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FROM ADMIRATION TO CONFRONTATION: GÜNTER GRASS AND THE UNITED STATES

by Siegfried Mews

Günter Grass is, without doubt, the best known representative of postwar and contemporary German literature in the United States. A few random samples culled from reviews of Grass's work in this country may suffice to illustrate this point. In 1964, on occasion of the English translation of *Hundejahre* (*Dog Years*), *Newsweek* wrote: "Günter Grass today is acknowledged as the author who put postwar German literature back in the world market. He is fast becoming a director of much of his country's creative movement, a keeper of old myths and new methods."¹ *The Tin Drum*, the novel that so far has determined Grass's reception in this country—the voluminous and challenging *The Flounder* notwithstanding—was even credited with initiating "the rebirth of German letters."² The recent film version of *The Tin Drum* contributed to a revival of interest in the novel; in 1982 the novelist John Irving stated: "*Die Blechtrommel*...has not been surpassed, it is the greatest novel by a living author."³ Irving continued in his praise of the author of *The Tin Drum* by claiming that "you can't be well-read today if you haven't read him. Günter Grass is simply the most original and versatile writer alive."⁴ Although such lavish critical endorsement is not to be encountered in all quarters,⁵ at least one other segment of the reading public, the professional intermediaries of German literature, that is, the professors and teachers of German, seem to agree with Irving. In a literary opinion poll conducted by the Goethe Institute in Boston, Massachusetts, *The Tin Drum* ranked first among the professors' favorite works of postwar German literature. Curiously, *The Flounder* attained second place—ahead of such redoubtable works as Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus*, Heinrich Böll's *Group Portrait with Lady*, and Max Frisch's *Homo Faber*.

In view of both Grass's renown in this country and the comparative commercial success of his books in English translation it is perhaps surprising that "America," a phenomenon that has occupied the imagination of German writers of the most diverse persuasions for the last two centuries or so, plays such a noticeably inconspicuous role in the author's work. In the pertinent literature that explores Germany's literary image of the New World in general and that of the United States in particular—this literature originated in large part on occasion of the American bicentennial of independence—only peripheral reference is made to Grass.⁶ In contrast to both his contemporaries such as the late Uwe Johnson with his multi-volume novel *Anniversaries* and representatives of a younger generation such as Peter Handke with his *Short Letter, Long Farewell* Grass did not choose the United States as the setting of any of his major novels. Although German writers have never let their imagination be fettered by their lack of familiarity with America—Bertolt Brecht during the twenties is a notorious case in point—Grass, like his colleagues Uwe Johnson and Peter Handke, is reasonably well acquainted with this country; hence he would seem to be in a position to come to grips with that phenomenon which has fascinated German writers for so long.

At any rate, since 1964 Grass has visited the United States on an almost regular basis. There are, to be sure, some traces of these transatlantic journeys to be found in his work—particularly in the collection of poems, *Ausgefragt* (1967), translated under the title *New Poems* (1968). But Grass's acquaintance with this country goes beyond a tourist's impressions. In particular, the

author has repeatedly indicated his familiarity with American literature as represented by such writers as Hemingway, Faulkner, Dos Passos, Melville, Walt Whitman, and Thomas Wolfe. A more remote but valid affinity between Grass and the literature of the English-speaking countries has been established by critics who compared the importance of the city of Danzig in the author's work to that of Dublin for James Joyce or Yoknapatawpha County for William Faulkner.⁸

The term Danzig does, of course, provide the explanation for Grass's comparative abstinence in dealing with other places and countries. Although presumably conceived as an afterthought, the title "Danzig Trilogy" that was given to *The Tin Drum*, *Cat and Mouse*, and *Dog Years* is entirely apt owing to the fact that it emphasizes perhaps the most important wellspring of Grass's creative imagination. To be sure, after the completion of the "Danzig Trilogy" (1959-1963) Danzig's significance was no longer quite as conspicuously evident; however, the city has never receded completely into the background as can be most readily seen in *The Flounder* (1977), a novel that truly elevates Danzig and, for that matter, postwar Gdańsk to the position of capital and unchallenged center of Grass's fictional universe.

