Chapter-III

Synthesis of Magic and Reality in The Tin Drum

The Tin Drum is, by unanimity of opinion, the greatest work of German writer Gunter Grass. This is his first and the most acclaimed novel which he completed in the summer of 1959 in Paris as Die Blechtrommel. Grass was a member of Gruppe 47, which had undertaken the task of encouraging the writing of critical literature that would address and confront different social and ethical problems of the German society. The novel became a runaway best-seller and catapulted its young author to the forefront of world literature. Till today, it remains the key text in European magical realism with a strong political dimension. He has become the literary spokesman for the German generation that grew up in the Nazi era. The novel writes the life of a three-year old drummer Oskar Matzerath with lots of historical details tinged with fantasy. Oskar refuses to grow up during the Nazi regime. He literally stops growing at the age of three and through his child-like action of drumming protests against the adult world that surrounds him. After the Second World War, he transforms from a child who does not want to grow into a grotesquely deformed dwarf, whose hump is symbolic of Germany’s ugliness, of the burden of history that Germany carries upon its shoulders. Beginning with the lines, “Granted: I’m an inmate in a mental institution; my keeper watches me, scarcely lets me out of sight, for there’s a peephole in the door, and my keeper’s eye is the shade of brown that can’t see through blue-eyed types like me” (Grass, The Tin Drum 1), it immediately grabs the attention of the readers. The lines are spoken by Oskar, who then proceeds to tell the story of his life, starting with the day his grandmother Anna Bronski hid a fleeing
arsonist Joseph Koljaiczek under her voluminous skirts and later married him. Their
daughter Agnes subsequently weds the storekeeper and future Nazi party member
Alfred Matzerath and becomes the mother of Oskar. However, later Agnes develops
love-affair with another man named Jan Bronski, who is a Polish post-office
employee. Because of her adultery, little Oskar remains uncertain of his true paternity.
When Oskar becomes three-year old, he decides not to grow physically anymore.
Because he is disgusted by the selfish German people and thinks of himself to be a
mismatched for the corrupt German society. Actually, his rejection of adulthood and
his drumming can be seen as metaphors of stunted development, immorality and
senseless destruction initiated by Nazism. Oskar is given a tin drum by his mother. He
never parts with it and keeps on drumming in order to drum away all horrors of life in
a war-ravaged society. After Agnes kills herself by gorging on eels, Book One ends
with the recounting of the suicide of Jewish toy merchant Sigismund Markus. In Book
Two, Oskar’s father Alfred hires a young woman, Maria to work in his grocery store.
Both Oskar and Alfred develop physical relationship with her and she becomes
pregnant. In the meantime, Oskar leaves Danzig and devotes himself to a corrupt life
of thievery and explicit sex. He eventually returns and meets Kurt, either Oskar’s or
Alfred’s son with Maria. As the Russian Army captures Danzig in 1944, Alfred
swallows his Nazi Party lapel pin in order to protect himself but accidentally chokes
to death. Book II concludes with his burial and Oskar’s decision to stop drumming. At
the funeral Oskar throws his drum into his father’s grave and Kurt hits him in the head
with a rock, compelling him to grow. Book III opens in post-war Germany. Maria
rejects Oskar’s proposal to get married and he moves to Dusseldorf, where he
becomes model at the Art Academy. He starts another affair with a nurse, Sister
Dorothea. Simultaneously, he resumes his drumming and plays with a clarinetist Klepp at the Onion Cellar- a popular nightclub where the Germans go to peel onions and cry in memory of those who suffered terribly during the Nazi period. Oskar enjoys lots of popularity there, but grows lonely from inside. One day, while walking outside, his pet dog gives him a human finger. Oskar preserves the finger in a jar, just to invite misfortune later, because the finger is of Dorothea. When the relationship of Oskar and Dorothea becomes public, Oskar is wrongly convicted of her brutal murder. He is forced to live in a mental hospital where he starts writing his memoir. The novel ends with Oskar patiently awaiting his release from the hospital. Just as the society where Oskar is living is in a state of chaos, similarly Oskar's life is also chaotically hard. Grass implodes the events of world-historical significance into the microcosm of Danzig, and the intimate world of Oskar’s German-Polish-Kashubian family.

Grass experienced the Second World War as a seventeen year old boy with fragments of shrapnel in his shoulder and haunting memories of his less fortunate comrades hanged for their unwillingness to die for a hopeless cause. While in an American prisoner-of-war camp, Grass reacted at first with disbelief and then with growing shame and horror to the atrocities of the Third Reich. Since that time he devoted his writing career to the cultivation of doubt, skepticism, and critical distance from Nazi ideologies. In *The Tin Drum*, Grass represents war in a mode of fiction, in order to make the terrible realities of Nazism more bearable. At the beginning of the novel, Oskar himself proclaims that he will deal with his experiences in terms of fiction, “You can start a story in the middle, then strike out boldly backwards and forwards to create confusion” (Grass, *The Tin Drum* 5). The Second World War is
described in such a way that in most part it happens in the background while people go about their ordinary lives. The major exception is the depiction of the battle for the Polish Post Office that signalled the start of Second World War. But here also, nobody is willing to display heroism. Jan Bronski unwillingly returns to join his coworkers in the besieged building, not out of loyalty, but to provide Oskar with a new tin drum. War is the most important element, pervading the novel and Grass strongly condemns it. The lessons of war remain "unmastered: The past...has not faded or become indifferent...but rather stronger, more terrifying, more unbearable, and, one would like to add, more incomprehensible" (Bosmajian 17).

Nazism, Holocaust and Germany are interrelated terms. The Nazis, under the leadership of Hitler classified themselves as a movement rather than a political party. Although they came to power through constitutional means, they were not concerned with political power as an end in itself. The Nazis sought to radically recreate Germany as a racial state. Hitler’s era was a dark age in German history. He achieved notoriety as a heartless dictator. He vowed to exterminate the whole Jewish race and murdered six million Jews. Hitler was elected by none other than the Germans themselves. But the crimes of Nazi Germany and the charred remains of Auschwitz and Dachau became the visible symbols of the nation’s guilty past. Grass said:

_Nothing, no sense of nationhood, however idyllically colored, and no assurance of late-born benevolence can modify or dispel the experience that we the criminals, with our victims, had as a unified Germany. We cannot get around...it, because Auschwitz belongs to us, is a permanent stigma of our history...._ (Two States-One Nation? 4)
The Tin Drum and German history go hand in hand. In the novel, Grass tackled the theme of Germany's agonized identity which he observed meticulously from various angles of life. During the first years which followed the historic defeat of the Nazis' under the leadership of Hitler, the German public tended not to remember or discuss the Nazi past or to confront it partially owing to tremendous sense of guilt. During this period, the historical, public consciousness skipped over the years of Nazi rule to the gone by stable years of the Weimer Republic and the relatively peaceful German Empire. Even after the start of the alleged denazification process, the German people were staffed with the supporters of the Nazi regime. The occupation of the German public about the moral responsibility for the crimes of Nazism and the formation of a consciousness of guilt had everlasting effect on the German society. This consciousness of guilt sustained and was reshaped throughout the period of the Federal Republic and it still persists. Many people attempted to forget their German identity. With the rise of a new German generation, which was young and immature during the years of the war, the historical indifference and evasiveness about the Nazi past gave rise to the social fermentation and the growing interest in the recent past. They decided to protest vehemently against the whole set of values of the former generation and to dissociate themselves from that complacent, conservative approach. Oskar perceives things from that standpoint. Grass who belonged to older generation fought ceaselessly against Germany for its willful amnesia regarding that horrific past. He tried to convey social criticism with high fidelity. German reconstruction after the destruction in the Second World War started so successfully with the help of America that it tried to cover up the memory of the past crimes. He reminded his fellow writers and compatriots about the past history of the country and their responsibility in
reconstructing the image of their nation in a guiltless way before the outer world. At the end of the 1950s, a double process of orientation to the democratic west on the one hand, and the decline of the occupation with the German national consciousness on the other began. With the establishment of the Federal Republic, the confrontation with the Nazi past was done almost solely within the realms of the institutional and political level under the command of Adenauer. Jeffery Olick and Daniel Levy said that the 1950s were a period of denial and avoidance of confrontation with the past. The majority of the public rejected the idea of collective guilt (and, therefore, Adenauer, too, was forced to do so), and many Germans were mainly occupied with themselves as victims of the war. This is the most accepted observation as reflected in literature also (Olick and Levy 927). The German writers became implicated in their historical milieu during the rise of Nazism. Grass too put great concerns for this implication of historic milieu in all his works. The Tin Drum is also not an exception to that. A nation’s guilt is the “incipient theme” (31) of the novel, as argued by Patrick O’Neill. It gave a new start to German literature after decades of linguistic and moral destruction. Grass himself has written, “...or, to be more precise, the history we Germans have repeatedly mucked up, is a clogged toilet. We flush and flush, but the shit keeps rising.” He spoke about the unwelcome truth of national crimes against humanity with great conviction and courage. He believed, “There is no end to writing after Auschwitz” (Grass, Crabwalk 122, 122). In the novel, Grass sarcastically depicts the coming of the Nazis through lines like, “He’s coming! He’s coming! And who came? The Christ Child, the Saviour? Or was it the heavenly Gasman with the gas metre under his arm, ticking away?” (Grass, The Tin Drum 187)
Weapon of Satire

