made accessible in these works, it was embellished, manipulated and expanded with additions from Grass's fertile imagination. In *Unkenrufe*, however, as we have seen, there is a change in the direction of Grass's attention to the problems of historiography. Here he addresses directly the actual process by which an historical text is created. In this fiction we see the enactment of Grass's concept of a process of historiography as described above: 'Übersichtlich ordnet sie, was vorgestern noch chaotisch zuhauf lag' ('Als Schriftsteller immer Zeitgenosse' 16: 178). That is to

say, the process of historiography involves forcing the chaos of events into some form of order. It should be noted that neither Grass's nor White's critiques of historiography are meant to imply that historical reports contain elements of fiction insofar as fictional elements are understood to be invented or imaginary. It is the interpretations that are placed upon the events of history, their handling by historians as they are recounted as narrative, that gives them an affinity to fiction. That the events actually occurred is not under dispute.

The thematization of this particular aspect of historiography in *Unkenrufe* is a new feature of Grass's prose fiction writing since the *Wende*. Both consciously and unconsciously the narrator is engaged in studying archival material and trying to find out the truth about the past, and to make sense of it so that he can perform the second activity White describes, namely the composition of a discourse and the translation of it into a written form. We can observe the narrator as he performs the process of stress and subordination described by White (*Metahistory* 6), for it is necessary for him to provide more than a list of events in chronological order. He needs to give the events meaning. As an historiographer the *Unkenrufe* narrator must make ontological and epistemic choices, which, according to White, would have ideological and even specifically political implications (*Content* ix).

As we become privy to the *Unkenrufe* narrator's concerns about his task, the relevance of White's 'epistemic choices' for history writing is striking. The opening sentences of *Unkenrufe* – 'Der Zufall stellte den Witwer neben die Witwe. Oder spielte kein Zufall mit, [...]?' – show very clearly that this is exactly the kind of choice with which the narrator is confronted. He must choose between

*Zufall* and *Fügung*; between a world view that says events occur randomly and have no intrinsic purpose or *Sinn*, on the one hand, and on the other, a teleological view of the past according to which events unfold in a progression towards some paramount conception or idea. As mentioned in the introduction, hi/story tellers, regardless of the genre within which they work, are competing to fill a contested space. For Grass it is the contested space of German identity, or self-understanding. To do this requires that meaning is given to the events of history, that is to say, the events of history are formed into a narrative which is utterly dependent on a certain understanding of the causal relationships underlying past and present occurrences. Events *mean* different things, depending on whether the source of a story is informed by a teleological view of history, or, on the other hand, a conviction that chance is the arbiter of events. This is why the *Unkenrufe* narrator's choice of world views is fundamental to the history he will write.

At our first encounter with the narrator he is in a state of limbo between the two conflicting alternatives. He has a conundrum that robs him of authority and causes him to stumble into the telling of the story in a way that parallels his protagonist's stumbling entrance. At first sight it would seem that the narrator provides very little tangible information as he begins his story. In fact, there is a lack of information, there are gaps, as far as the *story* aspect of the work is concerned. The reader might ask, who is the widow, who the widower? Why did he stumble, and where? For the narrator there are gaps too, but they are of an entirely different kind. The fact that a widower stumbled and a widow was there seems to be of less importance to him than the question as to how to interpret this event. Moreover, the choices for interpretation that he sees open to him do not lie in the category of

immediate physical causes, like an uneven pavement, or a shove from a passer-by, but in terms of universal causes: *Zufall*, or – as the mention of All Soul’s Day, and Reschke’s soon-to-be revealed preference suggest – *Fügung*. At first the narrator invokes the agency of pure chance. I say agency because the narrator’s unusual formulation is couched in the active voice.<sup>139</sup> Rather than say that Alexander and Alexandra met by chance, as one normally would, he says that chance caused them to meet. This invocation of agency already seems to be anticipating the opposite point of view, namely, that the meeting was predetermined.

Unable to decide between the world views that are subsumed under the terms *Fügung* on the one hand, and *Zufall* on the other, the narrator resorts to providing two accounts of events – one in keeping with each world view. He presents the first of these world views, that which Reschke espouses, in the form of a selection of excerpts from Reschke’s diaries, as well as in his own reconstruction of events from Reschke’s point of view. However, this understanding of how and why things happen is constantly placed in the context of the narrator’s ironising commentary. Furthermore, in many cases the cited passages are quite long, and flow over almost surreptitiously into the narrator’s own words, so that the reader can forget the context in which they are being presented by the narrator, and accept them as facts, as Reschke’s direct observations, which, of course, they are not. It is only when the same incidents are presented for a second time, or when

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<sup>139</sup> The unusual usage of the active voice in place of statal passive is encountered in other sections of *Unkenrufe* as well. It functions as an alienating device, making the reader sit up and reconsider what at first sight is a normal or obvious state of affairs. Other examples are: ‘Den Korb füllten Maronen.’ (12: 7); ‘An ihn hängt ein Aktenkoffer’ (12: 96).

the reader backtracks to review the beginning of the section of text just read, that the circumstances become clear.

The narrator's choices in this regard are thematised repeatedly. The reader is made aware of the fact that there are choices not only because of the programmatic opening sentences, but also by means of the narrator's dialogue with Reschke (or better, his image or projection of Reschke). The issues that impinge upon the narrator as he tries to write the history of the Reconciliation Cemeteries are revealed progressively throughout the work. As well as the epistemological concern, which is only addressed directly very late in the piece, the dialogue reveals the influence of the conflicting motivations of the commissioner of the history on the one hand, and the writer of the history on the other, as well as issues of guilt and atonement, and debt and indebtedness.

Because there are two sources of information about events in *Unkenrufe* – the narrator's commentary, and Reschke's notebooks, it is almost as if there are two narrators, but not quite. Because Reschke's version of events is presented through the medium of a narrator who has control over what parts of Reschke's account will be presented, we can speak of dominant and subordinate constructions of the fictional reality. However, it is not as simple as that. The narrator's account is compromised by his perceived unreliability. This means that the contest for the true meaning of events is much more equal than it would have been had the narrator been constructed as a more reliable source of information. It is in the dual accounts of certain events, with each account informed by a different world view, that the conflict between the two world views is most palpable. The extreme

banality of the narrator's accounts of events that are significant and serious for Reschke is also a source of the book's ironic humour.

After the initial paragraph in which the narrator sets up the conflicting paradigms between which he must choose before he can operate effectively as an historian, he plunges straight into what amounts to a send-up of Reschke and his views. He describes Alexander and Alexandra's first meeting as follows: 'Er stellte sich neben sie. Schuhgröße dreiundvierzig neben Schuhgröße siebenunddreißig' (12: 7).<sup>140</sup> This description contrasts starkly with Reschke's theatrical description of the same event in his diary: 'Es mag an diesem Tag, zu dieser Stunde – schlag zehn Uhr – Fügung gewesen sein, die uns zusammen führte' (12: 7). As will be shown, it is Reschke's love of ascribing events large and small to *Fügung* that reveals his belief in the progress of history towards a better world, and which blinds him to the immediate, sometimes even foreseeable, consequences of his actions. Unlike the equivocating narrator, he never for a moment countenances the possibility that events are the result of the chaotic operation of chance. For him it is all part of a greater plan.

The antagonism between the two world views is clear from the narrator's remark that it was Reschke's diary that had 'given away' the sizes of the couple's shoes: 'Sein Tagebuch bestätigt Allerseelen und gibt die Schuhgröße preis' (12: 7). In other words, by including commonplace details in his diary Reschke had furnished

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<sup>140</sup> The significance of Grass's choice of numbers for the shoe sizes was addressed in the section entitled 'Dances of Death and Numbers' above.

the narrator with the means of presenting events in a banal manner completely devoid of the historical instrumentality characteristic of Reschke's presentation of events. In his description of the meeting in words that could be summarised as, 'big feet beside small feet' – an image that calls to mind television footage of the commonplace, chaotic movement of feet, filmed at pavement level – the narrator reveals his leaning towards a world view that understands events as being determined by chance. Moreover, by placing his own account ahead of Reschke's he has set up a situation in which the reader may be more likely to privilege his view and reject Reschke's. The narrator also expresses his scorn of Reschke's world view by referring to *Fügung*, or providence, – that force which has directed Alexander and Alexandra's paths to meet at 10 a.m. on the second day of November 1989 – as 'die dritte, stumm vermittelnde Person' whom Reschke has difficulty making 'leibhaftig' in his diary (12: 7).

When Alexander discovers that his new acquaintance has a name which matches his own, his belief in *Fügung* is further reinforced. The narrator, on the other hand, writes unequivocally of 'die zufällige Begegnung zwischen Witwer und Witwe' (12: 10. My emphasis), and stresses this interpretation by referring to Alexandra and Alexander as 'dieses vom Zufall verkuppelte Paar' (12: 21). The narrator's disdain for Reschke's interpretation of events is also apparent in the register of the words he chooses to describe his affairs. He does not say, for example, that Alexandra and Alexander are 'verliebt'. His choice of words is 'er in sie, sie in ihn vergafft' (12: 10).

Another interesting portrayal of the clash of Reschke's and the narrator's world

views is to be found in the account of Alexander and Alexandra's first night together. The reviewer Nigel Chalmers found himself 'groaning with embarrassment' at the dialogue of this scene and Marcel Reich-Ranicki had a field day with it, holding it up as evidence of Grass's inability to write about sex adequately: 'Dem Wortmächtigen fehlt das Vokabular für die Liebe'. Reich-Ranicki's criticism of the scene goes on for three paragraphs in which he cites numerous sentences from *Unkenrufe*, hurling them like so many eggs or rotten tomatoes to smash against the barbs of his ridicule. The quotations appear to have been taken randomly from three different sources: the narrator's words, Reschke's spoken and written words, and Alexandra's words as recorded in Reschke's diary. For my examination of *Unkenrufe* it is important to keep the words in their relativizing context, both in terms of the scene itself, and also in terms of the narrative strategy of the whole.

The discursive strategy at work in this scene is once again representative of the narrative strategy of the work as a whole, which I have described above as a conflict of world views – or views of history. In looking closely at this scene it is helpful to recall that it is Reschke's diary-like notebooks that are the narrator's starting point as he assembles a 'factual' report about Alexandra and Alexander's activities. Reschke will obviously know more about what went on than the narrator; after all, he was there, and the narrator was not. (Once again that significant difference between this narrator and all of his predecessors in Grass's work!) But on the other hand, Reschke's subjective portrayal can also be considered to be unreliable, as he may wish to portray himself in a more favourable light than an impartial, omniscient observer might. The narrator, too, ,



makes us aware of the potential unreliability of Reschke's notes on several occasions with such relativizing remarks as 'wenn ich seine Kladde glauben darf' (12: 63). Reschke's and Alexandra's statements are unavoidably tinged with the subjectivity of their own desires. For the narrator's part, unless he confines himself to unannotated quotations from Reschke's notebooks, his report, too, will be informed by his own needs and desires, his relationship with Reschke, and not least by his own unwillingness to undertake the task. Given the narrator's apparent desire to interpret Alexandra and Alexander's affair as banal, it comes as no surprise that he chooses to use a well-worn, even trite formula to introduce their love-making. 'Sie machte einen kleinen Schritt, er einen Stolperschritt. Dann sie noch einen, gleichzeitig er. Und schon fielen sie einander zu, lagen sich in den Armen' (12: 66). This ploy on the part of the narrator is at work throughout *Unkenrufe*. We see it again at the beginning of Chapter Five when he says that photos of Alexander and Alexandra suggest they are wearing clothing in partner-look (12: 140). There is no evidence that Alexander and Alexandra indulge in such twee behaviour – indeed a number of detailed descriptions of their clothing suggests that each has a very pronounced individual taste in matters of dress which would be absolutely irreconcilable with a 'partner-look'. They might as well have been dressed that way, however, once the narrator has planted the seed of the idea in the reader's mind.