Grass's fixation on Danzig was, by no means, of a parochial or exclusive nature; hence it admitted of excursions into geographically distant areas and chronologically remote periods that were familiar to the author from his voracious readings in history, literature, and related fields. Indeed, the first phase of Grass's engagement with America during the fifties and early sixties was characterized by its pronounced literary bent. Despite the fact that the author began to acquire personal knowledge of the United States during the middle sixties, the years that mark the beginning of the second phase of his concern with America, literary associations tended to prevail. Surprisingly, Grass justified his pronounced involvement in politics on behalf of the Social Democrats with explicit references to Walt Whitman. But Grass's initially positive views began to change during the late sixties—primarily under the influence of the Vietnam War. Only in the third phase, for which the year 1979 offers a convenient starting point, does Grass assume a militant stance that largely dispenses with literature as a seemingly ineffectual means of resisting dangerous trends in the political sphere.

In the following, the three phases in the development of Grass's concept of America will be explored in greater detail.

I

America first appears as a motif in the one-act play *Only Ten Minutes to Buffalo* (1954). The title of this play in the absurdist vein is derived from Theodor Fontane's once widely known ballad that recounts the heroic, selfless deed of John Maynard, pilot of the *Swallow*, a passenger ship that plies Lake Erie on its run between Detroit and Buffalo. When fire breaks out on the ship, the pilot holds on to the steering wheel amidst the roaring flames until he succeeds in beaching the ship. All the passengers and crew are saved except the pilot who perishes in the flames. His act of heroism is memorialized by the survivors. As a means of creating suspense Fontane employs a kind of countdown indicating the time remaining before the boat will reach the safety of Buffalo harbor. In this refrain-like countdown the line "Only ten minutes to Buffalo" occurs. Although this line has become a proverbial saying, Grass's explicit, if whimsical, textual references to Buffalo attest to his familiarity with Fontane's ballad. Actually, Fontane's German version, "Und noch zehn Minuten bis Buffalo"⁹ conveys the urgency of a threatening situation that is totally absent in Grass's play.

In fact, unless one wants to construct a contrast between the breathless suspense that Fontane creates by emphasizing the speed with which the *Swallow* accomplishes the last leg of her fateful

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journey and Grass's immobile, rusty train engine that is sitting in an idyllic landscape but is paradoxically bound for Buffalo, there is hardly any basis for textual comparison. But Martin Esslin may have a point with his suggestion that Grass wished to poke fun at Fontane's ballad, the "epitome of bombastic, nautical nonsense."¹⁰ While one may search in vain for any deeper significance of the play, the protagonists' ultimate scuttling of their plan to travel to Buffalo lends credence to the thesis that Grass was poking fun at the hero worship of the ballad. In dismissing Buffalo as irrelevant, its significance as the beacon of hope that sustains John Maynard in his sacrificial deed is denied:

FRIGATE: What about Buffalo?

PEMPELFORT and KRUEWIL: Where's that?

FRIGATE: Where's Buffalo?

PEMPELFORT and KRUEWIL: How would we know?

FRIGATE: Buffalo?

PEMPELFORT and KRUEWIL: Never heard of it.

PEMPELFORT: Maybe it's on the North Sea or the Lake of Geneva.

KRUEWIL: It must be some stinking whistle stop.

PEMPELFORT: Between Topeka and Keokuk.

KRUEWIL: Without even a school or a drugstore.

PEMPELFORT: We wouldn't want to go there. We want to round the Cape. We want to jam into the wind on a windjammer. (pp. 185-86)

But Buffalo continued to stimulate Grass's creative imagination. In its next appearance in the author's work Buffalo was more clearly recognizable as an American city—although the contextual framework strongly suggests that Grass, in the time-honored fashion of German writers from the most prolific promulgator of lore about the Wild West, Karl May, to the gradually disenchanting admirer of American vigor and technical know-how, Bertolt Brecht, follows literary precedents by presenting an America that is a projection of wishful thinking. At any rate, Buffalo has now assumed the function that was denied it in *Only Ten Minutes to Buffalo*.