Primarily, The Tin Drum functions as a chronicler of harsh social criticism. It satirizes the cruelty and hypocrisy of the German society that is strangely blind to the enormity of its history. It is the autobiography of Oskar who is confined to a mental asylum for a murder that he did not commit. His avowed purpose for recollecting and ordering the memories of his past is so that he may prove his innocence. Another more important reason is to confront the unpleasant truths of Nazi past that Germany feared to face or confront. He is both an artist and a satirist. Oskar, according to Donna Reed, is “an artistic device designed to expose the society” (68). From the very beginning, Oskar is obsessed with whiteness that stands for purity and innocence. In the first page of the novel, Oskar’s white-enamelled bed in the mental hospital becomes his standard. He says, “My white-enamelled metal hospital bed thus sets a standard.” Then he asks for white paper to write his autobiography. He requests Bruno, “Oh, Bruno, would you buy me a ream of virgin paper?” His repeated demand for shelter under the copious skirt of his grandmother suggests his longing for oblivion of the womb. Thus Oskar repeatedly craves for relieving himself of that enormous sense of guilt arising out of the association of Germans with the Nazis. For him, guilt is omnipresent. No one can run away from that sense of guilt. He observes:

But disaster can’t be sealed in a cellar. It drains through the pipes with the sewage, it seeps into gas lines, invades every household, and no one who sets his kettle of soup on bluish flames suspects in the least that disaster is bringing his grub to a boil. (Grass, The Tin Drum 3, 4, 181)
The decision of Oskar not to grow continuously echoes throughout the novel and is the main motif and can be considered as euphemism for the guilt complex of post-war German citizens. With the employment of this motif, the novel criticizes the world of adults which is haunted by a sense of post-war guilt. Oskar is suspicious of the adult world. He hates adults so intensely that he even refuses to look like them and is always critical about them. Through Oskar, Grass presents the image of avoidance of confrontation of the Third Reich era, the infantilism of this avoidance, the impotency it causes and especially its impossibility. The novel also talks about the territorial, cultural, social, political and economic problems of Germany. Germany was directly responsible for World War II, with their aggressive nationalistic fervour. However the immediate cause was Hitler’s attack on Poland. In order to open Germany to the sea coast, a way was made running up to Danzig, Grass’ hometown. As a result, it got divided into two parts. When Hitler came to power, he demanded the annexation of Danzig to Germany on the ground that it was mainly inhabited by the Germans. He also demanded the closure of the Polish Corridor. Poland refused to do so, because they had the support of France. Upon their refusal, Hitler attacked Poland in 1939. Subsequently, France and England also declared war on Germany and this finally paved the way for the Second World War. The novel tackles the history of both pre and post World War Germany. For convenience the novel is divided into three books by Grass, which covers the prewar period (1899-1938); the war itself, from the German invasion to the fall of Danzig to the advance of the Red army (1939-45); and the postwar austerity and reconstruction in West Germany (1945-52). Book I gives an account of Oskar’s Danzig, revealing the ordinary people’s willing support for the Nazi regime. Oskar’s family history is detailed here. Oskar’s German father Alfred
Matzerath, mother Agnes who is from Danzig and his Polish uncle Jan Bronski. This triangle relationship is a miniature replica of the troubled political relationship between Germany, Danzig and Poland. In the second book, death is the main metaphor. Here, Oskar bears the pain of losing Jan Bronski, Alfred Matzerath, his lover Roswitha during the war. At the end of this book, Oskar begins to grow only with a humpback. Book III delineates Oskar’s attempt to fit into a new, adult life in the new post-war German society. He witnesses Germany and its people, totally devastated, both physically and mentally owing to Nazi horrors. Grass criticizes the official discourse of a regime for its oppressive politics and for rejecting and killing undesirable individuals. He directly castigates German conservatism through his fiction. He also targets the church in Germany, because of its silence during the Nazi period. Grass distinguishes between good and evil, reason and passion, Christ and anti-Christ, just and unjust through the perfect delineation of Oskar's character which is a perfect blend of both godly and satanic qualities. Oskar is both a victim and a fascist. Oskar finds himself on the threshold between these two domains. The Catholic Church in particular is the target of Grass’s satire in his novel. Oskar spotlights several instances of Nazi atrocities, like the Crystal Night that witnesses the burning of synagogues and murder of many Jews. Oskar sees his father Alfred warming his hands over that blaze, and accounts the heroic mission of Meyn, a SA member to burn a Danzig synagogue. He also describes the suicide committed by a Jewish toy merchant Sigismund Markus in order to prevent himself from dying under barbaric tortures caused by the SA men. The chapter, titled, Seventy-five Kilos details a horrific picture of Greff, the greengrocer hanging from a counterweighted mechanical system of beams and pulleys.
As Grass himself is half Polish, the plot of *The Tin Drum* deals with incidents of Polish sympathy and Nazi brutality. The novel is set in German-speaking occupation, in the city of Gdansk (then known as Danzig). As Salman Rushdie points out, not only did Grass have his childhood perception of reality overturned at the end of the Second World War, but he also lost his homeland and became a migrant to Berlin (279). Oskar becomes a metaphor for the ugliness of Germany. His stunted physical growth and supposed mental retardation make him a prime target for Nazi eugenics laws. The Nazi’s list of undesirables was ever growing—Jews, Slavs, leftists, pacifists, homosexuals, people with disabilities and so on. An abnormal child like Oskar who seems socially unproductive is an embarrassment to the healthy German community. But Oskar resists and opposes the Nazis. He survives and lives. That’s why he does not admit that his father is the Nazi Alfred Matzerath and recreates the idea that his real father is Polish Jan Bronski. Similarly, Oskar’s mother Agnes also resists Nazi gender expectations. The Nazis expect every German woman to give birth to healthy Aryan offspring. But Agnes gives birth to Oskar. She gets involved in incestuous sexual adventures and displaying her own form of insanity commits suicide through fish over consumption.

Through the beating of his drum, Oskar brings the memories of times past, of his childhood, of Poland, summoning not only an atmosphere of a never-ending war, but also of lamentation and mourning. Oskar longs as well as sympathizes with Poland this way:

> And I seek the land of the Poles that is lost, that is not yet lost. Some say nearly lost, already lost, lost once more. Here in Germany they seek Poland with credits, with Leicas, with compasses, with radar, with
divining rods and delegations, with humanisms, with leaders of the opposition and clubs of exiles mothballing regional costumes. While they search for the land of the poles with the soul in this land-some with Chopin, some with revenge in their hearts- while they dismiss plans one through four for partitioning the land of the Poles and sit down to work on a fifth, while they fly with Air France to Warsaw and place a wreath in remorse where the ghetto once stood, while they seek the land of the Poles with rockets some day, I search on my drum for the land of the Poles and drum: lost, not yet lost, lost once more, lost to whom, lost too soon, lost by now, Poland's lost, all is lost, Poland is not yet lost. (Grass, The Tin Drum 95)

He vindicates the cause of Poland in another paragraph:

Slowly the thought took root in me: this isn't about Poland, it's about my warped drum. Jan had lured me to the post office to give the clerks, for whom Poland was an insufficient rallying cry, a rousing battle standard. At night, while I slept in the rolling mail basket yet neither rolled nor dreamed, the clerks standing guard had whispered it like a pass-word: A dying toy drum has sought refuge with us. We are Poles, we must protect it, especially since England and France are bound by treaty to defend us. (Grass, The Tin Drum 209)

Polish independence was the main motive of many characters like Joseph Koljaiczek, who did a series of copycat acts of sawmill arson in the name of Virgin Mary, which, in turn, fed growing Polish sentiments. Grass writes:
...Koljaiczek worked in a sawmill near Schwetz and got into a row with the mill boss over a fence Koljaiczek had painted a provocative red and white. No fence sitter himself when it came to politics, the mill boss ripped two slats from the fence, one white and one red, and smashed them to Polish kindling across Koljaiczek's Kashubian back, grounds enough for the battered man, on the following no doubt starry night, to set the newly constructed, whitewashed sawmill ablaze in red, to the greater glory of an indeed partitioned but therefore even more firmly united Poland. (Grass, The Tin Drum 15)

Again, the Nazis in the novel are not demonized by Grass. The Germans in the novel are the petit bourgeoisie and they are particularly vulnerable to National Socialism. His Nazis are not violent, but opportunistic bystanders who tolerate injustices but never initiate it. They are weak and marginalized. For example, Alfred Matzerath warms his fingers on the flames of the burning Danzig synagogues, but at the same time opposes the idea of surrendering Oskar to the euthanasia program. Oskar is both a victim and a perpetrator of Nazism. He is abused and maltreated by the children of his neighbourhood. Being physically deformed, he is a potential target of Nazi eugenics. However, at the same time, Oskar acts as a perpetrator to further the Nazi cause. He drums for the Nazi cause, his blue eyes remind us about the Fuhrer and he travels to Paris and the Atlantic Coast in order to entertain the dispirited soldiers. There is inconstant harmony in his life, which truly reflects the chaotic historical age that Oskar witnesses. "Oskar Matzerath is a deeply duplicitous figure" (54), says Peter Arnds. That's why Grass believes that only a mental hospital can be
the appropriate setting for a plot concerning the Third Reich and the mental patient Oskar can perfectly narrate the story without any kind of inhibition.

Grass has enormous capacity to perceive the underlying comedy as well as the deepest tragedy in the mundane day-to-day life and it makes the satire more biting. For example, the farcical chase scene of Oskar's Polish grandfather Richard Koljaiczek and the German soldiers between the telegraph poles in the first chapter titled, "The Wide Skirt" recalls Charlie Chaplin's slapstick piss-take of Hitler in his famous film *The Great Dictator*.