Yet, strictly speaking, the narrator is not dishonest. He admits to some of his manipulations, as we have seen above. In relation to the bedroom scene, too, the narrator admits to having invented the hackneyed scenario: 'So muß es gewesen sein. Oder so sehe ich ihren Fall, obwohl Reschke nur wenige Einzelheiten seinem

Tagebuch anvertraut hat' (12: 66). The narrator has already anticipated his own intervention in metaphorical terms with his question as to whether he should hold up a lamp, despite the hotel room lighting (12: 66). In other words, the normal lighting, which is to say, Reschke's own account, cannot provide as much insight as the narrator's special illumination of the scene. In giving Alexander and Alexandra's lovemaking an air of banality right from the start the narrator is undermining the special significance that it has for the people involved. For Reschke it is an occasion for gratitude and elation: 'Ja, wir haben uns geliebt, konnten, durften uns Lieben. Und ich – o Gott – war zu Liebe fähig!' (12: 67). Again and again we see the narrator stemming himself, as it were, against the pull of Reschke's interpretation of events, by using the narrative conventions of the popular romance.

The sheer impossibility of his providing an objective account continues to dog the narrator. After giving a little more information from Reschke's notebook about the couple's night in the hotel he writes: 'Das ist alles. Und nicht mehr, als mein Mitschüler preisgegeben hat, will ich in das schmale Hotelbett hineinlegen' (12: 67). Yet, despite this comment he continues with obsessive compulsion to add to his picture of the couple's first night by combining scraps from Reschke's diary with elements of his own imagining. He claims, for example, 'Sie werden ihre Liebe wie eine Aufgabe erledigt haben' (12: 67), an assessment diametrically opposed to Reschke's description, obviously intended to further demythologise the occasion. However, the narrator is still uncertain, and finishes off his account with a series of four unanswered questions about the night that show that neither his supposed objectivity, nor his imaginative additions have given him

satisfaction.

Sprachen sie zwischendurch über ihre Idee? War, zumindest beiläufig, von Friedhöfen in Gdańsk und Wilna, von ausreichend viel Deutschmark die Rede? Oder blieb neben der Liebe im schmalen Bett kein Platz für Friedhöfe hier und dort? Oder wurde ihre Idee, der es immer noch an Zunder fehlte, durch Liebe beatmet? (12: 67).

The theme is taken up again in the following chapter when the narrator has occasion to cite Reschke's first letter to Alexandra. The letter is so full of 'obscurities' that they gush forth, as from a broken main, to use the narrator's terminology. Once again the disparity between Reschke's and the narrator's assessments of the situation are striking. Despite the fact that he was not present at the time, the narrator continues to denigrate Reschke's prowess, writing of the 'wirklichen Anstrengungen im zu schmalen Bett' (12: 71), whereas Reschke describes the night with what the narrator calls 'hymnische Übersteigerungen' (12: 71). No doubt the narrator is irritated by Reschke's use of hyperbole, but he really has no way of knowing that Reschke is exaggerating the pleasures of the night as he records them in his diary. It is his own prejudice which leads him to assume that this is the case. The fact that the narrator's handling of the information at his disposal is informed by his own personal desires is further illuminated when he comes to describe Reschke's acquisition of a computer to assist in the 'incarnation' of the Idea (12: 78). The narrator confesses to being quite illiterate as far as computers are concerned, and says that for this reason he is unable to pull missing details 'aus dem Hut' (12: 78). This almost amounts to an admission that he has been able to do so on other occasions. Similarly he confesses that sometimes he needs to milk a single word, because Reschke's diary provides insufficient information to keep the narrative flowing (12: 77).

I would argue, therefore, that the descriptions of Alexandra and Alexander's night in the hotel, far from being a failed attempt at erotic writing on Grass's part, as some critics would have it, is another instance of the conflict between narrator and protagonist as tellers of the 'truth'. As well as being a good example of McHale's reading of *sous rature*, it reveals how much our view of the world is determined by what we already know, and what we want to see. By making Alexandra and Alexander's affairs seem very ordinary he is seeking to evade having to write about them. He says, 'Was reizt mich an ihrer Geschichte noch? Ist ihre Liebe nicht jetzt schon gewöhnlich, ihr Geschäft mit den Toten gemachte Sache?' (12: 83).

The technique of simultaneous presentation of the mutually exclusive scenarios, as is the case with the narrator's and Reschke's descriptions of Alexandra and Alexander's night in the hotel, is related to a technique which Paver, using McHale's reading of *sous rature*, has described in *Narrative and Fantasy*, her study of five German novels of the 1960s including Grass's *örtlich betäubt*. The technique, which she calls 'overt fictionalization' (xii), involves the projection and cancelling out of narrative possibilities. In *örtlich betäubt* the narrator Starusch provides several accounts of how he murdered his fiancée Sieglinde Krings. But since the accounts cannot all be true, they cancel each other out, leaving the confused reader to wonder whether any of the accounts are true, or indeed, whether Sieglinde ever existed at all. All of the scenarios that the narrator describes are superimposed onto and threaded through his description of the treatment of his miss-aligned jaw. As his mouth is propped open and full of dental equipment, it should be clear that the reader is being made privy to fantasies, as it

is impossible for the narrator to speak in the condition in which he finds himself. Sometimes the narrator admits as much, showing that he is making up the stories as he goes by indicating that details can be changed as desired. A comparison between this work and *Unkenrufe* allows us to observe another of the features which distinguishes *Unkenrufe* from its predecessors. Starusch invents events in his own life to satisfy his own needs, and the events he recounts are of doubtful veracity. But in *Unkenrufe* the events themselves are not disputed. It is the interpretation placed upon events by the historian, the external observer, and not the participant, that is at issue.

The 'mutually exclusive states' (as defined at the beginning of this Chapter) which exist in *Unkenrufe* are to do with the divergent views of the world as explanatory paradigms for the way events happen, rather than the events themselves, as is the case in *örtlich betäubt*. Here it is not an invented scenario which is projected by the narrator and then erased either overtly, or by the substitution of an alternative scenario which would have made the first one impossible. Here it is world views, or philosophies of history, which are portrayed, and one of them must inevitably cancel the other out, as *Fügung* and *Zufall* are contradictory. But for most of the *Erzählung* the narrator does not allow this to happen. This means that the reader cannot be certain as to which account of events, each relying on a different world view, is legitimate, especially as the narrator's indecision causes his manner of narration to become a constant *sous rature*, that is, he crosses out Reschke's understanding of events with his satirical presentation of the same events, while still ensuring that Reschke's view remains visible. His unwillingness to excise Reschke's view completely may be attributed to any (or, indeed a combination) of

the following: He rejects Reschke's world view outright but thinks that in his history he must be true to Reschke's interpretation of events as it is at Reschke's behest that he is writing the history. Or he himself is unable to decide conclusively for one view or the other. Or his rejection of Reschke's way of looking at things is merely an outcome of his negative attitude towards the whole project of writing about Reschke and his affairs, or his negative feelings towards Reschke himself.

Whatever the reason, one thing remains clear: the writing of the history of the Reconciliation Cemeteries Association, like the writing of any history in the real world, is shaped by the epistemological and ontological choices made by the writer. Readers who concentrate on the *story* aspect of the text seems to pass over these incongruities, rhyming together their own version of what must have happened. But for the reader who concentrates on the *discourse* aspect, the play of possibilities enriches the text with its metahistorical implications.

As well as creating a fictional representation of the dilemmas facing the historiographer, Grass avails himself in *Unkenrufe* of a narrative technique which illustrates very clearly that our perception and understanding of our world is mediated, and that the form of the mediation shapes our understanding. By 'form of the mediation' I mean the manner in which past events are rendered intelligible by the historian in order to be passed on to a recipient. The *Unkenrufe* reader's uncertainty as to whether the mutually exclusive possibilities – that the narrator is simply rude and lacking in respect for Reschke's noble enterprise, on the one hand; or that Reschke is just a pompous old fool with an uncanny gift for making money, on the other – comes about because of the two different kinds of

mediation that Grass's narrator employs. When events are mediated through the narrator's world view there is nothing predetermined about them. They are not configured as parts of an purpose-driven whole. When the events of the novel are mediated through Reschke's world view, as they are when the narrator quotes directly from his notebooks, chance is not involved in the way the events unfold. Through Reschke's eyes we see a world whose processes are determined by *Fügung*. Even though there are times when it seems that, from Alexander and Alexandra's point of view, the purest of motives have led them into the darkest of involvements, Alexander, with his teleological view of history would believe that everything will turn out for the best in the end. Furthermore, no matter which of the 'endings' to the story we choose, it could be argued that he is right. If Alexander and Alexandra see Naples and die, then, as I have indicated above, they have experienced the best that this world can offer, and they did it together. In death they will lie together and Reschke's wish to lie like the figures on the sarcophagus he so admired will be fulfilled:

Immer wieder schön sind die etruskischen Sarkophage. Beide stehen wir entzückt vor den steingehauenen, seitlich gelagerten Ehepaaren auf den Abdeckungen der steinernen Särge. In manchen Paaren entdecken wir uns. So liegen zu dürfen! (12: 243).

Even if we take the alternative ending in which Alexander and Alexandra are growing old together in a world that is a vast improvement on the one in which they met, it can be read as the culmination of a train of events destined to produce this result. However, each of these interpretations of the endings is very much open to question, especially as we would normally think of death, and the disabilities from which Reschke says he suffers as a result of the accident and old

age, in more negative terms.

Readers are therefore obliged to strip the events and circumstances described in the work from the colouring given them through Reschke's and the narrator's accounts, so that they can make their own moral assessments of the narrator's and the protagonists' actions. Only in this way is it possible to negotiate the two contradictory worlds which exist in uneasy simultaneity in Grass's text. But it is not merely a matter of morality. If all of the information of the text is taken into account, the picture which we as readers compose of both the narrator and his protagonists is sufficiently complex as to prevent us from making unequivocal moral judgements about either of them.

A much wider issue is also indicated here, and that is the possibility that truly authentic knowledge and representation of the past may not be possible. The subjectivity of perception, which is thematized in *Unkenrufe*, is found mirrored in the critical reception of certain key aspects of the work. Let us take, for example, the question as to whether the motives driving Alexandra and Alexander's venture are as concerned with reconciliation as they purport to be. Hermann Kant is certain that they are. He says that Alexandra and Alexander 'reden von Liebe, aber nicht weniger von Reue, Sühne und Versöhnung und meinen nicht nur sich dabei'. Gert Ueding, on the other hand, writes that 'man glaubt weder dem Professor, noch der Restauratorin, noch gar dem Erzähler, daß sie von dem Gedanken der Völkerverständigung durch Totenexport auch nur einen klaren Augenblick lang überzeugt sind'.

Grass's *Erzählung* illustrates the post-modern critical concern surrounding the



questionable status of historiography as an objective 'scientific' pursuit in that it shows how the writing of history (i.e. the narrator's writing of the history of the Reconciliation Cemeteries Association) performs a mediatory act, which itself, in turn, is based on another mediatory act, namely the creation of the documents which purport to be representations of historical events (i.e. Reschke's diaries supported by newspaper reports – also mediated – and other items which he himself has selected).

In this regard the significance of the change Grass has made in the way he uses first-person narration cannot be overstated. The narrator of *Unkenrufe* is not a direct eye-witness to the events he must describe. The main protagonists of his story are presumably dead at the time he begins his work, so his knowledge of events is second-hand, derived from Reschke's documents and statements made by other parties. He (i.e. the narrator) therefore lacks the authority that the first-person narrator-as-eye-witness can enjoy. The uncertainty is further complicated, as indicated above, by issues of guilt and indebtedness between the two men. For the most part the sources of these obligations are hinted at in fragments of information from which readers must draw their own conclusions. Reschke, the protagonist, on the other hand, is an eye-witness to the events, and we have a selection of his accounts to go on, but the narrator presents them in such a way as to highlight the fact that they are tainted, as it were, by a teleological world view. Moreover, his close ally Alexandra observes that he has been too close to the events concerned to be able to write (an objective) history of them: 'Wir stecken drin viel zu tief in alles, was ist geschehen und schief gegangen' (12: 240). At the opening of the tale the only authority that the narrator possesses lies in the

documents in front of him, but as has just been demonstrated, and as Grass's observations cited above show, this is a dubious sort of authority. Furthermore, as White has shown, real historiography draws on much more than this raw material.