At the beginning of *The Tin Drum* the narrator Oskar Matzerath, "inmate of a mental hospital,"¹¹ tells of his grandfather, Joseph Koljaiczek. Koljaiczek, a Polish nationalist, had set fires in imperial Germany around the turn of the century until the police caught up with him. In a scene filled with irony and ambivalence Koljaiczek manages to escape his persecutors in the Danzig harbor—but he presumably drowns in the process. All of this happens during the launching ceremony of a ship with the symbolic name *Columbus* whose destination is America. Just before Koljaiczek takes his fateful plunge into the water, "he stands alone on his raft and sees America" (p. 36)—that is, he has the untarnished vision of a country that serves as the refuge for those who suffer from political persecution.

Koljaiczek's corpse was never found; hence speculation about his whereabouts abounds. Oskar writes that there are several "variants in which he was miraculously rescued" (p. 36). Although he professes not to give "a plugged nickel" for such rescue versions, which he dismisses as "nonsense" (p. 37), he feels duty-bound to relate the reports of eye-witnesses who claim to have seen his grandfather "shortly after World War One, in Buffalo, U.S.A." (p. 37). Oskar continues his report about Koljaiczek:

Called himself Joe Colchic, said he was importing lumber from Canada, big stockholder in a number of match factories, a founder of fire insurance companies. That was my grandfather, a lonely multimillionaire, sitting in a skyscraper behind an enormous desk, diamond rings on every finger, drilling his bodyguard, who wore firemen's uniforms, sang in Polish, and were known as the Phoenix Guard. (p. 37)

Koljaiczek's initial vision of freedom that suggests an entirely positive portrayal of America becomes more ambivalent when contrasted with Koljaiczek/Colchic's later existence in that country to which he had hoped to escape. To be sure, Colchic can serve as the prototype of the American success story that enables a penniless immigrant to rise from rags to riches; but his ostentatiously displayed wealth cannot hide his lack of human contact. Moreover, owing to Oskar's disavowal of the reports about his grandfather, the reader cannot be certain whether Koljaiczek's new existence has, within the context of the novel, any credibility.

Curiously, Oskar returns to his grandfather's story. What he himself initially declared to be fiction or fabrication seems to have assumed an air of reality. Shortly before his arrest in Paris the thirty-year-old Oskar contemplates the possibility of emigrating to America. He does so by implicitly alluding to yet another literary source, Ernst Willkomm's novel *Die Europamüden* (1838), a work whose title succinctly expresses the longing of those who are weary of old Europe for a new and better world. Oskar writes: "At thirty a man should marry. Or should I grow weary of Europe, I could emigrate: America, Buffalo, my old dream: Off I go, in search of my grandfather, Joe Colchic, formerly Joseph Koljaiczek, the millionaire and sometime firebug" (p. 585).

But Oskar's toying with the idea of emigration remains entirely in the realm of wishful thinking; just like his creator Grass, Oskar, in resurrecting half a century of German history, remained the prisoner of the past—a past, incidentally, in which America offered a vaguely defined and ambivalently portrayed hope for the future.

II

Grass's initial political engagement dates from the federal election campaign in 1961 when the author began to support Willy Brandt, then mayor of West Berlin. Since his emergence as a full-fledged campaigner in 1965 Grass has continued to support the Social Democrats—despite occasional differences with them—to the present: as a result, he has become one of the foremost politically committed writers in the Federal Republic. Such political engagement was and is, by no means, commonplace; Grass deliberately set out to destroy the writer's proverbial ivory tower and to take part in the political process as a concerned citizen. It is noteworthy that Grass derived his initial justification for his participation in politics from an American source, that is, Walt Whitman. During the federal election campaign of 1965 the author delivered campaign speeches on behalf of the Social Democrats in more than fifty cities; he repeatedly referred to Walt Whitman, "a Lincoln of the language," from whose *Leaves of Grass* he adapted the motto of his speeches, "Democracy, of thee I sing!"¹²

As the derivation of Grass's political ideas from Whitman indicates, his notions about the United States as a political entity are largely of a literary nature—although Grass composed his speeches on the Atlantic coast in Maryland. But his cursory, almost disdainful description of what he perceived—"dunes, billboards, and deserted beach hotels....empty beer cans on the beach" (p. 7)—pales in comparison to the rhetorical verve with which he evokes his political-literary forbear Whitman:

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Who has been speaking to you today? A man with transatlantic meditations and with Walt Whitman in his baggage. Who wishes he had Whitman's voice, his breath to sing as he did—smiling and serene, enthusiastic and angry, without fear of listings and repetitions—of democracy: bitter and dearly beloved, forever inadequate, infinitely irritating democracy, yearned for in prisons, complicated and forever contemplating new change: fatiguing and costly, sacred and sober democracy. (p. 14)

Grass's political creed, his unswerving belief in democracy, was, at this time, not only derived from the literary model of Whitman; as the passage cited above demonstrates, its very formulation depended on literary and rhetorical devices—presumably to the detriment of its efficacy in the political realm.