_Something was moving between the telegraph poles. My grandmother closed her mouth, sucked in her lips, narrowed her eyes, and munched on the potato. Something was moving between the telegraph poles. Something was leaping. Three men were leaping between the poles, three made for the chimney, then round in front, when one of them doubled back, took a new running start, seemed short and stout, made it over the chimney, over the brickworks, the other two, more tall and thin, made it over the brickworks too, if only just, between the poles again, but short and stout doubled back, and short and stout was in a greater hurry than tall and thin, the other leapers, who had to head back towards the chimney because the other man was already tumbling over it, while the two, still hot on his heels, made a running start and were suddenly gone, had lost heart it seemed, and the short one too fell in midleap from the chimney and disappeared below the horizon._

(Grass, *The Tin Drum* 8)
The novel is replete with the horrific picture of Nazi brutality. In the chapter, “Faith Hope Love”, Grass employs fairy tale mode of narration to make the intensity of Nazi brutality bearable. Here Oskar recounts the suicide of Jewish toy merchant Sigismund Markus, who poisons himself during the ransacking of synagogues and Jewish business, along with the appalling savagery of the Nazi members. Oskar remembers:

*Once upon a time there was a toy merchant named Sigismund Markus, and he sold, among other things, white and red lacquered tin drums. Oskar, mentioned above, was the major customer for these tin drums, for he was a drummer by trade, and could neither live without a drum nor wished to. He hurried away from the burning synagogue to the Arsenal Arcade, for there dwelt the keeper of his drums; but he found him in a state that made it impossible for him ever to sell tin drums again in this world.*

*The same ordnance specialists I, Oskar, thought I'd run away from had visited Markus before I got there, had dipped a brush in paint and written the words Jewish Swine across his shop window in Sutterlin script, then, perhaps displeased with their own handwriting, had kicked in the window with the heels of their boots, so that the slur they had cast on Markus could now only be guessed at. Disdaining the door, they had made their way into the shop through the window and were now playing in their own deliberate way with the toys.*
I found them at play, as I too stepped into the shop through the window. A few had pulled down their trousers, had deposited brown sausages, in which half-digested peas could still be discerned, on sailing ships, fiddling monkeys, and my drums. They all looked like Meyn the musician, were wearing Meyn’s SA uniforms, but Meyn wasn’t there, just as those who were there weren’t somewhere else. One of them had drawn his dagger. He was slicing dolls open and seemed disappointed each time nothing but sawdust flowed forth from plump bodies and limbs.

I was worried about my drums. They didn’t like my drums. My own drum couldn’t stand up to their rage, had to keep quiet and bend at the knee. But Markus had escaped their rage. When they wished to speak with him in his office, they didn’t bother to knock at the door but broke it down instead, although it wasn’t locked.

Behind his desk sat the toy merchant. He was wearing sleeve protectors as usual over his dark grey everyday jacket. Dandruff on his shoulders revealed a scalp problem. A man with Punch and Judy dolls on his fingers poked him woodenly with Punch’s grandmother, but Markus was no longer in, could no longer be harmed. Before him on the desktop stood a water glass that thirst must have urged him to empty at the very moment the splintering cry of a window in his shop turned his throat dry. (Grass, The Tin Drum 186-187)
In the same chapter, Oskar uses gas as a metaphor for death. The people believe in Santa Claus but he turns out to be the gasman and not the benevolent Santa. Gasman brings nothing but the stench of gas and it reminds one of death. Millions of Jews were brutally killed in the gas chambers during Hitler’s rule. Gas enters every household through the pipes to be used for cooking and so every person is implicated in the extermination of the Jews. Oskar argues:

*An entire gullible nation believed faithfully in Santa Claus. But Santa Claus was really the gasman. In faith I believe it smelled of walnut and almonds. But it smelled of gas. Soon it will be what’s called first Advent. And the first and second through fourth Advent will be turned on like a gas cock, so that it smells believably of walnuts and almonds, so that all those nutcrackers can take comfort in belief:*

*He’s coming! He’s coming! And who came? The Christ Child, the Saviour? Or was it the heavenly Gasman with the gas metre under his arm, ticking away? (Grass, The Tin Drum 187)*

Even Oskar’s presumptive father Alfred Matzerath is no exception to that brutality. Being a member of Nazi Party, he supports mindless destruction of everything Jewish on Kristallnacht. In the novel, it is written:

*Once upon a time there was a grocer who closed his shop one November day because something was going on in the city, took his son Oskar by the hand and travelled with the Number Five tram to Langgasser Gate, because the synagogue there was on fire, as were those in Zoppot and Langfuhr. The synagogue was burned almost to*
the ground, and the firemen were making sure the fire didn't spread to the surrounding buildings. Outside the ruins, civilians and men in uniforms were piling up books, sacral objects, and strange pieces of cloth. The mound was set ablaze, and the grocer took the opportunity to warm his hands and his passions at the public fire. His son Oskar, however, seeing his father so involved and inflamed, slipped away unnoticed and hurried off towards the Arsenal Arcade, because he was worried about his drums of white and red lacquered tin. (Grass, The Tin Drum 185-186)

In the satirical chapter, titled “Inspecting Concrete—or Mythical Barbaric Bored”, the horrors of Nazi era are described in just three words (Mythical, Barbaric, Bored) and these words sum up the modern 20th century quite shortly and succinctly. Here, Oskar and his troupe of midget acrobats and entertainers visit the German pillbox in northern France, as his own country's doom looms large. “Then there it was, our concrete pillbox. We could admire it and pet it: it held still” (Grass, The Tin Drum 314). They meet a former artist Corporal Lankes, who now finds these brutally efficient standards of war and hatred as genuine and profound specimen of marvellous artwork. He believes that these will last forever and the future archaeologists will marvel at them. When Bebra asks the names of these installations, Lankes names them as Structural Oblique Formations, with a subtitle: Mystical, Barbaric, Bored. The discussion develops this way:

Bebra: ...you're the creator, you should give the work a distinctive title...
Lankes: All right, here's what it says: Herbert Lankes, anno nineteen hundred and forty-four. Title: MYSTICAL, BARBARIC, BORED.

Bebra: You have given our century its name. (Grass, The Tin Drum 317-318)

With a schizophrenic, self-mutilating era, in which men flew higher than was dreamed possible and plumbed depths unimaginable, and were engaged in the tug of war between mechanistic wickedness and still-lit spark of humanity, terror and humour, collective insanity and individual rationality, the 20th century in summarized perfectly: Mystical, Barbaric and Bored.

Oskar's glass-cutting voice makes holes in shop windows and so favours theft, tempting the responsible citizens to steal valuable items. Thus, it exposes the hidden characters of many respectable persons. It mocks the pieties of those around him. In the chapter, titled “Special Communiqués”, it is informed that afraid of Oskar’s weird sexual aggression, Maria turns to the radio. Actually, listening to the radio serves as a substitute for communication between people who are unable or unwilling to listen to each other. It tells about the sense of distrust brewing among the general people, which is not at all healthy for a society.

The novel represents the story of two main Jewish characters, Sigismund Markus and Mariusz Fajngold, of them the former dies and the later survives. Markus is not the typical Jewish antihero of German fiction. He is a character of mixed response. He has both positive and negative traits. He seems opportunist when he supports Agnes and Bronski to maintain illicit relationship and helps the pair undermine the Christian family structure. But still he remains an unfortunate Jew at
the end. He had the opportunity to escape to England and had the necessary funds, yet he could not avail those opportunities and later committed suicide tragically. He is denied his individuality. His suicide is considered cowardly by the Nazis. His dead body is described as so repulsive that his death is unlikely to rouse sympathy to the reader:

_Behind his desk sat the toy merchant. He was wearing sleeve protectors as usual over his dark grey everyday jacket. Dandruff on his shoulders revealed a scalp problem. A man with Punch and Judy dolls on his fingers poked him woodenly with Punch’s grandmother, but Markus was no longer in, could no longer be harmed. Before him on the desktop stood a water glass that thirst must have urged him to empty at the very moment the splintering cry of a window in his shop turned his throat dry._ (Grass, _The Tin Drum_ 186-187)

It also signifies the vindictive attitude of the Germans towards the Jews.

Fajngold is another character who survives the Nazi mass extermination in death camps. He came to take over Alfred Matzerath’s grocery business after his death. Initially he demands sympathy from the readers as a hapless Jew. His hallucinatory experience of the presence of his dead family members everywhere is really moving. He still believes them to be alive and they take up all his emotional energy. He seems like a wandering or eternal Jew, portrayed in films like _Der ewige Jude_ (The Eternal Jew) by Fritz Hippler. Oskar says about Fajngold:

_A gentleman called Fajngold came to us, single, but acting as if he were surrounded by a large family he had to take care of._ Herr
Fajngold took over the grocery store without further ado, showed his wife Luba, who remained invisible and unresponsive, the decimal scales, the Kerosene tank, the brass rod to hang sausage on, the empty cash box, and, overjoyed, the provisions in the cellar. Maria, whom he immediately installed as salesgirl and introduced verbosely to his imaginary wife Luba, showed Herr Fajngold our Matzerath, who had been lying for three days under a piece of canvas in the cellar, since we didn’t dare bury him, given all the Russians on the street trying out bicycles, sewing machines, and women.