‘SOLCHE CHRONIK MÖGE ALLES ZURECHTRÜCKEN’

The information that it is a *chronicle* that Reschke is asking the narrator to write is reserved until close to the end of the work, where, in yet another instance of repetition being used as a spotlight, the word *chronicle* is used five times in a page and a half of text (12: 240-241). Because of its prominence at this stage of *Unkenrufe* the word *Chronik* overrides the word *Bericht* which the narrator has hitherto employed in reference to the history he is composing. This leads us to consider the crucial differences between these two words which both refer to accounts of past events.

For Walter Benjamin the difference between the historian and the chronicler, as he explains in ‘Der Erzähler’, lies not in the presence or absence of *Sinn* or meaning, but rather in relation to the source and kind of meaning which arises out of each kind of text. Whereas the writer of the traditional mediaeval chronicle was absolved from giving meaning to the events he recorded because each was simply part of God's plan for the salvation of mankind, the historian must provide another kind of explanation. He must put something in place of the implicit meaning with which the isolated event in the chronicle was imbued by virtue of its status as a fragment within the great story within which it is set (II (2): 637).

In *Unkenrufe* the information that a chronicle was called for brings the conflict of world views presented in the opening sentences, and running as an undercurrent

throughout the story, clearly into focus once again. This is because, in its traditional form, the chronicle would not require the narrator to choose between *Zufall* and *Fügung* to fulfil his task. A chronicle merely lists events in the temporal order of their occurrence. There was no need to explain cause and effect because everyone knew that events were determined by God. As God's creation was still in existence there was no need to round such histories off with an ending. This is why the chronicle could simply stop at whatever point the chronicler chose. The narrator of *Unkenrufe* is aware that more than this is required from him. His task is to give meaning to the events of which Reschke's documents are the evidence. In White's terms, he must assess the sequences of events he reports as elements of a moral drama; and to do this he must imbue the events which he records with a plot-like structure that will give them a moral meaning.

The *Unkenrufe* narrator's awareness that his history must be given a plot-like structure can be seen from his frequent use of the word 'Handlung': 'Schon wollte sie ihre magere Auswahl in einen der Eimer stoßen, als das begann, was Handlung genannt wird' (12: 9). Here we see a clear differentiation between the chronicle and emplotted history. The 'plot' of emplotted history begins at a certain point along a continuum of events, one of which the narrator has told us about before the 'plot' of his historical account begins, namely, Reschke's stumbling. But it is Reschke's intervention while Alexandra is buying flowers to which the narrator gives the status of an 'inaugural event'. Still in the first chapter, the narrator again refers to plot, saying that it is Alexandra who drives the plot forward: 'Angesichts zweier Windlichter beiderseits der Vase mit den rostroten Astern [...] ist es unvermittelt wieder die Witwe gewesen, die der Handlung Auftrieb gab' (12: 26).

This is an example of a ‘transitional’ motif. In the second chapter he sees plot as a force which can get away from him, saying he must record Alexander and Alexandra’s embrace ‘bevor abermals Handlung ihre Geschichte beschleunigt’ (12: 60). He says he refuses to introduce a sub-plot involving Reschke having an affair with his secretary Frau Erika von Denkwitz: ‘zudem hätte ich mich geweigert, hier eine Nebenhandlung einzuleiten’ (12: 118).<sup>141</sup> These are examples of the selection and rejection of events, and the process of subordination and stress which White describes. In the sixth chapter the narrator remarks: ‘Wollte ich nahtlos und mit der Feststellung, der restliche Aufsichtsrat sei zur Sache gekommen, meinen Bericht fortsetzen, kame ich gleichfalls zu rasch dem bloßen Ablauf dessen nach, was Handlung ist. Doch das geht nicht. So schnell kann ich von Erna Brakup nicht lassen’ (12: 189). Here we see the narrator’s recognition that he has personal needs which are not fulfilled if he simply follows the chain of cause and effect dictated by the plot.

It seems that the narrator, as an historian, feels that he must satisfy the demands of something that he calls plot (*Handlung*), but that a too slavish, or exclusive devotion to the task of keeping the plot moving would be detrimental to the satisfaction of his other needs. Indeed, the compulsion to provide a plot is so strong that he must stem himself against its demands. The narrator’s overt

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<sup>141</sup> The secretary’s name, which could be translated directly as ‘think-joke’ suggests that the narrator may be fooling himself. Denkwitz and the narrator have much in common in that both of their relationships with Reschke are relationships of dependence. Both have serious reservations about his cemetery project, yet both work to support it at his behest, for, as the narrator remarks, Reschke was a master at the art of delegation (12: 119).

references to plot, and his commentary on the way in which he chooses events and manipulates their chronological presentation as he creates his history of the Reconciliation Cemeteries Association continually highlights the thematic importance of the constructed nature of historical accounts. It also ties in with his inability to decide between *Zufall* and *Fügung* as explanatory world view paradigms for his narrative.

As White has shown, plot is that aspect of narrative which gives a meaning to the events that make up its story level. The narrator cannot know the meaning of his story, or indeed, whether it has a meaning at all, because he has not made that one crucial decision. It is for this reason, too, that his ending appears contrived. An alternative reading for the ‘Naples’ saying to that provided above would be to call it a *deus ex machina*, grasped at by the narrator in order to reveal at the end of his history a structure that was supposedly immanent in events all along. It allows him to provide his narrative with the ‘completeness and fullness’ of narrative closure which, White would argue, we can only imagine, but never experience (*Content* 21). It is a narrative ending which does indeed have ‘the odor of the ideal’ (*Content* 21). The kind of emplotment to which the narrator resorts is challenged by the information about Alexander and Alexandra’s lives *after* the accident.

Reschke, on the other hand, with his teleological understanding of history, may well have enjoyed portrayal as a tragic hero. His world view is underlined, as well as in his frequent references to *Fügung*, in his commentary on the use of the word

*Wahnsinn* as a word for all occasions (ein Deckel für jeden offenen Topf), especially during the autumn and winter of 1989/90:<sup>142</sup>

Und selbst uns, Liebste, mag Wahnsinn, freilich jede holde, der die Liebe beflügelt, vorm Blumenstand zusammengeführt, auf den Friedhof geleitet, zum Pilzgericht mit Gerüchen verlockt, abermals versammelt und im schmalen Bett ineinandergefügt haben. Doch zu diesem Wahn und zum Sinn dieses Wahns, zu unserem Wahn-Sinn sage ich immer, ja, ja, immer wieder ja (12: 77).

Here we encounter an extension of the new position occupied by the narrator in *Unkenrufe*, for it is not only the narrator who is not at the scene of the action, Alexander and Alexandra, too, become increasingly isolated from the historical events happening around them. They experience the euphoria of reunification via the media of television, and are apparently unaware of the way television images can be manipulated to tell a certain kind of story of their own. As Peitsch points out, television reporting always delivers interpretations along with its pictures (*West German Reflections* 164). We might read Grass's portrayal of his heroes experiencing 'history' as a response to criticism that he had no idea what the real feeling of the public was regarding reunification as he 'had presumably not even "gelegentlich auf den Bildschirm geschaut"' (Peitsch, 'Television' 164). But as Peitsch observes, in the case of Uwe Timm, who was overseas at the time, the

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<sup>142</sup> I suspect that this is the same phenomenon to which Julia Hell refers when she writes, 'Nothing conveyed this striking inability to comprehend what was happening better than the word "nonsense" (*Unsinn*), that terrifyingly meaningless utterance [...]' (913). In my view the word *Wahnsinn* as a colloquial expression for emotionally moving events, both negative and positive, had been in circulation for years. Grass draws attention to the word, firstly, because of his interest in language, and secondly as a means of contributing to the meaning of *Unkenrufe*. Such words allow us to refer to circumstances and events easily without engaging with their deeper significance.

sensation he had of public feeling when he returned to Germany did not coincide with the ‘momentous images’ he had seen on television.

The view that reunification had to happen, that it was a natural evolution towards a more perfect state, as it was portrayed in such television reporting, fits very neatly with Reschke’s view of the world. But Reschke’s view is ‘verhegelt’, to use a term from Grass’s radical criticism of Hegel’s philosophy of history in *Aus dem Tagebuch einer Schnecke* (7: 50).<sup>143</sup> Grass rejects Hegel’s world view:

[Hegel’s] Hineininterpretieren von Sinn in die Geschichte liegt mir genausowenig wie die Vorstellung von der ewigen Wiederkehr, mit der man die völlige Hoffnungslosigkeit des Geschichtsprozesses versinnbildlicht. Ich glaube, daß die Geschichte ein absurder Prozeß ist, aus dem zu lernen schwer fällt (Köhler and Sandmeyer 59).

With the exception of the narrator’s ironic reference to the ‘Hufschlag des reitenden Weltgeistes’ (12: 76), Hegel is not mentioned in this work. Yet the narrator’s use of this metaphor allows us to assume that his attitude coincides with Grass’s polemic against Hegel’s philosophy of history. Grass says:

daß die Hegelsche Geschichtsauffassung, die der Geschichte von vornherein einen Sinn suggeriert [...] eine schreckliche These und Lehre ist. [...] Denn in dem Augenblick, in dem wir den geschichtlichen Prozessen von vornherein recht geben, wird jedes Unrecht sanktioniert (‘Mir träumte, ich müßte Abschied nehmen’ WA 1987 X: 367).

Hayden White explains that in Hegel’s *Philosophy of History* the history of any given civilization, and of civilization as a whole, was broken down into four

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<sup>143</sup> Thomas Angenendt has noted the correspondence between Grass’s neologism ‘verhegelt’ and Fontane’s ‘verbebelt’, in *Der Stechlin*, and the way both writers use the prefix ‘ver’ in a pejorative sense (50; 232). It is no coincidence that one of the things Grass admires about Fontane, and cites as his defence against those who criticise him for writing about current affairs, is the fact that he wrote this work ‘parallel zur Zeit’.

phases, and that these phases can be taken as marking out the elements of a Classical Drama, with its stages *pathos*, *agon*, *sparagmos* and *anagnorisis*. The phases can be regarded respectively ‘as indicating existential relationships, of ways of explaining those relationships, as ways of representing them, or as ways of symbolizing their “meaning” within the whole process of Roman historical development’ (*Metahistory* 123-4). As a stage of the Classic Tragic plot, *pathos* is the general state of feeling which opens the action, which, in turn, is carried forward by the *agon*. *Sparagmos* is the tearing apart of the subject, which creates the conditions for *dénouement*, and carries the action towards resolution, or *anagnorisis*. However, White notes that even though each phase describes a pattern of Tragic rise and fall, in Hegel’s philosophy of history the three phases are not resolved in the mode of Tragedy, but rather in a Comic vision which annuls the Tragic resolution (*Metahistory* 126). Hegel asks us, White concludes,

to see ourselves as actors in a drama, which, although its actual end is unknowable, displays the order and continuity of a well-wrought play [...] and which therefore gives us good reasons for believing that the resolution of this drama not only will not be meaningless, but will not even be Tragic’ (*Metahistory* 130).

This observation has interesting, if not paradoxical implications, for our reading of the narrator of *Unkenrufe* as an historiographer.

#### THE TRAGIC MODE OF EMPLOTMENT IN UNKENRUFÉ

The *Unkenrufe* narrator’s approach to the historiographical exercise with which he has been entrusted can be read as a parodic depiction of a historiography that bears remarkable similarities to White’s description of Hegel’s ‘emplotment’ of the historical narrative. The deaths of Alexander and Alexandra on the last page of the work immediately suggest the Tragic mode of emplotment. Furthermore, Reschke



bears all of the hallmarks of the tragic hero, who, according to Aristotle will evoke both pity and terror if he is portrayed as being neither thoroughly good nor thoroughly bad, but a mixture of both. Also in keeping with the tradition of the tragic hero, Reschke is portrayed as having gifts that make him superior to other men. The obvious examples are his easy facility with money, his oratory skills, and his ability to see the future. His superior organizational skills, and his ability to put big ideas into practice also mark Reschke out as a hero who, in Northrop Frye's description of the 'high mimetic tragedy' is more powerful than the audience – or the narrator, as it turns out – but still 'only' a human being.