Whereas Grass wrote in 1965 that Walt Whitman's songs had given "the United States of America a poetic constitution that is valid to this day" (p. 6) such poetic effusions tended to subside in subsequent years. Although the references to America in Grass's public utterances from the late sixties and early seventies are rather sparse, the shift in the author's attitude is noticeable. Particularly two events caused Grass to revise his view of the democratic institutions in the land of Walt Whitman. Both the student protest movement of the late sixties and the Vietnam War resulted in Grass's growing criticism of the country that he had previously praised as a political model. True, Grass never completely identified with the goals of the German student movement and its intellectual spokesmen such as Hans Magnus Enzensberger whose professed revolutionary zeal and wholesale condemnation of society he considered antithetical to the position he adhered to, that is, that of a democratic socialist.¹³ Hence Grass did not indulge in spectacular gestures in the manner of Enzensberger. In 1968 Enzensberger, then a fellow of the Center for Advanced Studies at Wesleyan University, addressed an open letter to the president of that institution in which he stated his belief that "the class which rules the United States of America, and the government which implements its policies, [is] the most dangerous body of men on earth."¹⁴ Having pronounced his condemnation Enzensberger resigned his fellowship and went to Cuba, where he hoped to find conditions more congenial to his work. Grass, not enamored by Enzensberger's "revolutionary tourism"¹⁵ and the Che Guevara cult of leftist intellectuals, did not yet pay much attention to Latin America. On the contrary, he felt that the preoccupation with guerrilla warfare tended to distract from the task at hand, that is, the realization of full democracy and social justice in the Federal Republic by means of painstaking grassroots work. As to the Vietnam War, he praised the American students who opposed President Lyndon Johnson's foreign policy as the true defenders of the U.S. constitution and democracy.¹⁶

The novel *Local Anaesthetic* (1969) and the play *Max* (1969), which is derived from the novel, are the literary reflection of the political and intellectual problems that had arisen as a consequence of the Vietnam War. For our purposes it may suffice to briefly deal with the play. It is named after a dachshund whom the seventeen-year-old Philipp Scherbaum, student at a Berlin *Gymnasium*, intends to burn in full view of the "cake-eating fur-bearing animals"¹⁷ who populate the cafés in the center of town. Only in this way, Scherbaum believes, will he be able to stir the café patrons' consciences against the United States' use of napalm in Vietnam. Ordinarily indifferent to human suffering, the well-fed-dog-lovers will surely respond to the animal's fate, Scherbaum and his Maoist girl friend reason—somewhat in the fashion of Herbert Marcuse and revolutionary student leader Rudi Dutschke. Starusch, one of Scherbaum's

teachers, is determined to protect his favorite student from the prospect of grave injury or even death at the hands of incensed Berliners. In the end he succeeds by convincing Scherbaum of the dubious results of the planned protest; the student “is renouncing direct action and turning to long-term tasks” (p. 117). Scherbaum accepts the position of editor-in-chief of the school newspaper—presumably, “the Vietnam question” will be discussed in the paper “with complete frankness, and even with pro and con columns” (p. 18).

The “Vietnam question” is not discussed in the play itself; rather, it is a foregone conclusion that the war in Vietnam is morally reprehensible and should not be condoned. In essence, Grass presents arguments and differing ideological positions—there is a noticeable lack of action in the play—without unambiguously identifying with any of those positions. Surely, the Maoist student and follower of Ho Chi Minh, Vero, a perennial advocate of political actions that sometimes degenerate into mere happenings, is farthest from the stance Grass wishes to promote. Although the liberal Starusch and even more so Scherbaum, who ultimately adopts political reform rather than letting “the hot breath of revolution blow” (p. 34), are more in tune with Grass’s own political theory and practice, their positions are not completely identical with that of their author. Both the novel and the play offer “not the black-and-white of revolutionary thesis and reactionary antithesis, but rather the ‘grey’ of an independent critical questioning of the ills and virtues of contemporary capitalism.”¹⁸ Above all, it is a misperception to construe Scherbaum’s refusal to engage in his provocative act as Grass’s endorsement of political moderation, social adjustment, and careerism.¹⁹ As the following discussion will show, Grass had hardly succumbed to the ideology of the middle class.