When Herr Fajngold saw the corpse, which we had turned on its back, he clapped his hands to his head in the same expressive gesture Oskar had seen his toy merchant, Sigismund Markus, make years ago. He called his whole family, not just his wife Luba, into the cellar, and it was clear he saw them all coming, for he called each by name, Luba, Lev, Jakub, Berek, Leon, Mendel, and Zonja, explained to them all who it was lying there dead, then explained to us that everyone he’d called lay like that before they were put in the ovens at Treblinka, along with his sister-in-law and her other brother-in-law, who had five small children, and all of them lay there, except Herr Fajngold, who did not lie there because he had to spread lime. (Grass, The Tin Drum 379-380)

But very soon he regains control over himself and gets over the death of his entire family. He is shown firmly installed in Matzerath’s grocery store and leads a comfortable life. He even proposes to Maria, but she refuses. Ultimately Maria, the
legal owner of the store leaves him, taking along with her Oskar and little Kurt and
goes to Rhineland. The last impression of Fajngold is his waving after the train, which
takes away Maria and Oskar. Oskar remembers:

_We climbed into the fourth-to-last carriage. Herr Fajngold stood_
_below us on the tracks with his thin, reddish hair blowing in the wind,_
_and when the locomotive announced its arrival with a jolt, he stepped_
_closer, handed Maria three packages of margarine and two of_
synthetic honey, and as orders in Polish, cries, and weeping signaled_
our departure, added a package of disinfectants to our provisions-
Lysol is more important than life—and we were off, leaving Herr_
_Fajngold behind, who, as is proper and fitting when a train departs,_
grew smaller and smaller with his reddish hair blowing in the wind,_
then was merely something waving, then nothing at all._ (Grass, The Tin_
Drum 399)

Here Grass makes a reversal of historical fact. Instead of showing the Germans as all
powerful, makes a Jew acquire all power and profit and take advantage of non-Jews
by usurping their business. This image of the Jew and a train, the emblem of the
Holocaust may also suggest that the last Jew is left behind and Germany has moved
on, forgetting their guilt-ridden history. They do not want to remember that agonized
history. Possibly Grass wants to give the Jews a respectable position in the German
society, without any fear and misfortune and wants all the Germans to relinquish their
vain sense of superiority and glory. Grass commemorates Jewish victims twice:
through the story of Sigismund Markus and Mariusz Fajngold. Perhaps, this approach
can lessen the Germans’ sense of guilt, though only a grain of that.
By staging horrifying occurrences with Oskar at the centre, Grass quite satirically provides comments on the actual historical events that form the backdrop of such scenes, and holds the Germans responsible for every misfortune. One example is in the chapter “The Ant Trail”. Here Oskar is ludicrously busy looking at the progress of an ant column across the floor, when the Russian soldiers are threateningly making their presence felt everywhere. Through Oskar, Grass embodies about the distraction and the insouciance shown by a large number of Germans during the World War II and their denial to resist the escalating daily horrors meted out to the Jews.

**Magical Realism**

*The Tin Drum* has been a defining point of the magical realist movement in literature. With a magical realist brio, the novel mixes fantasy, gallows humour, deals with several pathetic love stories, a tragic family saga, a classic bildungsroman and a powerful account of how great political events affect or usually destroy small groups of ordinary people. The novel examines the capacity of supernatural elements to dramatize the ethical and representational difficulties of Holocaust fiction. Dr. P. Indira Devi says, “*It's an audacious mixture of accurate historical fact given as meticulous background and grotesque fantasy written in an energetic prose, influenced by surrealism yet never quite surrealistic*” (23). Grass himself refers to his novel, as having a “*realistic precision and its pursuit of fantasy as part of reality*” (Devi 23). Grass was very much interested in the German romantic tradition and the fairy tales from his childhood. He uses many archetypal figures of those fairy tales. Because, he believes that fairy tales give the impression of another kind of truth which cannot be brought to light by merely collecting everyday facts. The narrative
technique of the novel is closely akin to the surrealistic style of narration, adopted by another German writer Franz Kafka. Unable to accept the harsh realities of life, Oskar turns to fantasy and creates another world of his own, where he tries to rebuild himself in order to be able to confront the traumatic past that has injured his life forever. Oskar resorts to imagination, make-believe and storytelling in order to escape from the horrors of the Second World War. Because magical realism opens the door to escape from the untoward occurrences and this escapism relieves Oskar of the burden of extreme guilt. According to Kathryn Hume escapism, "flatters us and makes us strong" (126). Grass' magical realism can be seen to have arisen from the same source as Garcia Marquez's; that is, the distortion of truth through the effects of extremely horrific violence, which Grass himself had witnessed during and immediately after the Second World War (Reder 75). Maggie Ann Bowers also comments about Grass' technique:

His literary technique, however, is purposely postmodern, and his narrator adds to the rejection of an absolute truth both through the use of magical realism and through the use of a gleefully unreliable narrator. As well as being playful, Grass's narrator Oskar is also the inmate of an asylum for the mentally ill and so the veracity of his narratives is doubly doubtful. However, all the events of his narrative, whether magical or realist, are presented as the actual truth by Oskar and there is no external commentary to the narrative to signal to the reader to what extent his perception of reality may be disturbed. (63)

Fantasy is one of the most important manifestations of magic realism, where the writer resorts to a fantastic view of the world in order to depict the disturbing
realities of everyday life. The Nazi period in Germany was one of the most horrible phases of human history and when Grass decided to depict the grim realities of Holocaust and Hitler era, he employed magical realism in order to depict it with great accuracy. In this connection, Jane Curran remarked, "Magic realism is a common way for post-1945 writers to come to terms with recent events through the medium of fiction" (127). The whole novel is strewn with fantasy and supernatural elements which are proportionately embedded in a realistic literary canvas. The everyday rubs shoulders with the magical and the fantastic to bring a narrative issue to the fore. It's a world, where, the values are inverted, the tragedy becomes comedy and the insane is dubbed as sane. The novel begins with the chapter "The Wide Skirt", in which fantastic things are portrayed in a convincing air of realism. It describes how Oskar's grandmother saved his grandfather who escaped from German soldiers. She allowed him to hide under her four wide skirts and it was under these skirts Oskar's mother Agnes was also conceived. Oskar notes:

"On that October afternoon in eighteen ninety-nine, while Ohm Kruger was brushing his bushy anti-British eye-brows in South Africa, nearer home, between Dirschau and Karthaus, by the Bissau brickworks, beneath four skirts of a single colour, beneath smoke, shock, sighs, and saint's names sorrowfully invoked, beneath the slanting rain, beneath the smoke-filled eyes and hapless questioning of two rural constables, short but stout Joseph Koljaiczek begot my mother Agnes. (Grass, The Tin Drum 13)"

The tin drum speaks for Oskar, which is totally fantastic. The act of drumming helps him remember his past life vividly:
IT'S NOT SO EASY, lying here in the scrubbed metal bed of a mental institution, within range of a glazed peephole armed with Bruno's eye, to retrace the swaths of smoke rising from Kashubian potato fires and the fine diagonal strokes of an October rain. If I didn't have my drum, which, when handled properly and patiently, recalls all the little details I need to get the essentials down on paper, and if I didn't have the institute's permission to let my drum speak three or four hours each day, I would be a poor fellow with no known grandparents. (Grass, The Tin Drum 13)

William L. Sharfman correctly suggests:

The drum, then, is the means of conjuring up all wisps of memory, and the sounds of the drum evoke and associate the experiences that have at different times accompanied it....For the drum makes the narrative formally coherent. (64)

Again, it is the height of fantasy and magical moments in the novel, when Oskar refuses to grow and decides to remain the eternal three-year old drummer:

I stuck to my drum and didn't grow a finger's breadth from my third birthday on, remained the three-year-old, who, here times as smart, was towered over by grown-ups, yet stood head and shoulders above them all, who felt no need to measure his shadow against theirs, who was inwardly and outwardly fully mature while others drived on about development well into their dotage, who merely confirmed for himself what others learned with difficulty and often painfully, who felt
no need to increase his shoe and trouser size from year to year just to prove he was growing. (Grass, The Tin Drum 49)

At the same time he develops a voice that is so high-pitched that it can break any piece of glass. Oskar remembers:

The ability to drum up the necessary distance between grown-ups and myself on a toy drum developed soon after my fall down the cellar stairs, almost simultaneously with the emergence of a voice that allowed me to sing, scream, or sing-scream at such a high pitch and with such sustained vibrato that no one dared take away the drum that pained their ears; for when my drum was taken from me I screamed, and when I screamed something quite valuable would burst into pieces: I was able to singshatter glass; my scream slew flower vases; my song caused windows to crumple to their knees and let draughts rule; my voice sliced open display cases like a chaste and therefore merciless diamond, and, without losing its innocence, assaulted the harmonious, nobly bred liqueur glasses within, bestowed by loving hands and covered with a light film of dust. (Grass, The Tin Drum 52)

The glass face of his grandfather’s clock in the living room explodes, but the clock’s mechanism is unharmed and kept ticking. Immediately after describing about the power of glass-breaking voice, Oskar goes on pointing the limitations of his voice. His voice cannot damage the tablecloths of Gretchen Scheffler. He ruminates, “If with the same tones and techniques I could have cut up the boring, intricately embroidered
tablecloths that sprung from Gretchen Scheffler’s fantasia of patterns…” (Grass, The Tin Drum 53). Thus, Oskar’s magical power is firmly grounded in reality and this is magical realism at work, which increases the readers’ chances of willing suspension of disbelief. His magical power can have secondary level of interpretation that indirectly hints at the destructive capacity of spoken words and especially of Hitler’s contagious oratory skills. In the chapter, “Faith Love Hope”, Oskar tells the horrific events of the Nazi period as if they were fiction and it makes the features of magical realism more striking in the novel.

“Once upon a time there was a tin-drummer named Oskar, and they took away his toy merchant.

Once upon a time there was a toy merchant named Markus, and he took along all the toys when he left this world.