Reschke's *hamartia*, or error of judgement, is clearly his decision not to retain a right of veto on the Board of the Reconciliation Cemeteries Association. This is an error which, as is typical of the tragic hero, consists not necessarily in wrongdoing or moral weakness, but simply in his being a strong character in an exposed position. Reschke's *hubris*, or overweening self-confidence, which is frequently in evidence, not only in the self-importance of his speeches, but also in his unilateral decision-making, is a factor which contributes to his downfall. While his espoused goal of reconciliation is certainly noble, he compromises his goal by establishing links between himself and people like the representative from the health fund, and the leaders of the expellees' associations, whose aims are clearly not reconciliation, but rather, economic and revanchist respectively.

Alexandra's role in the unfolding of the tragedy is crucial for while it is Reschke's *hamartia* which leads to their downfall as far as the Reconciliation Cemeteries Association is concerned, it is her desire to go to Naples, in full knowledge of the

saying, 'See Naples and die', that leads to their deaths. Remarkably, this is one of the few instances in which Alexander follows Alexandra's lead. He usually disregards what she has to say. He refuses to go home when Alexandra is being attacked by mosquitoes while he is recording toad-calls (12: 106-7). He insists that they use Chatterjee's rickshaws although Alexandra cannot stand Chatterjee (12: 137); and, most importantly, he pays no attention to her plea to abandon the cemetery scheme while it is still going well: 'Nur was ich sag, aufhören, weil noch schön ist' (12: 120).

Alexandra's plea could also be read as the divine warning of classical Tragedy. The narrator even emphasizes the pivotal status of this 'divine warning': 'Doch wurde mit dem Vorschlag aufzuhören, solange es noch schön sei, ihrer Geschichte die Wendemarke gekerbt' (12: 120-21). Alexander's neglect of the warning to quit while they were ahead keeps them on the path that leads inexorably to their humiliation and defeat in the Reconciliation Cemeteries Association, and their flight from Danzig. In fact, the fourth and central chapter of *Unkenrufe* provides a virtual plethora of circumstances one can interpret as divine warnings, all of which Reschke ignores. The ironical climax of these is Reschke's excursus on the role of the *Unke* as a prophetess of doom. This section, incidentally, is indebted for its detail to one of Grass's favourite sources, Grimm's *Wörterbuch*, in which the same poets – Voß, Brentano, Bürger and Achim von Arnim – are mentioned, as is the rhyme, '... und die Frösche und die Unken singen bei Johannisfunken ihre Metten ganz betrunken...' (12: 106). Similarly ironic is Reschke's observation: '[...] wir bekommen die Quittung für unser Tun und Nichtstun, wenn nicht morgen, dann übermorgen' (12: 104); as well as a number of other observations in

which natural occurrences are interpreted as signs and portents, and disregarded: ‘Glaub mir, Alexandra, wie der Raps zu früh blüht, rufen Rotbauchunken und Gelbbauchunken zu früh. Sie wollen uns etwas sagen’ (12: 127); not to mention the narrator’s insightful: ‘Doch nicht nur der zu früh blühende Raps gab seine Vorahnung’ (12: 125). Towards the end of the fourth chapter Reschke even reads the flattened toads as warnings, and not in the more vague, ‘Sie wollen uns etwas sagen’, with which he had respond to the early toad-calls, but with a negative implication: ‘Noch eine plattgewälzte Unke, kein gutes Zeichen’ (12: 134). The ironic gesture in this statement is that the narrator is referring to the state of affairs with the Reconciliation Cemetery Association, while Reschke’s new pessimism concerns the state of the environment (12: 135).

Another feature of the classical Tragedy is the evocation of pity for the tragic hero. This is very clearly in the narrator’s exclamation: ‘Reschke, der arme Reschke’ [...] (12: 167). The interesting thing about this is that at the same time as the narrator is emplotting the events in the tragic mode, and making his history fit the mould, he is simultaneously ironising this reading of events by bizarre juxtapositions and satirical commentary. His ‘arme(r) Reschke’ comment, for example, is made during a scene in which Chatterjee and Reschke meet clandestinely at the deserted, overgrown grave of the Klawitter family. The original Klawitter, Johann Wilhelm, was a shipbuilder, and the founder of the first shipyard in Gdańsk, and is a familiar figure in Grass’s depictions of Danzig’s history. Thus anything that happens on the site of his grave is imbued with particular historical significance. This is heightened, of course, by the fact that Chatterjee has become Klawitter’s successor now that he has taken over the Lenin

shipyard. In the *Unkenrufe* scene the ageing Reschke is counting as the younger and more nimble Chatterjee does flank vaults over the rusting wrought iron enclosure of the grave. Yet despite his display of lack of respect for the dead, Chatterjee says he would have liked to have the old Klawitter as his business partner. It is at this stage that 'poor Reschke' buys himself into the position as Chatterjee's partner by offering him more money, secretly siphoned out of the Reconciliation Cemeteries Association coffers. Reschke may also be pitied because of his 'German' malady of having 'zwei Seelen in einer Brust', and his sense that he would have felt that his soul had been lost if either one had been removed (12: 88).

The classical Tragedy ends, of course, with the Death of the Hero, and this, as all reviews and articles on *Unkenrufe* tell us, is Alexander and Alexandra's fate too. They are presumed to have died in a flaming inferno when their car plunges over an embankment after they have seen Naples on their honeymoon. Frye says of the tragic mode:

The particular thing called tragedy that happens to the tragic hero does not depend on his moral status. If it is causally related to something he has done, as it generally is, the tragedy is in the inevitability of the consequences of the act, not in its moral significance as an act (38).

There is an inevitability about Alexander and Alexandra's deaths that arises out of what seems to be Alexandra's self-fulfilling prophesy when she evokes the saying, 'Neapel sehen und sterben'. The narrator makes a great deal of Alexandra's insistence on seeing the famed city:

"Einmal will ich italienischen Stiefel lang runterreisen und,  
wenn geht, Neapel sehn."  
"Warum Neapel?"  
"Weil man sagt so."

“Und Umbrien, auf den Spuren der Etrusker ...”  
“Aber Neapel dann” (12: 149) .

The accident can be interpreted as the final sequence, or ‘terminal motif’ in a chain of events, and thus a direct consequence of Alexander and Alexandra’s actions. They would not have even had a car, for example, if Reschke had not diverted Reconciliation Cemeteries Association funds into Chatterjee’s enterprise. The car is Chatterjee’s expression of appreciation for services rendered. But as far as morality is concerned, the act is paradoxical. It is ironic that the manufacturer of pollution-free transport should buy his friend a car. Furthermore, Reschke’s investment in Chatterjee’s enterprise may be seen in either a positive or a negative light, given that, although the funds were diverted from the Reconciliation Cemeteries Association coffers without the board members’ knowledge, which is not the right thing to do, his act is moral insofar as it contributes towards the resolution of the problems of environmental pollution and unemployment. As will be clear from the reference to the Etruscan sarcophagus, mentioned above, even Reschke’s mention of the Etruscans in this interchange is a prefigurement of death.

Although the narrator’s history of the Reconciliation Cemeteries Association follows the archetype of Tragedy, the elements of the tragedy have been presented, as noted above, in an ironic fashion. The death of the hero is a particularly poignant case in point. The narrator’s decision to end his account of Alexander and Alexandra and the Reconciliation Cemeteries Association with the fatal vehicle accident seems to represent comic irony as well as a tragic *dénouement*.

It has been shown that the narrator clearly believes that his historical account must

be given the structure of fictional stories, as can be seen in his frequent references to *Handlung* or 'plot' in connection with his writing of his report. Yet despite this, at the end of the work the narrator appears to feel satisfied that he has succeeded in *resisting* the lure of 'novelistic' or 'romanhafte' representation (12: 245).

While his depiction of the history of the Reconciliation Cemeteries Association conforms to the Tragic archetype, it only does so because the narrator chooses to suppress some items of information available to him, and highlight others, as Hayden White suggests that narrative historians do. The most important area in which we see the narrator exercising his discretion as far as emphasizing and subordinating information is concerned, is in relation to the hero's death.

The question arises as to why he, as the historian, should choose to extend his history of the Reconciliation Cemeteries Association to that point, and not end it at some other juncture, as indeed he considers doing. In terms of his historical account of the Reconciliation Cemeteries Association the deaths of Alexander and Alexandra are marginal, if not extraneous. The fact that the narrator chooses this event as his 'terminal' motif, to provide closure, shows that he has not succeeded in freeing himself from the explanatory patterns of the archetypes listed above, that he has indeed succumbed to the lure of novelistic presentation. Although he expresses the desire, 'meinem Bericht hier den Schlußpunkt zu setzen', asking, 'Ist den nicht alles gesagt?' (12: 241) he finds that he cannot end his report at that stage. He describes the conclusion he would like his narrative to have:

Wie selbsttätig füllen sich die Versöhnungsfriedhöfe. Als Tote kehren die Deutschen heim. Die Zukunft gehört der Fahrradrickscha. Polen ist nicht verloren. Alexandra and Alexander sind glücklich verheiratet. Mir gefiele dieser Schluß (12: 241).

If his account were really a chronicle he could end it at any stage, because the chronicle does not require closure. But the narrator's aim is to write a story, to provide explanations, not merely a record of events. He says, 'Ich habe versucht, mich nicht einzumischen. Allzu romanhafte Ausflüge konnte ich mir verkneifen. Aber müßtet ihr unbedingt diese Hochzeitsreise machen, verdammt!' (12: 245). It is as if the narrator, in his frustration, is blaming the protagonists for the form he gives his account, rather than accepting that he is in control of the history he is writing. He has fallen victim to the compulsion to impose a plot on the events, and in so doing he demonstrates the validity of White's contention, in his explanation of plot, and that is that the structure of tragedy was 'immanent in events all along' (*Content* 20).

As we have seen in the comparison of the events of *Unkenrufe* with the critical constituents of the tragedy, it is not only Alexander and Alexandra's deaths in fulfilment of the saying, 'Neapel sehen, und sterben', and Alexandra's prophetic, 'Na, wenn ich schon gesehn hab' Neapel, kann ich ja sterben gleich' (12: 150), that indicate a tragic mode of emplotment. Alexandra says right at the beginning that she regrets never having been to Italy (12: 29). It takes almost half of the *Erzählung* for this wish to crystallise into a specific wish to see Naples, and then half of the novel is yet to unfold, allowing time for suspense to be built up as we wonder whether expectations associated with the saying will be confirmed or disappointed, in much the same way as is already happening with Alexandra and Alexander's happy love story unfolding under the cloud of the title. Will the story satisfy the expectations established by the insertion of such 'master narratives', or will the reader be surprised by some unexpected twist?

Alexander and Alexandra's demise and the demise of their vision for the Reconciliation Cemeteries Association, is linked by the narrator to tendencies whose effects are world-wide. The fortunes of Alexander and Alexandra and their project are brought into conjunction with these events under the heading of the 'Krisenmonat', August (12: 127). The narrator writes of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and the resulting Gulf War; simmering tensions in Georgia, Lithuania and Yugoslavia; and spiralling prices in Poland because of the sinking value of the Złoty (12: 127). When portrayed as part of a wider picture of trouble and decline, the irresponsibility, or immorality of individuals tends to be played down, or even given an air of inevitability. The inclusion of these external factors at this stage of the narrator's report does not coincide with the order of presentation in Reschke's notebooks, for the narrator informs us later that it is by means of Erna Brakup's concern at the Gulf War that the matter receives its first commentary in Reschke's diary, and that this does not take place until the winter of 1990. 'Erst durch sie steht in Reschkes Tagebuch der Beginn des Golfkrieges gemeldet' (12: 157).