III

After *From the Diary of a Snail* (1972), a book of indeterminate genre in which Grass related his experiences in the federal election campaign of 1969, the author returned entirely to literature with the full-fledged novel *The Flounder* (1977). As Judith Ryan has convincingly argued, this novel, together with *The Meeting at Telgte* (1979) and *Headbirths* (1980), forms a second trilogy in which Grass develops a new “aesthetics of resistance”—to use the title of the late Peter Weiss’s novel—that departs from the “Danzig Trilogy” in that it is no longer based on the dialectic interpenetration of past and present and a realistic mode that takes the reading public’s knowledge of historical facts for granted. Rather, this new aesthetics relies on fancy that presents historical reality in a series of imaginative transformations.²⁰ But instead of directing his flight of fancy towards the shores of the New World—surely not out of reach for the fabulous, mythical fish who gave the novel its title—Grass preferred the Portuguese navigator Vasco da Gama to Columbus, who had lent his name to the America-bound vessel in *The Tin Drum*. The choice of Vasco da Gama, who serves as one of the many incarnations of the author/narrator in the third chapter of *The Flounder*,²¹ may be attributed to Grass’s journey to India in 1975, that is, during the time of the novel’s origin. India, of course, provided a prime example for the problems of nourishment and food supply—or, rather, lack thereof—that constitute an important theme of the novel.

In a sense, the novel is a literary transformation of Grass’s concern about the problematic situation of the countries of the Third World. In 1980 the author declared the conflict between the North and the South, that is, between industrialized, developed nations on the one hand and less developed nations on the other, to be the decisive issue of our time.²² Grass’s substitution of the North-South conflict for that between the West and the East may be attributable to his adoption of a variant of the “convergence” theory, a mode of political thought that essentially holds that there are no fundamental economic, social, and political differences between the

capitalist and communist systems and that eventually they will become alike. Whatever the merits of the convergence theory, Grass has repeatedly advanced the claim that the interests of the two superpowers are identical. In *Headbirths*, his fanciful contribution to the federal election campaign of 1980, Grass has a tour guide, a veritable guru, formulate such an opinion: "Even if capitalism and communism step on each other's toes,...they're the same pair of shoes."²⁴ Such a view, which surely invites the charge of oversimplification, enabled Grass to equate the then leading representatives of the two respective systems, the "bigoted preacher" Carter in Washington and the "ailing philistine" Breshnev in Moscow (p. 72), who—as their respective successors continue to do—displayed a remarkable ignorance of world affairs that they so decisively shaped.

While such general, almost casual attacks on the United States lack the element of direct, if largely verbal confrontation, two factors in particular contributed to the radicalization of Grass's views vis-à-vis the United States. First, his aforementioned interest in the countries of the Third World eventually induced Grass to visit Nicaragua. In accordance with his preconceived pattern of equating the Soviet Union and the United States, he now developed a corollary pattern by portraying Vietnam and Afghanistan as well as Nicaragua and Poland as countries similarly suffering from the oppression engaged in by their respective superpowers.²⁵ It is an indication of Grass's newly adopted belligerence that in 1982 he resorted to the formulation "gemeingefährlich" (inimical to the interests of mankind), which had been previously used by Enzensberger, to characterize the policies of the U.S. administration. The administration itself he thought "incapable of democratic impulses and instead relying exclusively on force and power."²⁶

Second, Grass's increasingly radical stance can be directly traced to the NATO decision of December 1979 to deploy intermediate cruise and Pershing II missiles in Europe. This decision, incidentally, was supported by Chancellor Helmut Schmidt, then head of the coalition government of Social Democrats and Free Democrats. As a consequence, Grass and three other writers addressed an open letter, dated 17 April 1980, to Schmidt in which they implored him not to follow the course of the American administration that would presumably lead to the total annihilation of life on this planet. The writers invoked the particular German responsibility for peace and declared that the U.S. government had lost its right to issue moral appeals owing to the war in Vietnam.²⁷ It may be said that the emergence of the efforts for peace as the overriding issue for Grass can be dated from this letter; at the same time, by Grass's own admission this letter constituted a turning point in his relations to and view of the United States. He continued, however, to profess his love of America; precisely this love and friendship, Grass argued, entitled him to engage in criticism that, in his view, was devoid of anti-Americanism.²⁸