Once upon a time there was a musician named Meyn, and if he’s not dead, he’s still alive today, playing his trumpet again, too beautifully for words.” (Grass, The Tin Drum 189)

The incorporation of elements of dream, fairy tale or mythological elements enhances the effect of magical realism in a piece of work. The Tin Drum is full of such elements which appear so natural to the readers. Oskar often describes himself as gnome, “...I remained the three-year-old, the gnome, Tom Thumb....” Gnome is a human-like creature that appears in stories and fairy tales and lives under the ground and guards precious things. Another finest example is Niobe’s myth that is incorporated in the allegorical chapter fifteen titled, “Niobe”. This chapter can stand as a first-rate supernatural tale. Niobe is the pride of Maritime Museum's collection. It
is a figurehead from a Florentine galleon, captured by Pirates from Danzig in 1473. The green figurehead is a carving of "a voluptuous wooden woman, green and naked, her arms raised and languidly crossed, all fingers on view, gazes ahead with sunken amber eyes across breast striving towards their goal." Over the centuries, every one of the sculpture's owners befell some grand misfortunes. Danzig's citizens blamed much of their tragedy on its presence. They believed that Niobe brought ill luck and sudden death to men who came too close to her. She was described as a living woman and a murderer. "Niobe was seriously suspected of having dispatched men and boys to the other world" (Grass, *The Tin Drum* 48, 171, 174). This belief is proved once again, when Oskar's friend Herbert Truczinski suffers great misfortune. He is appointed as a guard in that museum where Niobe is displayed. Suddenly, one day, an ambulance shows up at the museum. Oskar slips inside along with them and goes to Niobe's room. He sees Herbert hanging from Niobe's front, his face covering hers. He is naked to the waist, showing off his scars. He has taken a safety axe and plunges it into the statue and in the process has driven the other end into himself. His trousers are open in a bid to make love to the lifeless statue. Subsequently, Herbert dies from the chest wound. In this chapter, Oskar parodically criticizes those Germans who tried to prove their innocence by arguing that they had been somehow tempted by irrational forces to become involved with Hitler's Nazism.

The legend of Black Witch or Black Cook is another oft-quoted fairy-tale ingredient that Oskar uses to refer to guilt or death lurking in war-torn Germany. Grass recalls her to life from an old German folksong. This symbol manifests the fear of Nazi history that pervades the German middle-class. There is no way to run away
from that fearsome Black Witch. She is universal, omnipresent and ubiquitous. Oskar expresses his fear for her this way:

...I'll drum out the little song that's become more and more real to me, more and more terrifying. I'll conjure up the Black Cook, consult her, so that tomorrow morning I can tell my keeper Bruno what sort of life the thirty-year-old Oskar plans to lead from now on in the shadow of an increasingly black bogey-woman; for what frightened me years ago on the stairs,...remained there for ever, talking with fingers, coughing through the key-holes, moaning in the stove, screeching with the door, billowing up the chimney, when ships blew their horns in the fog, when a fly took hours to die between panes,...when the sun vanished behind the Turmberg yet lived on as amber. Whom did Herbert think of as he assaulted the wooden figure? Behind the high altar too-what would Catholicism be without the Cook who blackens .every confessional? She cast her shadow as the toys of Sigismund Markus shattered, and the brats in the courtyard at the apartment building, Axel Mischke and Nuchi Eyke, Susi Kater and Hanschen Kollin, they declared it, they sang it, while brewing the brick powder soup: 'Better start running, the Black Cook's coming! You're to blame, and you're to blame, and you are most of all. Better start running...' she was always there, even in the woodruff fizz powder, foaming so greenly and so innocently; in every wardrobe I ever crouched in, she crouched too, and later on she borrowed Luzie Rennwand's triangular fox face, ate sausage sandwiches, skin and all, and led the Dusters up
the diving tower—Oskar alone remained, watched the ants, and knew: that's her shadow, multiplied, now seeking sweetness, and all the words: blessed, sorrowful, full of grace, virgin of virgins... and all the stones: basalt, tufa, diorite, nests in the shell lime, alabaster so soft.... Later on, four tomcats,... everything that tapered towards the foot, cemeteries in which I stood, flagstones on which I knelt, coconut fibres on which I lay... all things mixed in concrete, the juice of onions that called forth tears, the ring on the finger and the cow that once licked me... Don't ask Oskar who she is. He's run out of words. For what was once behind my desk, then kissed my hump, is now and forever coming towards me.... (Emphasis added) (Grass, The Tin Drum 562-563)

Black Cook slowly encroaches upon and finally engulfs Oskar and propels him into desperate flight of madness. The eel scene in another chapter, Good Friday Fare recalls the head of Medusa, the serpent in the Garden of Eden.

The magical realist novel abounds in symbols that denote specific allegorical meanings. In case of the symbol of red and white, the colour red stands for guilt and white stands for innocence. In the first chapter itself, Grass very subtly introduces the theme of guilt by juxtaposing red and white colour to the readers. In the second page of the novel, the following exchange takes place between Oskar and Bruno:

Bruno Munsterberg— I'm talking about my keeper now, I'm done playing with words—bought five hundred sheets of writing paper on my behalf. Should this supply prove insufficient, Bruno, who is unmarried, childless, and hails from the Sauerland, will revisit the little stationery
shop, which also sells toys, and provide me with whatever additional unlined space I need for my recollections, which I hope will be accurate. I could never have requested this favour of my visitors, my lawyer, or Klepp, say. The solicitous love prescribed for me would surely have prevented my friends from anything so dangerous as bringing me blank paper and allowing my incessantly syllable-excreting mind free use of it.

When I said to Bruno, 'Oh, Bruno, would you buy me a ream of virgin paper?' he looked up at the ceiling, sent his finger pointing in that same direction to underline the comparison, and replied, 'You mean white paper, Herr Oskar.'

I stuck with the word virgin and told Bruno to ask for it that way at the shop. When he returned later that afternoon with the package, he seemed a Bruno lost in thought. He stared long and hard a few times at the ceiling, that source of all his bright ideas, and then announced, 'that word you recommended was right. I asked for virgin paper and the salesgirl blushed bright red before she gave me what I wanted.'

(Grass, The Tin Drum 4-5)

Thus, innocent white paper will be sullied by Oskar's black deeds and unavoidable guilt will slowly encroach upon the prospect of innocence.

The symbol of white and red colour also stands for Polish sentiment that occurs frequently in The Tin Drum. The red and white colours remind the readers about the Polish flag. Oskar's grandfather Joseph Koljaiczek paints a sawmill fence
red and white in a fit of Polish sentiment. Oskar refers to his drum, the outside of which has triangular pattern of red and white painted alternately, "There I have it now, my drum. There it hangs, brand-new, zigzagged white and red, on my tummy" (Grass, The Tin Drum 48). In the chapter titled, "Shop Window", when Oskar makes a hole in jewellery shop window so that Jan Bronski, whom he believes to be his father can steal a necklace of red rubies set in gold, he is compared to the mythological Parsifal, whose attention was captured by drops of red blood in white snow. Oskar is attracted to white, but he has an obsession for red also. It is exemplified in another paragraph from the chapter "Good Friday Fare". Oskar is thinking about Sister Inge in Dr. Hollatz's chamber and is fantasizing about red. In the process the nurse's Red Cross pin undergoes a series of transformation in order to highlight the intensity of red:

_I seldom looked Sister Inge in the eye. My gaze and my sometimes racing drummer's heart found repose on the clean, starched white of her nurse's uniform, on the weightless edifice she wore as a cap, on a smooth pin decorated with red cross. How pleasant it was to follow the constantly renewing folds of her uniform. Did she have a body beneath that fabric? Her ageing face and her well-cared-for yet raw-boned hands indicated that Sister Inge was indeed a woman....How often I was overcome by sleep as she auscultated my small and supposedly ailing body: a shallow sleep, born from the folds of white fabric, a carbolic-cloaked sleep, a dreamless sleep; unless in the distance her pin expanded into who knew what: a sea of banners, an alpine glow, a splash of poppy field, ready to revolt, who knew against whom: against red Indians, cherries, nosebleeds, against cockscombs, red blood cells,
coalescing to a red that filled my vision and gave background to a passion that I found, both then and now, quite understandable, but could not name, because the small word red says nothing, and nosebleeds do nothing, and banners fade, and if in spite of all I still say red, red won't have me, turns its coat. (Grass, The Tin Drum 142-143)

In the chapter titled, “The Last Tram or Adoration of a Canning Jar” in spite of Oskar’s drumming the Polish national anthem to save Viktor Welhun, the ghostly spirits of the Polish cavalry carrying the red and white banners of Poland emerge from the ground and carry off both victor and his executioners.

... it was a squadron of Polish Uhlans, for red and white like Herr Matzerath’s lacquered drum the pennants tugged at their lances, no, didn’t tug, but floated instead, just as the whole squadron floated beneath the moon, ... wheeled to the left towards our garden, ... took only poor Viktor and his executioners, and were lost in the open fields beneath the moon.... (Grass, The Tin Drum 550)

This episode at the end of the novel, once again, mentions about the symbols of red and white colours. Metaphorically speaking, the colour red signifies evil or guilt and white stands for innocence.

Oskar narrates the family history, closely intertwined with Germany’s Nazi past from the images etched in his memory or kept in the family photo album. Oskar’s album is a microcosm of German national history, experienced by Grass himself. Oskar’s grandmother’s wide skirts, triangular card game of Alfred Matzerath, Agnes and Jan Bronski, Jewish toy merchant Sigismund Markus, SA man and great trumpet
Meyn, mysterious Niobe, clown Bebra etc., are all transformed into photographic images and become real.

*I am guarding a treasure. Through all the bad years of nothing but days to get through, I guarded it, hid it away, pulled it out again; during the trip in the boxcar I clutched it to my breast, a thing of value, and when I slept, Oskar slept on his treasure, his photo album.*

*What would I do without this open family grave that shows all things so clearly?* (Grass, *The Tin Drum* 38)

Thus Oskar’s story naturally becomes fragmented, inconsistent, as he brings those images to make a complete piece of literary history. Sometimes his memory falters. Thus the whole narrative becomes non linear and this point of non-linearity is a salient feature of magical realist novels. Oskar dismantles the German history during the reign of Nazi with the revolutionary insight gained from photographic images. His perspectives of photographic images have the effect of a camera which can easily make an enlarged or close-up version of a single photograph. The hidden reality or the official history of the Nazi era is enlarged or diminished to a grotesque size by Oskar in order to make familiar things appear strange.