There are several other important elements in the death-complex that Grass creates in the novel. One such element is Reschke's car. From the narrator's first mention of the car he appears to be obsessed by what seems like a pedantic attention to detail. Over several pages there are references to the fact that the narrator does not know the make of the car. He even asserts that Reschke's diary withholds this information from him: 'Sein Tagebuch verweigert Auskunft' (12: 53). Then he tries to imagine which make of car might satisfy Reschke's love of luxury items – he considers a Peugeot 404, which, with its luxurious leather upholstery, would be in keeping with the extravagant extended velvet collar of Reschke's overcoat (12:



45), or perhaps he would drive a Saab, or a Volvo (12: 60). Derogatory comments written by Reschke on scraps of paper about Mercedes and BMW drivers would indicate that he drives neither of these (12: 232). The reader might well ask what difference it makes, what kind of car Reschke drives. If Reschke has not made a note of it in his diary, then it is surely of no importance. But now, with the advantage of hindsight, it becomes clear that the car is an important vehicle of meaning in the story.

The original car with which Reschke makes his trips to Poland, and in which the couple travel to visit their respective children, is stolen from a car park. It is replaced, as one later finds out, by a car which is a 'gift' from Chatterjee in recognition of Reschke's secret investment of Reconciliation Cemeteries Association funds in his rickshaw business. But the car is more than simply a means of transport. Indeed the narrator devotes a whole paragraph in the final chapter to 'Reschkes Verhältnis zu Autos' (12: 232-33). Here we also discover that the narrator's hypothesis that the car may have been a Peugeot 404 must be rejected, as such a car would hardly have been tempting to the car thieves who supply Poland with stolen cars manufactured in the west. Later the narrator says that he knows that the car is a Volvo 440 (12: 242), but does not tell us how he came by this information, or why it had been necessary for him to devote so much time to puzzling about the make of the car earlier on.

Despite its reputation for being 'besonders stabil' (12: 242) the new car leaves the winding road somewhere between Naples and Rome, and lurches over a cliff, presumably killing its occupants. One could argue that this is also predictable in

that it follows the pattern of fairy tales and fables in which the villain falls victim to his own cunning.

When we read *Unkenrufe* as a study of an historian's construction of an historical report, and set this alongside White's thesis that historical accounts are constructed along the lines of literary prototypes to conform with the form of a story, we can grasp the whole death complex as a revelation of the power of the narrator or historian to imprint his interpretation of events on the story he tells. How else can the universal acceptance of critics and scholars of Alexander and Alexandra's deaths as the end of the novel and resolution of its conflict be accounted for? We accept that Alexander and Alexandra are dead not only because the narrator wants us to, but also because it is a predictable outcome. Yet in so doing we disregard evidence in the text to the contrary. As well as the fact that Reschke writes that they survive the accident – 'ein glückliches Altern [...] bei wechselseitiger Fürsorge, bedingt durch den Unfall und dessen Folgen (12: 218) – there are so many clues that anyone who watches TV detective stories would be as bored as Schirmacher with the 'Neapel und sterben' saying. One wonders, for example, why Reschke would have taken the documentation concerning the Reconciliation Cemeteries Association with him on holidays, for the package that he sends the narrator holds not only his notebooks, but also a video, cassette tapes, newspaper clippings and an assortment of receipts. Furthermore, the narrator *knows* that Reschke is driving a car renowned for its stability, and therefore unlikely to leave the road. There is no evidence that the charred bodies in the wreckage actually belong to Alexander and Alexandra. Not only are the bodies unidentifiable, the documents in the glove box have been

destroyed. Somehow – and no one seems to find this remarkable – symbols of the pair survive the conflagration – a slipper and a string bag. Yet the slipper is not the kind Reschke wears. Reschke wears ‘Hausschuhe aus Kamelhaar’ (12: 143); but the slipper found at the site of the accident is a ‘Lederpantoffel’ (12:245). Either this is a slip-up on the author’s part, or he is having a lot of pedantic fun with his readers, watching them read what the mythic archetype of the Tragedy suggests.

Until the time comes when the narrator must decide on how to give his account of the Reconciliation Cemeteries Association closure, that is to say, when he must decide how to make his account of historical events conform to the *story* form, he seems to be untroubled by Reschke’s ability to see into the future. He gives no intimation, for example, that there is anything odd about Reschke’s ability, as a schoolboy, to draw the picture of Danzig in flames as early as 1943, when the city was still intact. He calls Reschke’s drawings ‘vorausselende Kritzeleien’, belittling the drawings themselves, revealing no amazement at Reschke’s rare acuity, but rather affirming it (12: 105).

The way in which Grass has chosen to bring his *Erzählung* to a close provides an interesting spectrum of interlocked meanings which are only possible in this work because Grass has separated the roles of narrator and protagonist, for this is what allows the narrator’s story to continue after the protagonists are presumed to be dead. In association with the approach to the work in terms of Hayden White’s description of history-writing, the death of the protagonists provides a vehicle for questioning the adequacy of an approach to history-writing which demands closure. The *dénouement* provided by the deaths of the protagonists satisfies the

conditions of the Tragic mode of emplotment. Yet its very completeness raises questions rather than resolves them. We can read Alexander, with his grandiose aims and disregard for the sensitivities of others, as a parody of a great historical personality. He conforms to Hegel's observation that great men form 'purposes to suit themselves, not others' (Qtd in White, *Metahistory* 110). Indeed, his name links him to Hegel's description of 'the fate of world historical personalities':

They attained no calm enjoyment; their whole life was labor and trouble; their whole nature was nothing but their master passion. When their object is attained they fall off like empty hulls from the kernel. They die early *like Alexander* (Qtd in White, *Metahistory* 110. My emphasis).

Although the *dénouement* provided by the deaths of the protagonists satisfies the conditions of the Tragic mode of emplotment, other aspects of *Unkenrufe*, especially the narrator's treatment of the deaths, mean that it raises questions, rather than answers them.

A significant aspect of the interchange between Alexander and Alexandra on the subject of going to Naples, cited above, is that it is one of the occasions on which the narrator gives no documentary source for the information he gives. As he does not reveal how he came to know of this conversation the reader is free to assume that it is invented, in order to contribute to the cohesiveness of the historical story – and, what is more, make it, as White's work reminds us, a *story of a particular kind* (*Metahistory* 6). This explanation is supported by the narrator's comment that he can see the pair discussing the route, bent over the atlas which he only *assumes* to have existed: 'weil sich in Alexandra's windschiefen Büchergestell [...] gewiß ein Atlas fand' (12: 149), and also from the narrator's concluding remarks: 'So sehe ich beide: zufrieden. Ich sehe sie gerne so' (12: 150). For good

measure the narrator finishes up with yet another reference to Naples with Alexandra's saying, as noted above, that she can die once she has seen Naples (12: 150). Yet the narrator admits that he has no evidence that Alexander and Alexandra actually got as far as Naples: 'Auf dem Weg nach Neapel oder auf dem Rückweg ist es geschehen' (12: 245). Once again, it is merely his assumption that they did. He says, 'Ich nehme an, daß Alexandra Neapel gesehen hat' (12: 245). Once again, this is an instance of dubious credibility in which a suggestion on the part of the narrator is accepted as 'fact' by readers because it fits in with an already constituted, or predictable pattern of events. If we step back from the expectations that the 'Naples' saying engenders, we will remember that a previous reference to Naples in Grass's work involved the falsification of papers. In *Die Blechtrommel* Oskar has false papers indicating that he was born in Naples on the 21st of October 1912 (3: 427).

Reschke's reference to the Etruscans is also part of the prophesy of death complex, for it provides an ironic reversal of the expectation set up by the narrator's emphasis on Alexandra's desire to see Naples before she dies. This is because Reschke's commentary on the figures on the sarcophagus is made, not before his presumed death in the accident, but at a time seven years hence:

Also leben wir unsere Jahre. Interessant, wie Rom sich verändert hat seit unserem ersten Besuch. Schon damals haben wir alle längeren Wege mit der Ricksha gemacht, über den Tiber zum Vatikan. Dort vor sieben Jahren [...] kam Alexandra zu ihrem Vergleich: "Ist lustig schon. Papst ist in Polen, und ich steh' vor Peterskirch" (12: 243-44).

In other words, even though they may have longed to die together and spend eternity in each other arms, the accident predates the expression of this wish.

Furthermore, Alexander's attraction to the image of the couple on the lid of the sarcophagus stands in sharp contrast to his fear of mortality as depicted in his headlong flight from the vision of his own tombstone depicted at the beginning of the story. It indicates not only Reschke's personal growth, and acceptance of his mortality, but also suggests that death would be a 'happy ending' to his story, rather than a tragic one. It is also one which would coincide with White's description of the *dénouement* of the Comedy:

The reconciliations which occur at the end of Comedy are reconciliations of men with men, of men with their world and their society; the condition of society is represented as being purer, saner, and healthier as a result of the conflict among seemingly inalterably opposed elements in the world; these elements are revealed to be, in the long run, harmonizable with one another, unified, and at one with themselves and others (*Metahistory* 9).

Reschke describes himself and Alexandra, as well as their friend Chatterjee, the Pakistani entrepreneur and promoter of rickshaws, as winners. 'Rom ist frei von Gestank, kein Dauerhupen, nur noch das melodische Geläut der Dreitonklingeln. Freund Chatterjee hat gewonnen – und wir mit ihm' (12: 244). This diary entry is also dated in the future, at a time when Reschke can say with some satisfaction, 'Heute weiß ich, wir haben versagt, sehe aber dennoch, wie sich gegenwärtig alles zum Besseren fügt. Falsches schlägt richtig aus' (12: 231). This resolution coincides exactly with White's Comic *dénouement*. The condition of society is represented as being purer, saner, and healthier, and Reschke is unified, and at one with himself and others, just like Goethe, who wrote during his *Italienreise*: 'In Rom habe ich mich selbst zuerst gefunden, ich bin zuerst übereinstimmend mit mir selbst glücklich und vernünftig geworden, [...].'

In a close reading of *Unkenrufe* the apparent tragedy of the ending is further relativized by two of the narrator's thoughts. Firstly, he gives his account an ambivalent note by showing that he himself is not really sure that there is an end to the story at all, saying enigmatically: 'Das Ende, falls es ein Ende gibt, steht fest' (12: 298). Then he seems to be correcting this uncertainty by throwing in a secondary explanation for the tragic ending: 'Auf einer kurvenreicher Strecke muß es sie – doch wer ist Es? – aus der Kurve getragen haben' (12: 299).

Yet how can the 'end' be decided, if the very existence of an 'end' is in question? Once again the narrator seems to be vacillating between conflicting kinds of historical explanation. He appears to have grasped that the events of his historical account need to be manipulated in order to be shaped into the unilinear causality of traditional historical narrative which seeks revelation and closure. Yet he lacks either the will, or the conviction to write his history *entirely* in the vein to which he himself is most predisposed. With these final sly twists the narrator reminds the reader of his epistemological uncertainty in the work's opening sentences.

What remains is the fact that the narrator has attempted to imbue his account of historical events with narrative structure. In order to do so, he has had to ignore, or at least play down certain items in the archival material at his disposal. For, as we have seen, taken as a whole, this material actually suggests two, mutually contradictory endings. These two endings seem to coincide with the two world views that inform the narrator's and Reschke's lives. The narrator does not align himself with Reschke's ending. He overwrites it with the tragic ending of the car crash. But because he then proceeds to ironise this ending the work actually

remains without closure.

We can understand this as the projection of mutually-exclusive states of affairs by the same text. The two conflicting world views – *Zufall* and *Fügung* – are placed alternately *sous rature*. If we recall McHale's adaptation of this term, referred to at the beginning of this chapter, the concept works in the following way:

First one state of affairs is projected: "someone opens the door. It's Dale who stands there." Then that state of affairs is recalled or rescinded, "unprojected": "I erase him." Yet the "erased" state of affairs still persists, if only as a kind of afterimage (99).