Not all professional readers and observers of Grass's speeches, appeals, and other activities on behalf of the peace movement—many of these addresses have been collected in a small volume with the symptomatic title *Learning How to Resist*²⁹—were ready to grant Grass such noble motives. For example, when the author co-signed an appeal that was entitled "To the People of the United States" and published in the *New York Times*, this renunciation of the covert war in Nicaragua was denounced by William F. Buckley, Jr., who hinted broadly that the writers who signed the appeal had been duped by communists.³⁰

There is no need to discuss in detail Grass's continuing engagement in the peace movement that seems to have temporarily impeded literary effort: suffice it to note that Grass's commitment, which is shared by a significant number of German writers and intellectuals, has intensified rather than slackened and become more radical rather than more moderate. This is evident from the hitherto latest writers' manifesto, largely penned by Grass, the highly contro-

University of Dayton Review, Vol. 17, No. 3 [1985], Art. 2 the title "Refuse."³¹ It enjoins the soldiers of the *Bundeswehr*, the army in the Federal Republic, to refuse military service on the grounds that the army has changed its function from a defensive force—as stipulated in the constitution—and become a potential instrument of aggression owing to the deployment of American cruise missiles and other offensive weapons.

Although Grass's political contributions were challenged from the very beginning of his activities, his recent peace initiatives, whose thrust is inevitably directed against the governmental policies of the Federal Republic and, implicitly or explicitly, against those of the United States, have met with particularly close scrutiny and considerable comment. As the late Heinrich Böll stated, at present Grass faces a paradoxical situation; on the one hand, he employs his fame that was created by the media in the first place in order to be heard; on the other, some media seem to have begun viewing Grass as one of their favorite targets.³² Admittedly, Grass is no longer disposed to deal exclusively "with the small retail trade of democracy,...the everyday business of politics, including the very flat land of electoral campaigns," as he had stated in the preface to the paperback edition of his collection of essays, *Über das Selbstverständliche*.³³ On the contrary, he is now assuming the "elevated observation post"—which he had shunned before—in order to "survey the panorama of significant world events" (p. 7) and pronounce judgment. It is perhaps Grass's posture as ubiquitous prophet of doom who, for example, coined the phrase "Orwell's Decade"³⁴ for the eighties and lectured on topics with such alarming titles as "The Destruction of Mankind Has Begun"³⁵ that has contributed more than anything else to the wrath of the media.³⁶

At the same time, one cannot discount the possibility that the media attacks on Grass have been prompted by the unspoken assumption that the writer should confine himself to his craft and not meddle in politics. Whereas William F. Buckley, who was cited above, was merely implying that in the sphere of politics writers are likely to become the victims of their gullibility, other American critics put the matter more forcefully. Richard Gilman wrote: "Today there is no writer more swollen with selfimportance or, if that's too harsh, more convinced of his responsibility for the whole of his culture than Günter Grass..."³⁷ And the novelist John Updike reiterated a charge that German critics had levelled against Grass more than a decade before:

Critics who urge upon American writers more social commitment and a more public role should ponder the cautionary case of Günter Grass. Here is a novelist who has gone so public he can't be bothered to write a novel; he just sends dispatches to his readers from the front lines of his engagement.³⁸

Updike may be proved just as wrong as the German critics who had accused the writer of squandering his creative energies in the political arena. At that time, Grass was fully vindicated when *The Flounder* was published. At the present moment, his announcement that he intends to resurrect Oskar Matzerath of *Tin Drum* fame in a yet to be completed novel might signal a similar return to literature.³⁹

Although Grass may be planning to devote more time to literature, ample evidence has been cited that he rejects the notion of the artist's splendid isolation and considers the public sphere his proper domain. In fact, one of the recurrent themes in both Grass's recent political pronouncements and fiction is his profound concern about the survival of his craft in a world threatened by nuclear holocaust. To be sure, he professes defiance in the face of "the might of the Americans and Russians [that] has taught us to tremble" and pretends not to be bothered by the mighty superpowers when writing.⁴⁰ But in the final analysis Grass ventures forth and