A magical realist text normally does not follow the traditional concept of time and space in order to make the narrative fragmented and non-linear. Oskar is aware of that:

*You can start a story in the middle, then strike out boldly backwards and forwards to create confusion. You can be modern, delete all reference to time and distance, and then proclaim or let*
someone else proclaim that at the eleventh hour you've finally solved the space-time problem. (Grass, The Tin Drum 5)

The Tin Drum transcends realism in a brilliant and innovative way. In this connection, Alfred D. White opined:

The project of writing an account of such a catastrophic age cannot work if it surrenders to realism: the means the realistic writer has are not sufficient to stand against six million dead Jews and all the other victims of hatred. Large-scale, concentrated, unrealistic transposition of events, attitudes, and fates is needed to help establish a counterweight to the horrible reality. (90)

**Artist and Society**

The protean Oskar is an artist, who reacts to his experiences in a creative way by drumming, and then by writing. Asserting himself as a drummer, he always maintains an aura of superiority over the ugly realities of the society. His drum signals his allegiance to art, creativity and independence from ordinary life. Oskar's male nurse Bruno is also an artist, who transposes Oskar's historical facts into certain abstract sculptures by setting in plaster on a stand, pierced with needle and thus gives them permanence. The Tin Drum discusses World War II primarily by contrasting it with art in Oskar's life. An underlying theme in the novel is that art has the power to defeat war in human society. Art is mightier than war. It is the best alternative to politics and war. During the reign of Hitler in Nazi Germany, the artists suffered terribly. They found themselves in difficult and contradictory positions and often got engaged in a series of disguises or changes of identity in order to survive along with
their artistic pursuits. The first enemies targeted by the Nazis were the artists, the Dadaists, the writers and the free thinkers who openly raised their voices against every kind of orthodoxy. From the very beginning, the Nazis burned books or degenerated art. Hitler despised art for it signifies free spirit. He burned books and later the humans. Oskar did not fit in the Nazi idea of what an artist should be and had to resort to false identities in order to escape persecution. Oskar himself confessed that to Bebra, the musical clown of a circus, who played ‘Jimmy the Tiger’ on bottles. During his first meeting with Bebra in the chapter “The Grandstand”, Oskar expresses his desire to remain uninvolved. He says to Bebra, “You Know, Herr Bebra, I prefer to be part of the audience, to allow my little art to bloom in secret, far from all applause, but I would be the last person to fail to applaud your performances” (Grass, The Tin Drum 102). Bebra is aware of the volatile political situations prevailing in the country and the tragic fate of the artists under the tyrannical rule of Hitler. His worries are reflected in his reply:

My dear Oskar, take it from an experienced colleague. The likes of us should never be part of the audience. We have to be on the stage, in the arena. We have to perform and direct the action, otherwise our kind will be manipulated by those who do. And they'll all too happily pull a fast one on us. (Grass, The Tin Drum 102)

In this chapter, Grass is adamant to wrest control from the politicians and give it to Oskar. So, Oskar finds an alternative to be on the grandstand and he crouches under the stand and controls events secretly. As the Nazi marchers approach, he takes up his drumsticks with the words, “Now my people, now my volk, hearken unto me” (Grass, The Tin Drum 108) and disrupts their demonstration with his rhythms and makes the
participants dance 'The Charleston' instead of marching. Oskar also breaks up the mass meetings of other parties, groupings and sects. He himself informs:

*In those days you could get the better of people on and in front of a grandstand with a paltry tin drum, and I grant that I developed my stage trick, as I had my long-distance, glass-slaying song, to the point of perfection. I didn't just drum down rallies in brown. Oskar sat under the grandstands of reds and Blacks, of Boy Scouts and the spinach shirts of the PX, of Jehovah's Witnesses and the Kyffhauser Bund, of vegetarians and the Polish youth fresh Air Movement. Whatever they had to sing, to blow, to pray, to proclaim: my drum knew better.*

*Thus my task was destruction. And what I failed to bring low with my drum I slew with my voice.* (Grass, *The Tin Drum* 112)

Such is the power of his art and his drum. In the chapter, titled, *The Last Tram or Adoration of a Canning Jar*, Oskar's controlled artistry of drumming is used as a form of satire that exposes the ridiculous side of Nazi convictions. In this surreal episode, an attempt is made to arrest and execute Viktor Weluhn as an insurgent, on the strength of a still valid 1939 warrant, because he helped to defend the Polish Post Office. But Oskar's drumming and Viktor's voice intoning the Polish national anthem called forth the ghostly Polish cavalry and they removed Viktor and his persecutors. When Vittlar congratulates Oskar for his achievement, he laments before Vittlar, “...I've had far too many triumphs in life. I'd like to fail for once. But that's hard to do and takes a great deal of work” (Grass, *The Tin Drum* 551). He indirectly wishes
to have a peaceful life in which art would not be needed to right the injustices of society.

Oskar’s self-awareness is mediated through the drum. He knows he is in love with Maria when he notices that his improvisations are imparting this passion to the tin. To quote Ann L. Mason about Oskar:

\[
\text{Oskar embodies as well as parodies the excesses involved in the Nazi glorification of the artists, themselves and their misguided race: just as Hitler attempted to elevate himself and the German people above ordinary life and its rational and moral restraints by arguing that they were of the only true creative race, so the self-willed infant Oskar, by rejecting the bourgeois world in favour of his art, becomes a parody...Thus Oskar embodies and reduces to size a whole range of Nazi artistic-political pretensions. (353)}
\]

In the chapter, “The Onion Cellar”, Oskar is shown to make a living as a member of a Jazz trio in the nightclub Onion Cellar, providing musical background to the nightly ceremony of the cutting of onions to enable the German citizens to weep remembering their past guilt. But on one occasion when the owner Ferdinand Schmuh’s double dose of onions fails to produce a liberating outburst, but an orgiastic frenzy, Oskar’s art of drumming is called on and it works as a regression therapy for the citizens. Oskar plays emotional tunes and as a result they weep, remembering their bruised childhood in an innocent way. Oskar explains:

\[
\text{When Schmuh asked me to step in with my drum, I didn’t play what I could play, but what was in my heart. Oskar pressed his}
\]
Thus Oskar’s insistence on memory, his endeavour to remind other German’s of their wrong past parallel Grass’ concern that the Nazi crimes should not be swept under the carpet, but to be faced and resolved not to commit that sin again.

Very often Oskar’s drumming is intricately linked to the Second World War to convey the message that art has the ability to avoid war and defeat hatred. By drumming, he proclaims a fundamental discontent with reality. The war breathes death for him and becomes something unavoidable. The musical instrument is symbol of identity for him. The drum never leaves him. The process of drumming is eternal for Oskar and it withstands the slaughter of time. Oskar says:

...I clung all the more tightly to my despised drum, for it didn’t die as a mother does, you could buy a new one, have it repaired by old man Heilandt or Laubschad the clockmaker, it understood me, always
After 1945, when Oskar forsakes drumming and attempts to build up an ordinary and more normal life, then also he gets engaged in certain other aesthetic activities. Instead of drumming, he contents himself "with the modest joy of tapping out letters in stone at Korneff's workshop." He once again "fell prey to art" with a new prospect. He becomes a stonecutter and engraver of inscriptions. He slowly becomes "a prominent artist." Professor Kuchen of the Art Academy also sums up, "Art is accusation, expression, passion. Art is black charcoal crushing white paper" (Grass, The Tin Drum 435, 440, 409, 442). Grass has strong belief in the political and historical responsibility of art as an interpreter of the past. An artist's unbiased and impartial attitude to reality should be the modern version of religion and the best alternative to politics and war.

Impression of Bildungsroman

The Tin Drum is a Kunstlerroman, a sub-category of Bildungsroman. Kunstlerroman, according to M. H Abrams, "represents the growth of a novelist or artist from childhood into the stages of maturity that signalizes the recognition of the protagonist's artistic destiny and mastery of an artistic craft" (193). This term in German literature signifies novels of education. This genre of novel records the story of an artist. The main theme is the development of the protagonist's mind and character, as he passes through varied life experiences and usually through a spiritual crisis into maturity and the recognition of his identity and role in the world. But, unlike Thomas Mann's The Magic Mountain or Somerset Maugham's Of Human
Bondage, The Tin Drum is a Kunstlerroman with a difference. It's a deliberate parody of the traditional Kunstlerroman, since through the book's fragmented, non-linear style of narration Grass stresses not on Oskar's development, but his retardation and alienation from the dehumanized adult world. Oskar willingly stops growing above the age of three on his third birthday. The grotesque depiction of the world through his eyes becomes both disturbing and sad. The novel has many sad undertones of Nazi atrocities in light of which readers can identify with Oskar's unwillingness to grow.