This description can be used as a template which fits exactly over the opening sentences of *Unkenrufe*. First one state of affairs is projected: '*Chance placed the widow beside the widower.*' Then that state of affairs is recalled or rescinded, 'unprojected': '*Or chance wasn't involved, because their story began on All Souls Day*' Yet the 'erased' state of affairs – *the meeting was a chance occurrence* – still persists, if only as a kind of afterimage.

In *Unkenrufe* the narrator's value judgements are similarly projected then replaced. Things that are judged by him to be good and right are suddenly assessed as the opposite, and vice versa. First Alexander and Alexandra's concept of reconciliation is 'eine Furzidee' (12: 45); then the narrator calls it 'ihre schöne Idee und ihre entsetzlich Fleischwerdung' (12: 150). He even approves of Reschke's diversion of Cemeteries Association funds to Chatterjee's rickshaw production: 'Reschke handelte richtig' (12: 171). But in the same chapter he claims, 'Seine Idee stank mir von Anfang an' (12: 175). For McHale the purpose of such states of affairs in fiction, where 'both cannot be admitted, yet cannot be excluded', is 'that of laying bare the processes by which readers, in collaboration



with texts, construct fictional objects and worlds' (100). However, it is a practice which also has the potential to lay bare the processes by which we, in collaboration with texts construct our reality.

‘DIE UHR KOTZT IN DEN EIMER / DER EIMER WIRD NIE SATT’

In the opening sentences of *Unkenrufe*, then, the ‘crossed out’ words must still be read. Far from telling us the ‘true’ state of affairs, the narrator leaves us hesitating (with him) between alternative, competing sets of interpretations. This narrative strategy continues to determine the work’s structure, right through to the end, where, I, in contrast to others who have written about the work, find that two mutually exclusive outcomes are presented. Assessments of the narrator’s, or the characters’ motivations, events and processes are repeatedly ‘erased’, and replaced by their opposites. The reader of *Unkenrufe* is obliged, therefore, to reassess time and time again the moral, social and political rectitude and value of what is going on in the fictional, and by extrapolation, in the real world. Within the text itself conclusive answers are not provided. In this way the reader is forced to come to terms with the complex issues underlying the events – both real and fictitious – which the work describes. This is a feature of the work that appears to have been completely ignored to date, and yet, as the various aspects of the text are examined below it will be seen to be one of the text’s underlying constants. Closed endings that are open to only one interpretation have never been part of Grass’s *métier*. The story does not end with the deaths of Alexander and Alexandra, it ends with the unreliable narrator telling us that they died, and that is another thing altogether.

Lack of closure, or open-endedness is a feature of much modern and post-modern fiction with its representation of the world as essentially disordered and incoherent. The 'no end' in Grass's fiction is a reflection of his world view, and is a recurring theme in his prose and lyric writing, including *Unkenrufe*, for which, he says, he is indebted to Celan: 'Ich verdanke Paul Celan viel: Anregung, Widerspruch, den Begriff von Einsamkeit, aber auch die Erkenntnis, daß Auschwitz kein Ende hat' ('Schreiben nach Auschwitz' 16: 249). It is his consistent theme. It will be recalled that Pilenz's story is not given closure; in all likelihood he is still loitering at the door of *Ritterkreuzträger* reunions, excluded, and hoping to catch sight of Mahlke. In *Hundejahre* we read: 'Kein Kreis schließt sich rein' (5:389). In *Aus dem Tagebuch einer Schnecke*: 'Über die Ebene, manchmal von Hecken verdeckt, zieht die Schnecke und sieht kein Ende ab' (7: 111). In *Der Butt*: 'Danach ging das Leben weiter' (8: 629). And most recently in *Im Krebsgang*: 'Das hört nicht auf. Nie hört das auf' (216). Similarly in his poetry: 'die Uhr kotzt in den Eimer / der Eimer wird nie satt' (*Frost und Gebiß*, 1: 102). The one exception to this pattern of consistency is *Die Rättin*, which was written at a time when Grass felt that time had run out for writers to make a difference. Of this work Neuhaus observed: 'Das Konzept der Rattengeschichte wird insofern zum Durchbruch, als Grass mit ihrer Hilfe die Form findet, in der "das Ende [...] mitgeschrieben werden" kann' (Neuhaus, *Günter Grass* 163). The she-rat's closing verdict is that the narrator's desperate desire for a last chance to build a world based on peace and brotherly love is 'ein schöner Traum' (11: 487).

For Grass the impossibility of closure is linked not only to modern experience of the world as a whole, but also to what he perceives as the moral imperative of

maintaining an intense awareness of the consequences of German nationalism and fascism. To say that this story has an end, that the issues have been resolved, would be to allow it to fade from contemporary German consciousness. There was a time when Grass thought, erroneously as it turns out, that he had finished working with the past: 'Schreiben deckt Schichten auf: Und ich habe sicher nach der *Die Blechtrommel* gedacht: Nun ist dieser Komplex vorbei. Es war nicht vorbei. Es waren neue Schichten da, und ich sehe kein Ende ab' ('Manche Freundschaft zerbrach am Ruhm' WA 1987 X: 26). In *Unkenrufe*, and in his 1990 lecture 'Schreiben nach Auschwitz', Grass provides once again his answers to the questions which haunted Pilez back in the sixties: 'Zwar wird meine Rede ihren Punkt finden müssen, doch dem Schreiben nach Auschwitz kann kein Ende versprochen werden, es sei denn, das Menschengeschlecht gäbe sich auf' ('Schreiben nach Auschwitz' 16: 256).

The understanding that closure has an air of artificiality is consistent with the view that history is chaotic. In an interview with Manfred Durzak, Grass spoke of his belief in the necessity of expanding our understanding of history to include the absurd, the disparate, and the contradictory. He also expressed the view that such an approach would not have appeared strange to historians like Burckhardt and Mommsen ('Geschichte' 16). White's description of Burckhardt's approach to historiography explains why Grass would find it attractive, for White associates Burckhardt's approach with a move from processional history to structural history, in which 'the element of theme tends to override the element of plot, at least insofar as plot may be conceived to be the strategy by which an *unfolding* story is articulated' (*Metahistory* 230. Original emphasis).

A further interesting aspect of the simultaneously open and closed structure of *Unkenrufe* can be seen in the parallels between the way Grass has structured this work and some comments he made in connection with his play, *Die Plebejer proben den Aufstand*. The play is a superimposition of Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* on the events of the uprising in East Berlin on the 16th and 17th of June, 1953. It can be seen that the tragedy of *Coriolanus*, which Grass superimposes upon the character called the 'Chef' (i.e. the 'Boss', nameless, like the *Unkenrufe* narrator) has a good deal of resemblance to what happens to Reschke in *Unkenrufe*. With regard to this earlier character Grass says:

Ich habe genausogut mich gemeint. Ich habe eigentlich jeden gemeint, der in diesen Zwiespalt gerät, auf der einen Seite Theorie, utopischer Anspruch, Heilslehren dieser und jener Art, Forderungen an die Welt, an den Menschen und auf der anderen Seite die widersprüchliche Wirklichkeit, das fehlerhafte Beginnen eines Arbeiteraufstandes, das natürlich gemessen an der Theorie, an den utopischen Forderungen immer verlieren muß, obgleich sich dann wieder herausstellt, daß die Wirklichkeit stärker ist als die Theorie, denn die Arbeiter haben sich zwar spontan benommen und haben dann doch Dinge getan, mit denen der Chef gar nicht gerechnet hat. Alles war ganz anders, sagen die Plebejer, wenn sie zurück kommen ('Es war nicht meine Absicht, den 17. Juni zu dramatisieren', WA 1987 X: 49).<sup>144</sup>

Reschke, too, promotes his particular brand of *Heilslehre* with his view of the cemeteries project as a 'große, die Völker versöhnende Idee', and his faith that it is *Fügung* that brought him together with Alexandra, thus sowing the seed from which the cemeteries project begins to grow. His project, like that of the

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<sup>144</sup> See also Grass's commentary in 'Vor- und Nachgeschichte der Tragödie des *Coriolanus* von Livius und Plutarch über Shakespeare bis zu Brecht und mir' 14: 58-84, as well as opening section of 'Politisches Tagebuch: Der verschämte Siebzehn' 15: 168-170.

spontaneously initiated workers' uprising comes to grief in the clash of his Utopian demands with contradictory reality. The realities of capitalism – within the 'divided' man Reschke, as well as in society at large – prove to be stronger than his theoretical concept of reconciliation in its utopian dimensions. The narrator, too, finds himself floundering in the claws of contradictory reality.

As noted above, tragedy is a mode of emplotment which is consonant with the interests of those historians who conceive of events as belonging to 'an ongoing structure of relationships or an eternal return of the Same in the Different' (*Metahistory* 11). This is yet another of White's observations illustrated in Grass's tale. The narrator's view of history finds occasional expression in such seemingly off-handed remarks as his above cited references to the church dome, borne on its octagonal columns until next time it destroyed (12: 60), and to the granite columns of the Polish National Bank building which feign permanence (12: 103). He demonstrates an attitude of resignation, perhaps even fatalism. Grass himself has a different view of history: 'Mein Geschichtverständnis ist nicht resignativ, es ist skeptisch. Es ist ein den absurden Prozeß mithineinbeziehendes Verständnis, das aber nicht mit Fatalismus abgetan werden darf' (Hofer, 433). As has been shown in Chapter 2 of this thesis, it is important to maintain the differentiation between the narrator and the author. In *Unkenrufe* we can see how philosophies of history can determine how individual events, or strings of events, are interpreted. The meaning that attaches to events is one that derives from an understanding of the world as a whole. The narrator's vacillations and contradictions are all part of his

trying to make sense of the absurd process of history as best he can.<sup>145</sup> His ‘emplotment’ of events, the way he finally imbues his account with the structure of a story from what are, in the fictional world, real events, conforms well to White’s explanation of the tragic mode as ‘a revelation of the nature of the forces opposing man’ (*Metahistory* 10). Alexander and Alexandra’s resignation from the board of the Reconciliation Cemeteries Association when the forces of capitalist opportunism overtake their noble enterprise, could be seen, at least in the fictional world, to confirm White’s view that ‘the reconciliations that occur at the end of Tragedy [...] are more in the nature of resignations of men to the conditions under which they must labor in the world’, for these conditions ‘set the limits on what may be aspired to and what may be legitimately aimed at in the quest for security and sanity in the world’ (*Metahistory* 9).

The narrator can be regarded as the spectator in White’s sense. He has been the spectator of Reschke’s activities through the medium of his documents as well as through the medium of his own construction of the story. As the narrator is forced by his work on the history of the Cemeteries Project to engage more and more with the events of the past that led to the desire for cemeteries for expellees in the first place, he finds himself at one point unable to maintain the divided stance that has demanded his continual presentation of two world views. In accepting the task that Reschke thrust upon him, and especially in his conscientious portrayal of

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<sup>145</sup> For Grass’s view that history is an absurd process, and it is up to individuals to try to make sense of it as best they can, see also: Grass, ‘Ich bin Sozialdemokrat weil ich ohne Angst leben will’, Gespräch mit Leo Bauer in Hermes, ed. *Angestiftet* 157-181.

events from Reschke's point of view, the narrator has been the proverbial toad-eater. He knows this himself, and asks, 'Wie viele Kröten muß ich noch schlucken?' (12: 83). His vacillations between hating Reschke and all that he stands for – 'Diese sich edelgebende Rechthaberei im Dienst der Toten stank mir von Anfang an (12: 45) – and identifying with Reschke's concerns and wishing him success – 'Jetzt will sogar ich, daß sie weiter machen, verdammt (12: 120), seem to resolve themselves through a gain in consciousness. This development comes out most clearly in his outburst as he recalls events towards the end of the war, how as teenagers in 1944, he and Reschke had been thrown into the *Endkampf*. The equivocation with which the narrator began his account gives way here to an affirmation of his own world view, and the rejection of Reschke's.