Mews: From Admiration to Confrontation: Gunter Grass and the United States advocates an activist stance that entails the recognition and implementation of “the writer’s responsibility in an endangered world.”⁴¹ That he delivered this message in person to his American colleagues, albeit with little apparent success, indicates his continued interest in and preoccupation with this country. The predominant negative features of Grass’s view of the United States should not obscure the fact that he started out by portraying this country or, rather, Buffalo as a beacon of hope—albeit in a somewhat ironic and ambiguous fashion. If Grass’s vision has darkened, this may be attributable as much to the course of political events during the last twenty-five years or so as to the writer’s subjective perspective of increasing gloom about the future.⁴²

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- 1 "The Hound of Hitler," rev. of *Dog Years*, *Newsweek*, 24 May 1965, p. 117.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 John Irving, "Günter Grass: King of the Toy Merchants," rev. of *Headbirths, or The Germans are Dying Out*, *Saturday Review*, March 1982, p. 57.
- 4 Ibid., p. 60.
- 5 For more detailed accounts of Grass's reception in the United States, see especially: Sigrid Mayer, "'Grüne Jahre für Grass': Die Rezeption in den Vereinigten Staaten," *Günter Grass, Text + Kritik*, 1/1a, 5th ed. (1978), 151-61; Sigrid Mayer, "The Critical Reception of *The Flounder* in the United States: Epic and Graphic Aspects," "*The Fisherman and His Wife*": *Günter Grass's The Flounder in Critical Perspective*, ed. Siegfried Mews (New York: AMS Press, 1983), pp. 179-95.
- 6 See especially the following collections of essays: *Amerika in der deutschen Literatur. Neue Welt-Nordamerika-USA*, ed. Sigrid Bauschinger, Horst Denkler, and Wilfried Malsch (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1975); *Deutschlands literarisches Amerikabild. Neuere Forschungen zur Amerikarezeption der deutschen Literatur*, ed. Alexander Ritter (Hildesheim, New York: Olms, 1977); *Die USA und Deutschland. Wechselseitige Spiegelungen in der Literatur der Gegenwart*, ed. Wolfgang Paulsen (Berne, Munich: Francke, 1976).
- 7 See, e.g., Irmela Schneider, "Ein Stück persönlicher Literaturgeschichte. Ein Gespräch mit Günter Grass," *Die Rolle des Autors. Analysen und Gespräche* (Stuttgart: Klett, 1962), p. 114.
- 8 See, e.g., Volker Neuhaus, *Günter Grass* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1979), p. 26.
- 9 Theodor Fontane, "John Maynard," *Werke in drei Bänden*, ed. Kurt Schreinert (Munich: Nymphenburger Verlagshandlung, 1968), III, 750.
- 10 Martin Esslin, Introd., *Four Plays*, by Günter Grass (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1967), p. ix, n. Subsequent references to *Only Ten Minutes to Buffalo* in the text will be to this edition.
- 11 Günter Grass, *The Tin Drum*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: Vintage Books, 1962), p. 15. Subsequent references in the text will be to this edition.
- 12 Günter Grass, "The Issue. Election Speech Delivered in Summer 1965," *Speak Out! Speeches, Open Letters, Commentaries*, trans. Ralph Manheim, introd. Michael Harrington (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1969), p. 6. Subsequent references in the text will be to this edition.
- 13 See, e.g., Schneider, "Ein Stück persönlicher Literaturgeschichte," pp. 115, 116.
- 14 Hans Magnus Enzensberger, "On Leaving America," *New York Review of Books*, 29 February 1968.
- 15 See Hans Magnus Enzensberger, "Revolutions-Tourismus," *Palaver. Politische Überlegungen (1967-1973)* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1974), pp. 130-68.
- 16 See Günter Grass, "Die Nadelstichrede," *Über das Selbstverständliche. Reden Aufsätze, Offene Briefe, Kommentare* (Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1968), p. 159.
- 17 Günter Grass, *Max. A Play*, trans. A. Leslie Willson and Ralph Manheim (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972), p. 27. All subsequent references in the text will be to this edition.
- 18 Michael Hollington, *Günter Grass. The Writer in a Pluralistic Society* (London, Boston: Boyars, 1980), p. 130.
- 19 See Manfred Durzak, "Plädoyer für eine Rezeptionsästhetik. Anmerkungen zur deutschen und amerikanischen Literaturkritik am Beispiel von Günter Grass' 'örtlich betäubt.'" *Akzent*, 18 (1971), 487-504.
- 20 Judith Ryan, "Günter Grass and the Aesthetics of Resistance," unpubl. paper, delivered at the MLA convention in New York City, December 1983.
- 21 For more comprehensive interpretations of the novel, see "*The Fisherman and His Wife*," ed. Mews (n. 5. above).