"...I would never be a politician and most certainly not a grocer, that I would make a point instead of remaining as I was-and so I did, remained that size, kept that attire, for years to come" (Grass, The Tin Drum 48). Thus the novel falls in the category of inverted German Bildungsroman that Jack Zipes describes as:

an episodic, realistic representation of a protagonist's growing alienation and his refusal to comply with the socio-economic pressures that lead to one type of reification or another.... The protagonist’s awareness of his alienation becomes a measure of his humanity; and his resistance to it, a guideline for establishing standards for real growth. (155)

By inverting some specific features of Bildungsroman, Grass proves that this literary form is suitable to represent the horrible realities of Nazi Germany after Auschwitz. Unlike a typical bildungsroman, Grass' novel does not follow linear narration, but is fragmentary and episodic within the accurate chronological flow of history. In spite of physical retardation, Oskar develops mentally, which is fretted with strange and macabre moments. Oskar himself says at his birth, "I was one of those clairaudient infants whose mental development is complete at birth and
thereafter simply confirmed” (Grass, The Tin Drum 35). This remark denies the fundamental notion of a Bildungsroman, in which the protagonist gradually develops both mentally and spiritually through gaining varied experiences of life. But, Oskar’s condition of “being intellectually adult at birth but never becoming physically adult” (Ireland 341) mocks the idea of such development. Moreover, by transforming dwarf Oskar into a person with a hunchback in the postwar Germany, Grass hints at the replacement of the retarded Nazi Germany with a modern guilt-ridden German society that is deformed in every aspect. Both at the beginning and at the end of the novel, Oskar remains a patient in a mental asylum and it seems that his development is restricted only to the confines of that hospital room. Oskar himself confesses that:

*My white-enamelled metal hospital bed thus sets a standard. To me it is more; my bed is a goal I’ve finally reached, it is my consolation, and could easily become my faith....* (Grass, The Tin Drum 3)

The concept of Bildungsroman receives a major blow, when inside the boxcar Oskar experiences his ‘missbildung’ and becomes more deformed. He develops his hump on his back, loses the glass-breaking power of his voice, calls himself a mythical beast, a unicorn, seems frightened of falling, but wants to fall from a ten meter diving board. He totally loses his mental balance and turns insane. Finally he is taken to a mental hospital.

However, in the chapter, titled, “Should I or Shouldn’t I” Oskar participates in the funeral services of his father Alfred Matzerath and while standing by the grave of his father, he resolves to accept the responsibilities for Matzerath’s death and for his family. So, he throws his drum into Matzerath’s grave and welcomes a new life with
lots of responsibilities. He reduces his confusing “Should I, Shouldn’t I” into a confirmed “It must be” (Grass, *The Tin Drum* 385, 386)! He grows with renewed vigour. Critics like Cunliffe see him undergoing a strange kind of rebirth. Cunliffe says:

*After 1945 he [Oscar] undergoes a kind of rebirth, beginning with the burial of the Nazi Matzerath, when Oskar throws his infantile drum into the grave, telling himself that he should have done so sixteen years ago during his visit to Jan Bronski’s grave in the same cemetery.* (79)

Oskar’s son Kurt throws a stone at the back of Oskar’s head and Oskar begins to grow like an adult. This is the dawn of a new existence for Oskar. The childlike dwarf grows into an adult with a hunchback. He can no longer be in disguise behind the façade of childhood, with a communicative drum. In post-war Germany, Oskar transforms into another Oskar. He becomes a stonemason, dresses himself in dandified clothing, socializes in sleazy nightclubs, and so on. He himself calls that “the story of my growth...” (Grass, *The Tin Drum* 409). Even very early in the novel, Oskar asserts about some kind of development taking place within him:

*And yet-and here Oskar too must admit to development –something was growing, and not always to my own advantage, ultimately taking on messianic proportions; but what grown-up in my day had eyes and ears for Oskar, the eternally three-year-old drummer?* (Grass, *The Tin Drum* 49)

Oskar is waiting for his release from the mental hospital into the world on his thirtieth birthday. He is now fully aware that there is no hiding place from the past sense of guilt. Every German has to face it. He faces it, remembers it and records it in his
memoir. That is his ultimate success and that encapsulates his true growth as a human being.

Another Recurrent Theme: Religion

Grass parodies the concept of the Christian Trinity in his novel. Oskar's insanity is directed against the church and the state. Instead of the union of the three divine figures of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost in the Godhead, Grass' Trinity consists of Oskar's Kashubian mother and his two putative fathers, German Alfred Matzerath and Polish Jan Bronski. In the chapter titled, "Good Friday Fare", the grotesque picture of small, light-green eels in the horse head reminds the reader not of the Resurrection of Christ, but it leads to the death of Agnes. By parodying the concept of the Trinity with the help of these three characters, Grass mocks at the Nazi propaganda of eradicating everything which are not of pure Aryan blood. He exhibits a world where no Faith, Hope and Love reign. Grass himself proclaims, "Since Auschwitz, Christian institutions (in Germany, at least) have forfeited their claim to ethical leadership" (Grass, On Writing and Politics 89) due to their passive acceptance of Nazis. In order to make the agenda of censuring the church more pronounced, Grass in his novel parodies God and installs Satan as a central figure. The novel installs a vagrant Jesus figure who has to carry the burden of guilt imposed upon him by the crimes of a totalitarian regime, it cowardice, betrayals and murders. Oskar identifies himself with Jesus and strongly believes that he is Jesus. He challenges and scorns Jesus Christ in disturbing and sacrilegious manner. He has no idea about his limitations and refers to himself as a demi-god. With this parallel of God and Oskar, Grass satirizes Hitler, who himself constructed a myth around himself.
and controlled others by carrying out systematic acts of death and destruction against other ethnic minorities like the Jews. In the chapter titled "The Imitation of Christ", Oskar renounces the supremacy of Christ once again. While inspecting the baby Jesus figure in the Church of the Sacred Heart, Oskar realizes that Oskar and Jesus are identical twins with the same Bronski blue eyes and the same arm posture. Oskar remembers demanding a small miracle from Jesus many years back, and if Jesus drums, then he will be entitled to assert his primacy. Otherwise, Oskar will arrogate the name of Jesus. He puts the drumsticks into the figure’s hands and waits for Him to drum and As Irene Leonard explains, “he feels that the Church above all places ought to be the rightful home for his drum, for both drum and church have pledged themselves to fight for the highest ideals of mankind, for Faith, Hope and Love” (19). Jesus does not drum and it is “a clear indication for Oskar that he is to replace this god of plaster who cannot grasp the rhythms of life, who cannot deliver his message and therefore cannot redeem mankind” (Diller 86). Oskar goes on producing glass-breaking screams to break the church windows. But he cannot break church windows. He thinks that Jesus is performing this miracle which He did not produce at Oskar’s demand earlier. Many years later, Oskar again demands that miracle of drumming from Jesus. He mentions:

_I stuck both sticks into his ten sausage fingers-now drum, sweetest Jesus, painted plaster drumming on tin, Oskar backs down the three steps, from carpet to flagstones, come on, drum, Jesus boy, Oskar steps farther back. Maintains his distance and laughs himself silly, for Jesus just sits there, can’t drum though he wants to. Boredom starts gnawing_
at me as if I were a rind of bacon-and then he struck, and all at once
he was drumming! (Grass, The Tin Drum 337)

This time that miracle happens. Jesus starts drumming, even playing Oskar’s favourite pieces:

While all remained motionless: he crossed over nicely, first with his right, then his left, then with both sticks, his drumroll not half bad, he took it seriously, loved to change tempo, was as good when the rhythm was simple as he was when he made it complex, and yet he avoided all gimmicks, just stuck to his drum, his style not even religious or that of some warmed-over trooper, but simply and purely musical, nor did he scorn popular hits, playing, among others, one that was on everyone’s lips back then.... (Grass, The Tin Drum 337-338)

Here Grass hints that only in this way religion can effectively deal or come into terms with a chaotic and absurd world and the figure of Jesus can become an active member of humanity. By letting Oskar beat his drum inside the church and sticks it into the hands of baby Jesus, Grass actually censures the religious conservatism of the Adenauer period and denounces the church for its silence during the Holocaust. In the chapter, No Miracle, Oskar’s blasphemy reaches its climax. Here, Oskar touches Jesus’s penis, which he calls as watering can and keeps on stroking and squeezing it until he himself experiences pleasant and strangely new sensation in his own penis.

As Oskar carefully examined the boy Jesus’s little watering can, which should have been circumcised but wasn’t, stroking and
cautiously squeezing it, as if trying to make it move, he felt something at once pleasant and confusing in his own little watering can, at which point he left Jesus's alone in hopes that his would leave him alone. (Grass, *The Tin Drum* 128)

Oskar wants to run away from Catholicism. He orders Jesus, “Give me back my drum right now. You have your cross, that’s all you need!” After relinquishing the drum, Jesus tells Oskar, “Thou art Oskar, the rock, and upon this rock I will build my church. Follow thou me!” Oskar violently denies that and even breaks off one of the statue’s toes. Oskar vehemently opposes the primacy of Jesus and draws a clear line of demarcation between drum and cross, religion and art. Debunking all the myths surrounding religion, Oskar wants to build, not church, but an alternative edifice based on the gospel of art. For him art is the supreme religion. Only art can restore humanity to its glorified past. That’s why Oskar grandly claims holiness for the printed words in this way, “Even bad books are books, and therefore holy” (Grass, *The Tin Drum* 338, 338, 78).

In the chapter, “The Dusters”, Oskar, declaring himself Jesus, plays the role of a team leader to twenty boys, all between the ages of fourteen to sixteen. Oskar returns to the Church of the Sacred Heart several times, trying to get the baby Jesus repeat his drumming performance. But Jesus does not oblige. One day he arrived at the church late. The door was locked, so he took a long way home. In order to vent his rage, he sang out street lamps and came upon a chocolate factory. There he noticed a group of boys that had been following him. It was clear that they were converging on Oskar. They were the Dusters, a group of boys that had become
famous in Danzig for raiding the offices of the Hitler Youth, attacking them, stealing medals from soldiers, gasoline from military sites, and ammunition from stockpiles. Their grand ambition was to raid the city's rationing office. There were twenty in all between the ages of fourteen and sixteen. When, they asked Oskar his name, Oskar replied, "My name is Jesus." A boy named Pinchcoal dusted Oskar by grabbing him and grounding his knuckles into the upper right arm of Oskar and then rubbed them rapidly until it became dry, hot and painful for him. Just then the air-raid sirens went off and a boy named Störtebaker believed that Oskar was Jesus. He wanted to know how Oskar broke glasses with his voice. Immediately, Oskar broke all the windows in a chocolate factory that catered exclusively to the German air force. On the basis of this ambiguous display, Oskar was made their leader. Oskar resolved to take these children under his wing, to lead them as Jesus did. The boys were enthralled; they danced and shouted. Finally Oskar was admitted to the gang. Stylizing himself as Jesus, the Messiah, Oskar said, "Jesus will lead the way. Follow thou me" (Grass, The Tin Drum 347, 351)! He walked in the footsteps of Christ with the Dusters as his disciple.