Und zufällig – Reschke, hörst du! – rein zufällig nur, nicht dank  
höherer Fügung, kamen wir davon, überlebten wir, blieben wir  
bis auf ein paar Schrammen heil und retteten uns in den Westen  
(12: 215).

In collating the documents that deal with the events relating to Alexander and Alexandra and the Reconciliation Cemeteries Association, and emplotting them in the form of tragedy, the narrator becomes simultaneously contestant in, and witness to, an agonic test. This is underlined throughout the *Erzählung*, and especially poignantly in the above paragraph, by the use of the second person. The narrator addresses Reschke by name, thus both evoking and underlining the inseparability of past and present, of historical event and lived present. The agonic contest consists in the confrontation with Germany's past. In this section of *Unkenrufe* it is the grim result of the betrayal of Europe's youth' under a swastika whose arms stretched for thousands of kilometres from Kursk, south of Moscow, to Tobruk on the African continent, a betrayal, moreover, which can never be

justified by reference to *Fügung*.

[D]och Alexandras Bruder wurde im Jahr zuvor als Partisan erschossen, siebzehnjährig wie wir, und Reschkes Brüder waren seit Sommer '43 tot: Maximilian verbrannt als Panzerfahrer bei Kursk, Eugen nahe Tobruk von einer Tellermine zerissen; sie fanden ihr Ende, wir nicht (12: 215-16).

Here the narrator is following once again the procedure, cited above, which Grass advocates in *Aus dem Tagebuch einer Schnecke*, asking 'davor, und was war vor dem, und was ging vor alledem vor, bis etwas nachkam und benannt wurde' (7: 141), and this is what allows the narrator to make the breakthrough, and decide which of the competing world views – his or Reschke's – will give meaning to the events of which the story he must tell is to be constructed. An event in the past gives meaning to the present and enables him to come down categorically on the side of *Zufall* as the overriding determiner of how things happen. The narrator's insistence that he and Reschke survived by chance coincides closely with Grass's conviction that he only survived the war, and was only able to remain innocent, by chance – a view that he has repeated many times over the years, most poignantly perhaps in his confessionally constructed *Aus dem Tagebuch einer Schnecke*: 'Außerdem, Kinder, bin ich ein Zufall, der zufällig überlebte, zufällig etwas zu schreiben weiß – aber auch oder abermals zufällig eine umsichgreifende Industrie – Schiffswerften – hätte aufbauen können' (7: 84-85).<sup>146</sup>

However, the conflict of master narratives of the historical process played out in *Unkenrufe* is only provisionally resolved with the narrator's denial of *Fügung* as

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<sup>146</sup> See, for example, Arnold 3; 'Die Verzweiflung arbeitet ohne Netz' WA 1987 X: 166; 'Von der Überlebensfähigkeit der Ketzer' 16: 447; and Neuhaus, 'Das konstante Gefühl'.



an explanation for historical events. The conflict remains because, as has been shown above, the tragic deaths of the protagonists are overlaid with the comic, magic realist element of Reschke living on to the end of the millennium, and viewing with satisfaction how the world around him is a much better place. In Reschke's Utopia land titles have little value. Free of the restrictions imposed by the nation-state and linguistic borders, Europe is enjoying new agricultural productivity as a result of global warming and the warm damp climate it has brought to northern Europe (12: 231).

In choosing to end his history of the Reconciliation Cemetery Association with Alexander and Alexandra's deaths the narrator subordinates Reschke's statements that he is almost blind, that he must use a walking stick, and that he has enjoyed seven years of happy married life with Alexandra. The fact that the narrator has chosen to pass over this information, and provide closure for his history in the tragic mode enables us to see not only the processes of selection and rejection engaged in by the narrative historian, but also the way in which external pressures on the historian might influence the interpretation of the raw historical data. By eliminating the possibility that Alexandra and Alexander may indeed still be alive, and opting for the alternative that gives his historical account the moral meaning that attaches to tragedy, seemingly against his better judgment, and after his 'awakening', the narrator illustrates Grass's contention that we do find it hard to learn from history, that we are recidivists who repeat the same kinds of deeds and misdeeds again and again. We have seen how the narrator had a moment of enlightenment, when he knew without a doubt, that Chance, not Destiny, had preserved his life at a time when so many others of his generation had lost theirs,

and yet he fails to integrate this moment into his practice of history writing.

In keeping with White's definition of the tragic mode, *Unkenrufe* reveals the nature of the forces opposing man, in this case, the Germans of the late twentieth century. In this view the reconciliations that occur at the end of tragedy are in the nature of 'resignations of men to the conditions under which they must labor in the world' (*Metahistory* 9); this, too, we see demonstrated in *Unkenrufe* as the narrator recognises that Auschwitz imposes a debt on subsequent generations, especially his own. In Grass's view this terrible era of German history imposes permanent limitations on what the Germans may aspire to, and what they may legitimately aim at in their quest for security and sanity in the world. The narrator's outburst about the role of *Zufall* leads him to the conviction that as a German he must, in White's words, learn to work within conditions that are 'inalterable and eternal' (*Metahistory* 9). The fall of Alexander and Alexandra, his protagonists, and the shaking of the world they wished to inhabit, with which he ends his 'tragedy' are not totally threatening to the narrator, who has survived the agonic test. There has been a gain in his consciousness. But, and this is typical of Grass's narrators of the first period in particular, and especially in *Starush of örtlich betäubt*, in which, as has been noted above, a similar strategy involving *sous rature* is employed, his personal weakness prevents him from acting concertedly on his insights.

The final page of *Unkenrufe* suggests that the certainty underlying the narrator's outburst about having survived the war by chance, and his apparent commitment to a world view which rejects Reschke's belief in *Fügung*, is being relativized yet

again. Another explanation, however, is that now that the narrator has followed the trail of Alexander's documents as far as he can, he feels that he has 'written himself free',<sup>147</sup> and that he can therefore afford to play with the *Zufall/Fügung* dialectic, or at least ironize the way certain idiomatic expressions reveal a leaning to a world view according to which we are the play things of some greater agency: '– doch wer ist Es?' (12: 245).

The narrator is also directing this question to the readers, as is entirely in keeping with the conception of first-person narration as the most direct form of communication between narrator and reader, and its confessional intimacy as described in Chapter 2 above. With the moral meaning that inheres in the tragic mode of emplotment seriously questioned, readers are left to their own devices, and their own concepts of right and wrong, to deal with the complex political and moral issues thrown up by the *story* aspect of the novel. This is the real significance of the narrator's question.

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<sup>147</sup> Cf. Pater Alban's advice to Pilez, the narrator of *Katz und Maus*: 'Schreiben Sie sich frei' (4: 126). Grass, too, believed, after he had completed *Hundejahre*, that he had 'written himself free' but discovered himself to be in error. See 'Schreiben nach Auschwitz' 16: 250.

## 7. CONCLUSION

Regardless of the ways in which histories are conceived, the fact remains that their purpose is the same, and that, as has been shown above, is to take possession of the past in the interest of promoting certain views of the present, and in turn, determining the course of the future in keeping with particular ideological standpoints. Historians share the belief 'that historical writing will do far more than merely reflect the changed circumstances [after unification]: it will play an important role in deciding the kind of Germany that establishes itself in the heart of Europe' (Alter and Monteath 9). Jürgen Kocka has suggested that historiography can best serve the community by concerning itself less with dramatic turning points and more with history as a structural continuity (Qtd. in Alter and Monteath 8). Historical turning points, such as was witnessed in Germany in 1989-90, however, provide the necessary impetus and urgency for this process to be undertaken. The criticism that Grass was turning his back on domestic issues by setting his first post-*Wende* *Erzählung* outside of Germany is not only unjustified, it misses the very important point that the question of German-Polish relations goes to the heart of the problem of Germany's identity, a question that was forced to the fore when the prospect of reunification offered itself in 1989.<sup>148</sup> The fact that highlights this perhaps more than any other, is that

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<sup>148</sup> Here I differ with Mark Cory, who criticizes Szczypiorki's view of the novel ('Fröschgequak'). He says: '[Szczypiorki] made the mistake of assuming the main point had to do with Poland.'

Footnotes continued on next page.

Germany's border with Poland was the only one of Germany's international borders that had not been recognized by the Federal Republic at that time. This was bad enough whilst the two Germanys seemed to be enjoying so-called 'post-national' identities, with the East expressing its identity in socialist internationalism, COMECON, and the Warsaw Pact, and the West in cosmopolitan consumerism, NATO, and the liberal democratic, free market economy of the European Union. However, with this kind of identity already under challenge by unprecedented brooding over the problems of identity in the eighties, unification was to put extreme pressure on already existing demands within the Federal Republic for a redefinition of German identity. Germany's prevarication on the issue of the Polish border whilst it was searching for a new kind of national identity concerned Grass deeply.

In this study of *Unkenrufe* I hope to have justified my opening contention that far from being a 'slight work',<sup>149</sup> Grass's first post-*Wende* work of fiction is rich in texture, allegory, intertextual reference and political significance. In many aspects it is situated securely within the traditions of Grass's complete oeuvre, and conforms to Neuhaus's description of each of Grass's works as 'Bruchstück einer großen Konfession', and 'Fragment im romantischen Sinne, das über sich hinausweist, vor und zurück in einen größeren Zusammenhang, den er selbst nur

*Unkenrufe* is just as much a novel of German-German relations, and just as much a novel of the role of a united Germany in European relations' (183). The point is that Germany's relationship with Poland, burdened as it is with historical guilt on both sides, is absolutely fundamental to German identity, and therefore to German-German relations and European relations. It is not a separate issue.

<sup>149</sup> Preece, *Life and Work* 187.

dunkel erahnen läßt' (*Günter Grass* 1). At the same time, however, Grass makes fundamental changes in the way in which he constructs that most central of the aspects of all of his prose fiction writing, his narrator figure.

In seeking answers to Grass's questions: 'Wer erzählt hier? Und mit wessen Erlaubnis?', I have demonstrated the ways in which Grass's response to the challenge of reunification is revealed in its content and narrative structure, and explained the two most significant changes which distinguish *Unkenrufe* from the work of the preceding decades. These are, firstly, the shift in the narrator's location away from the positions at the centre of the action that Grass's narrators have characteristically occupied, to a position on the edge of the action; and secondly, a move away from a concern with metafiction towards a concern with metahistory. In identifying the *Unkenrufe* narrator's role as that of the historian, and tracing the way in which he interacts with the historical documents, I have shown how the process of history-writing as demonstrated in *Unkenrufe* coincides with Cohn's observations regarding genres of historical and fictional writing, and with White's observations concerning the ways in which an historical story traces a sequence of events and gives them meaning.

By focussing on the tellers of Grass's tales, and tracing the forebears of the *Unkenrufe* narrator in Grass's earlier prose fiction works I have been able to propose a very clear periodization of Grass's fiction writing from 1959 to 1995 based on the way in which he constructs and uses his narrator figures, which suggests a sound explanation for these changes. I have shown how the first-person narrators of the first period of Grass's prose fiction writing describe their own

lived experiences, and are representations of their creator's concept of the struggle involved in trying to come to terms with their own and their country's past. Their concerns are their own experience. Grass explores the relationship between protagonist and narrator by means of occupying these key positions in the text with the same figure, under the aspect of the moral obligation of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*.

In the second period Grass creates narrators who are fictional representations of himself. In the seventies and eighties Grass's works exhibit a strong interest in the empirical author, as Grass, along with much of West German society, embarks on a quest for self-definition in a changing world. Now the focus falls clearly on the writer himself, upon his personal life experience as a writer and citizen, rather than on the lives of invented figures. In these works Grass thematizes the experiences of the writer in a pluralist society as he grapples not only with history, but with the other demands of Germany-in-the-world, with its responsibilities towards the environment, women, the Third World. These are issues that relate to the new way in which West Germany increasingly came to see itself, as it began to take pride in its economic and social achievements and assume a post-national, post-conventional identity.

The narrators of both of these periods all have very distinctive personalities. In the first period the names, family trees, and physical descriptions draw attention to the narrators as highly idiosyncratic characters central to the texts which they narrate. In the second period the identity of the narrator figures is given a new kind of piquancy because of the close relationship between the fictional narrator and the

empirical author. Apart from the borderline case of Pilenz, the stories told by all of the narrators in the first and second periods of Grass's fiction revolve around themselves. They are narrator-protagonists. The works are all of the 'fictional autobiography' genre.

It has been demonstrated that *Unkenrufe* is distinguished from all of Grass's previous works by the appearance of a new type of narrator, and with this new narrator type, a substantial shift in emphasis. In Grass's first two post-*Wende* works the narrators are no longer writing about themselves. The 'autobiographical' information about the narrators is still relevant, but only in a general sense. The absence of names and other information about the narrators in the newer works is a device that directs attention away from the narrators as *individuals* towards the narrators as *performers of a specific, socially and politically relevant task* – namely the collation of historical documents and the interpretation of these documents. In short: historiography. As individuals the narrators of *Unkenrufe* and *Ein weites Feld* are forgettable, something one could never say of Oskar, Pilenz, or the fictional Günter Grass figures in the various 'incarnations' and conversations with the flounder in *Der Butt*, or in the space capsule in *Die Rättin*, let alone the autobiographically constructed *Aus dem Tagebuch einer Schnecke* and *Kopfgeburten*.

In the post-*Wende* novels there is a shift in emphasis away from the 'selves', away from the individual identities and individual problems of the narrators, towards an emphasis on the specific social and historical 'role' that they perform. The new, unnamed, relatively undefined narrators attempt to grasp and shape the chaotic



events of which 'history' is made up, and give it meaning. It is thoroughly in keeping with this role that the narrators are not named. The narrators of *Unkenrufe* and *Ein weites Feld* are not writing their own memoirs, and therefore their names or personal identities are of little consequence. In history-writing it is the historical document which vouches for authenticity, not personal observation. Thus, while both of the new works cited are about German issues, the works are simultaneously representations of the challenge of historiography, the possible modes of the presentation and understanding of history, and the ends which it serves.

For *Unkenrufe* Grass invents a narrator whose undefined identity, combined with his attempt to write a history on the basis of surviving documents, highlights not only the subjective nature of historiography, but the very important role played by historians in the construction of an identity for the new post-*Wende* Germany.

Whereas the narrators of the works written during the first two periods were consciously involved in writing their own histories, in the third period (*Unkenrufe* and *Ein weites Feld*) the narrators are writing the histories of others, not for their own benefit, but for the sake of the wider community. Furthermore, the position of these narrators on the margins, or outside of the action, is played off against their central significance to the narratives in which they appear as interpreters of the fictive reality, and, importantly, the reader's only access to the fictional world. The movement of the narrators away from the centre of the action which we observe for the first time in *Unkenrufe* becomes even greater in *Ein weites Feld*, and *Mein Jahrhundert* for here Grass uses multiple narrators. My reading of *Unkenrufe* as indicating a turning point in Grass's practice with his narrators is further

strengthened by the fact that it is the last of Grass's works to date in which the narrator is the same age as the author. Thus we can speak of a process which has two stages: first the non-identity of narrator and protagonist, and then the shifting of the narrator's point of view from that of the author's generation to that of a new generation.

The advent of the historian-narrator coincides with unification and the renewal of demands for Germany to seek once again a national identity. The recorder of history (as in *Unkenrufe*), and the archivists who retain evidence of historical occurrences (as in *Ein weites Feld*) complement one another's roles in serving the community's need for the collation and interpretation of historical documentations. The 'double-take' which the opposition between Reschke's and the narrator's views provides, is further enhanced by the inevitable complicity of the reader whose own understanding of the events described cannot but be affected by the shadow cast over the seemingly optimistic and often humorous tale by the book's pessimistic title. The narrator's very act of writing the history of the Reconciliation Cemeteries Association, as well as the subject matter of his writing, arises out of, and is inseparable from, the National Socialist legacy.

The recognition that there is an element of play with regard to the narrator's identity, and the resulting engagement with the questions associated with this fact, make it possible to locate *Unkenrufe* both in the context of Grass's oeuvre as a whole, and in wider historical terms, as a literary documentation of the reunification period. Because the narrator has no name he can stand for the empirical author and his intimate associations with that critical historical flash-

point, Danzig, through which the *Linie 9* ran; or he can stand for one of Grass's many fictional characters, as I have shown. He can also stand for the post-*Wende* historian who, on the basis of documents which cannot but be biased, must frame the continuing narrative of German history. Grass's first fiction work of the 1990s, while indicating utopian possibilities for the future, clearly points towards the past, contradicting claims that a new *Stunde Null*, a new beginning, is possible. For Grass, German identity will always be historically defined, and the most significant, inescapable aspect of that history is Auschwitz. The recorders of history – and, in Grass's view, the writers of fiction – are those upon whom the responsibility falls to shape our conception of the past, and thus determine how we perceive ourselves now, and how we will act in the future as a result of who we think we are.

For Grass there is no place which is, to use Jameson's phrase, 'sheltered from the omnipresence of history and the implacable influence of the social' (20). The historical novel, as much as historiography itself, is in the final analysis, designed to meet the needs of the present. The problem is that the continuous 'present' has conflicting needs that want to be served. Grass's works, his dramas, ballets, lyric poetry and fiction, his paintings, sculptures and graphic work, as much as his essays and speeches, express his conviction that a life lived in the present that does not incorporate in its essence an awareness of the past is incomplete, invalid, false, immoral. Just as there is no place which is sheltered from the omnipresence of history, so too, in Germany, there is no generation that is spared the legacy of Auschwitz. The historical obligation also falls to those who were too young to have been perpetrators and victims, but old enough to tell the tale of what they

saw as witnesses, those whose youth at the time imbues them with the cool distance of the 'Verdienst- und Schuldlosen'.

The *Unkenrufe* narrator falls into this category. His obligation, especially as he is a gifted writer, is to contribute to the 'public use of history', to foster the formation of an identity that takes into account Germany's shameful past, in the hope that it will be impossible for such things to happen again. His debt is to the dead, whose lives were wasted in the drive of criminal nationalism, as well as to the living, who will determine the present and the future. This is Grass's apology for his work too. Just as *Aus dem Tagebuch einer Schnecke* occupies an axis position by virtue of the sudden intervention of the writer himself in Grass's fiction, *Unkenrufe* occupies an axis position because here the *modus vivendi* for a writer is prescribed in the new context of a reunified Germany. The contest for the interpretation of Germany's problematic past assumes once more the urgency that it bore in the sixties when left-liberal intellectuals fought to bring about the significant paradigm changes that enabled Germany to assume a post national identity and take its place amongst the nations of the world.

I have shown how the narrator's impassioned commitment to *Zufall* which has its roots in his wartime experience is followed immediately by a cryptic hint about his identity that directs the informed reader towards the works of the *Danziger Trilogie* and their central concern with *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. However, to understand this as simply a reversion to old themes, or to call it 'more of the same' would be to ignore significant developments in Grass's fiction. The earlier works can be placed under the heading of 'metafiction', as they are 'constructed on the

principle of the fundamental and sustained opposition between a fictional illusion (as in traditional realism) and the laying bare of that illusion' (Waugh 6). In this way these works, and their narrators in particular, draw attention to their ontological status as fiction. This is not the case with *Unkenrufe*. Here attention is drawn to the process of historical reconstructions. The work dramatises some of the concerns of the discourse of 'metahistory', and is informed by an underlying interest in how the documents which provide the raw data historical events are preserved and come into the hands of historiographers, and how the narrativization of events gives them a meaning with particular political implications.

I have tried to show how the narrator's enterprise as an historian is threatened on two fronts, one particular and one general. Firstly, there is the fact that the history has been commissioned to achieve a particular aim. The reason why first Wróbel and then the other founders of the Association want the history of the Reconciliation Cemeteries to be written in the first place, is because they believe that it will vindicate them – 'Solche Chronik möge alles zurechtrücken' (12: 240). This is a condition that has the potential to compromise the objectivity of the report, especially in the light of the narrator's indebtedness to Reschke. Secondly, doubt is raised concerning the possibility of 'true' representations in general in the light of the wider epistemological considerations that I have described. These are issues central to post-*Wende* German historiography.

*Unkenrufe* is a fantasy in which Alexander and Alexandra deal with the late, unresolved aftermath of the territorial losses and human displacements, and the

seduction of the old *Heimat* even for those who may believe, like Grass, that the losses of territory should not be contested because these came about as a direct consequence of Germany's aggression towards its neighbours. The fact that the German refugees' and expellees' plight came about because of their own government's policies does not change the fact that they, too, are victims. No burial plots, and no new border changes, nothing can undo the crimes of National Socialism or erase the pain and suffering of the victims on both sides. The only hope is for the future. Real reconciliation can only take place when both sides show remorse and compassion. Only then can the cycle, when 'Unrecht Recht, Recht Unrecht fällt', described by Klaj so long ago, be broken. Based on the consequences of the massive post-war expulsions from Germany's lost territories *Unkenrufe* represents a step towards the more direct confrontation of the issue of the Germans as victims a decade later in Grass's latest novel, *Im Krebsgang*. It is a precursor to a new, more considered approach to German history.

At the same time Alexandra and Alexander's shortcomings are a cipher for the inadequacy of the reconciliation process thus far. This is particularly highlighted in *Unkenrufe* when, on one of their excursions around Danzig they find themselves on the road to Stutthoff, the sight of the concentration camp, but do not go all the way. It was not their intention to go there, and even when they find themselves close by, they do not go the extra distance. Similarly, their project of reconciliation does not go all the way. It does not address the old resentments, it does not involve penance, it is merely an exchange on market principles, and a cheap one at that.

*Unkenrufe* also highlights the unequal consideration given in Germany to the plight of the Polish expellees. With Alexandra's enthusiastic embrace of Reschke's lifestyle the pain of her compatriots simply slips from sight as quietly as the Lithuanian component of the Reconciliation Cemeteries Project. The mass forced migrations referred to in *Unkenrufe* have their precursor in the massive expulsions undertaken in line with Hitler's *Lebensraum* policies.<sup>150</sup> It has been demonstrated by de Zayas and others that animosity between Poles and Germans was not universal. Moreover, the trauma of exile and resettlement experienced by the Poles who had been driven from Polish territory annexed by Russia was compounded when they found that they were to live in homes whose occupants had been forcibly evicted perhaps only hours earlier.<sup>151</sup> Another matter raised by my reading of background literature on the 'Century of Expulsions', and which must be of particular concern to Anglophone readers, is the not inconsiderable contribution of the victorious Allies to the expulsions, which must be seen as a crime against humanity. Given the sensitivity of the issue of Germans as their own victims, it would hardly have been possible for Grass to address this side of the issue so soon after reunification.

In *Unkenrufe* Grass employs the motif of Death as a means of interweaving the concerns of the reunification period with the history of German culture, especially the Baroque, in the Danzig area. The fact that there are really two endings to

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<sup>150</sup> These are documented in de Zayas, esp. 27-31.

<sup>151</sup> See de Zayas, for example. An example of a fictional account is Stefan Chwin's *Der Tod in Danzig*.

*Unkenrufe*, one in which Alexander and Alexandra die after losing control of their project, and one in which they live in contented retirement is suggestive of the two different ways the future might look. We are warned that we must not expect fate or *Fügung* to take care of things as Reschke did. *Unkenrufe*'s message is that we must retain control of ideas, no matter how good they may seem at the outset, and never let our ideas grow legs and walk on their own, as Alexander and Alexandra did.

Finally, in its portrayal of the difficulties attached to the role of the generation that had to do the *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* on behalf of their parents, the now dying off generation of *Kriegsteilnehmer*, the work raises concerns about what role the next generation – that of Alexander and Alexandra's children – will play in the determination of Germany and Europe's future. Will they, like their parents, treat the historical events of the past, and those that are going on around them today 'wie bloße Tatsachenbehauptungen' (12: 14), irritating distractions from their personal pursuits, of no relevance to their materially rich and spiritually impoverished lives?



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