Concurrently, Oskar associates himself with Satan. This association goes back to his baptism, when he consciously distanced himself from the words of his godfather, who renounced Satan on baby Oskar's, behalf:

_I still remember the Church of the Sacred Heart from my baptism: my heathen name caused problems, but the family insisted on Oskar, as Jan, my godfather, made clear at the church door. Then Father Wiehnke blew in my face three times to drive Satan out, the sign of the_
cross was made, a hand was laid upon me, salt was sprinkled and a few further measures taken against Satan. Inside the church a second stop at the actual baptismal chapel. I kept quiet as the apostles Creed and Our father were tendered to me. After which father Wiehnke found it advisable to pronounce another Satan Depart, and imagined he was awakening my senses as he touched Oskar’s nose and ears, though I had known what was what right from the start. Then he wanted to hear it once more, loud and clear, asking, ‘Dost thou renounce Satan? And all his works? And all his pomp?’

Before I could shake my head—for I had no intention of rejecting anything—Jan answered in my stead, saying three times, ‘I do renounce.’ (Grass, The Tin Drum 123)

Despite the ceremony, Oskar’s relationship with Satan remained strong and unspoiled. Oskar frequently converses with Satan and becomes a frequent companion. Even when, Oskar was carried away from the church on the day of his baptism, he asked Satan, “Did you make it through?” Satan enticed Oskar into committing sin by whispering, “Did you see those church windows, Oskar? All glass, all glass!” In another instance, when Oskar failed to break the glasses of the Church of the Sacred Heart with his diamond hard voice, Satan inside him warned, “Watch out, Oskar, don’t break those church windows! He’ll ruin your voice if you do” (Grass, The Tin Drum 123, 123, 339). Actually, Jesus and Satan are inseparable, just like good and evil. As Stacey Olster comments, “...Catholicism cannot completely exclude the idea of Evil from its tenets, precisely because its theological basis lies so largely in the
concept of Original Sin...” (69). So, Oskar is seen moving between poles, for instance, between Satan and Jesus, between Goethe and Rasputin or between the Nietzschean dichotomy of the Dionysian and the Apollonian. He faces conflicts within himself and his oppositional deeds encapsulate the flawed innocence of the era. A. Leslie Willson commented:

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\text{The whole question of guilt and innocence, of grace and sin, is a religious, if not explicitly Christian, statement of man's predicament. Grass has given it a fine distillation in the person of Oskar Matzerath, who shares in the divine dichotomy which invests creation. He is a single being paradoxically split into flesh and spirit, the light of love and the dark of desire, preposterously Christ and Satan, a contradictory absurdity but unimpeachably real. In the last analysis Oskar is a grotesque Everyman longing for the white of innocence, fascinated by the red of evil, seeking deliverance from the universal presence of the black witch of guilt...}(138)
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**Autobiographical Elements**

Forrest G. Robinson said, “Like Oskar, then Grass is an autobiographical writer caught up in competing compulsions to reveal and to conceal the same dark truths about his involvement in the Second World War” (28). The Tin Drum has some striking autobiographical passages. In 1956, Grass left Germany for Paris, where he wrote The Tin Drum. The novel is full of unpopular truths challenging the postwar
culture of strategic forgetfulness of the guilt-ridden German population. The novel is quite autobiographical in some of the passages. It was the narrator of *The Tin Drum*, Grass declared openly, who, “compelled me to haunt the misty corners of my early year” (Grass, *Peeling the Onion* 312). Grass is an autobiographical writer, who felt compelled to reveal and to conceal the same dark truths about his involvement in the Second World War and in Nazism. Like Oskar, Grass’s moral awareness and sense of guilt sharpened dramatically with the passage of time. Both Grass and Oskar were children when the Nazis assumed power. Both became embroiled in their system. As soon as we open the novel, one striking similarity catches our attention- the novel’s close relation to the life of its author comes up. The novel is dedicated to Grass’s wife Anna, and she seems to be the model for Oskar’s grandmother Anna Bronski in the novel. Again, Grass was born in 1927 and in that year Oskar also decides not to grow anymore. Like Oskar in the novel, Grass himself was tormented by the incidents of Nazi brutalities and Holocaust. In his autobiography *Peeling the Onion*, he admits about his association with Waffen SS and Hitler and the resultant sense of dissatisfaction and guilt:

> What I had accepted with the stupid pride of youth, I wanted to conceal after the war out of a recurrent sense of shame. But the burden remained, and no one could alleviate it.... I will have to live with it for the rest of my life. (Grass, *Peeling the Onion* 110-111)

The general setting of the novel is clearly autobiographical. Grass’s lower-middle class background in Danzig, the grocery store owned by his German father, his mother’s Kashubian origin, pictures of Hitler and Holy Ghost hanging in his own
house, his listening to special radio communiqués, Grass’s working as a stonemason and Jazz player in postwar Germany— all these incidents are given fictional touch in the novel. Here, Oskar is from Danzig, his father Alfred Matzerath owns a grocery shop, his mother Agnes has Kashubian origin, Oskar’s father hangs Hitler and Beethoven’s picture in his room after getting inducted into the Nazi party, Oskar leaves for Dusseldorf and works there as stonecutter and a jazz player. In the post-war Germany, Grass becomes thoroughly Americanized, and similarly, Oskar too adopts a different persona by socializing in sleazy nightclubs, by displaying dandified clothing, after the Second World War. The novel is full of such striking analogies between Grass and his fictional hero Oskar.

Oskar is a quirky narrator in search of truth. He is both Jesus and Satan, an artist and a maverick, a child and an adult, or a victim and a story-teller at the same time. The beginning sentence of the novel introduces Oskar as an inmate in a mental hospital and compels the readers to question the veracity of the narrative as well as the trust-worthiness of the narrator. Being mentally ill, he seems to be the most unreliable narrator. His narrative has problematic dimensions. As the story advances, the inconsistencies become more common, as Oskar narrates the story with lots of flashbacks and flash forwards, Layered digressions, and with non-linearity. Breaking through the linearity of time is a key narrative technique in magical realist novels. Oskar’s language distorts and hampers our understanding of the incidents happening in reality. He mentions new characters as if the readers are already familiar with them. He gives many contradictory versions of the same story. Oskar himself admits that while telling the story, he manages to “embellish now and then, if not to lie” (Grass, The Tin Drum 229). For example, at the end of the Polish Post Office siege, His uncle
Jan Bronski is executed and in the chapter, *House of Cards*, Oskar presents himself as an innocent bystander who witnesses Jan’s arrest. However, in the following chapter, titled, “He Lies in Saspe” Oskar confesses that he himself denounced Jan to the Nazis and so, is responsible for his death. Thus he contradicts himself. However, in the second attempt, he tries to give truthful explanations regarding the death of Jan. he says:

...Oskar, seeking protection, inserted himself between two avuncular and seemingly good-natured members of the Home Guard, put on a show of pathetic weeping, and pointed at Jan, his father, with accusatory gestures, transforming the poor man into a villain who had dragged an innocent child to the Polish Post Office in typical barbaric Polish fashion to use as a human shield. (Grass, *The Tin Drum* 229)

Thus Oskar gains the status of an unreliable narrator. His character highlights a bit of madness embodied by Rasputin and a thin layer of rationality portrayed by Goethe. On the other hand, Oskar’s male nurse Bruno’s narrative highlights the inconsistent nature of Oskar’s versions and invites the readers to question its reliability and not to accept everything that he says as the ultimate truth. Both first-person and third-person narrators intrude the text. Sometimes the sudden allusions to distant parts of the world disrupt the narrative continuity of the novel. For instance, the second paragraph of the second chapter titled, “Under the Raft” summarizes the whole first chapter:

*At any rate my drum says: On that October afternoon in eighteen ninety-nine, while Ohm Kruger was brushing his bushy anti-British*
eye-brows in South Africa, nearer home, between Dirschau and Karthaus, by the Bissau brickworks, beneath four skirts of a single colour, beneath smoke, shock, sighs, and saints' names sorrowfully invoked, beneath the slanting rain, beneath the smoke-filled eyes and hapless questioning of two rural constables, short but stout Joseph Koljaiczek begot my mother Agnes. (Grass, The Tin Drum 13)

This paragraph tells everything about Oskar's grandmother, grandfather, the location and the conception of his mother Agnes. But Oskar also alludes to a person named Oom Kruger. The readers are confused about the true identity of that man. Oom was a South African statesman and president of the Dutch-speaking republic of Transvaal. He was connected to the anti-British Boer War in 1899. His reference conjures up local conflicts in partitioned Poland, just like the complex network of global alliances and enmities between Germany and Great Britain during Boer War. By juxtaposing local and global, Grass gives his readers a slice of the universal experience of mankind.

The Tin Drum is the first work that bore Grass' name boldly on the title page and from here he emerged duly as a writer. In this novel, he carved out a certain philosophy of life which he is bravely advocating till today. The novel was a milestone in his literary career and marked his definite and uncompromising stance as a humanist. He knew his position and responsibilities as a writer and hardly changed his beliefs. His latest poem "What Must Be Said", published in April, 2012, once again repeats the theme of guilt-ridden silence observed by German people earlier and
invokes the supreme authority not to furnish Israel with nuclear weapons that may otherwise lead to war and wanton destruction.
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