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- 22 Günter Grass, "Kritik ist ein Beweis von Loyalität. Gespräch mit Fritz J. Raddatz (1980)," *Widerstand lernen. Politische Gegenreden 1980-1983* (Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1984), p. 20.
- 23 See Peter Christian Ludz, "Convergence," *Marxism, Communism and Western Society: A Comparative Encyclopedia*, ed. C. D. Kernig (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), II, 209-17.
- 24 Günter Grass, *Headbirths or The Germans are Dying Out*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: Fawcett Crest, 1983), p. 97. Subsequent references in the text are to this edition.
- 25 See Günter Grass, "Im Hinterhof. Bericht über eine Reise nach Nicaragua (1982)," *Widerstand lernen*, pp. 37-47. The English translation was published as: "Superpower Backyards. Solidarity with the Sandinistas," *Nation*, 12 March 1983, pp. 300-303. See also n. 42, below.
- 26 Günter Grass, "Statements bei Schriftstellertreffen. Zweite Berliner Begegnung (22./23. April 1983 in West-Berlin)," *Widerstand lernen*, p. 31.
- 27 Thomas Brasch, Günter Grass, Sarah Kirsch, Peter Schneider, "Vier deutsche Schriftsteller, die in Berlin leben, rufen zum Frieden auf," *Widerstand lernen*, S. 13-14. See also John Vinocur, "Günter Grass Urges Schmidt to Shun U.S. Policies," *New York Times*, 18 April 1980, p. A12.
- 28 Heinz D. Osterle, "Interview with Günter Grass concerning American-German Relations," *New German Critique*, 31 (Winter 1984), 129-30.
- 29 see n. 22, above, and n. 42, below.
- 30 See "To the People of the United States," *New York Times*, 17 April 1983, p. Y25, and William F. Buckley, Jr., "Nicaragua's Literary Defenders," *New Orleans Times—Picayune*, 22 April 1983, sec 1, p. 17. The half-page paid advertisement in the *New York Times* was signed, in addition to Grass, by Gabriel Garcia Marques, Carlos Fuentes, Graham Greene, Julio Cortazar, William Styron, and Heinrich Böll. Buckley's reply appeared in a syndicated column; for a contrasting view, see Carlos Fuentes, "Yankee, Stay Home. Don't Intervene: Remember that We Are Revolutionaries, Too," *Washington Post*, 12 June 1983, p. B5.
- 31 "Verweigert Euch! Aufruf der an der Heilbronner Begegnung beteiligten Schriftsteller," *Widerstand lernen*, pp. 97-98.
- 32 Heinrich Böll, "Wahnsinnig wendegenehm," *Der Spiegel*, 25 May 1984, p. 8.
- 33 Günter Grass, Introd., *Über das Selbstverständliche* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuchverlag, 1969), p. 7. Subsequent references in the text will be to this edition.
- 34 See Siegfried Mews, "Grass' Kopfgeburten: The Writer in Orwell's Decade," *German Studies Review*, 6 (1983), 501-17.
- 35 Günter Grass, "Die Vernichtung der Menschheit hat begonnen. Rede anlässlich der Verleihung des Internationalen Antonio-Feltrinelli-Preises für erzählende Prosa," *Widerstand lernen*, pp. 52-57. See also n. 42, below.
- 36 See, e.g., Hellmuth Karasek, "Der unermüdliche Querkopf, e.v.," *Der Spiegel*, 14 May 1984, p. 215.
- 37 Richard Gilman, "On the One Hand....," rev. of *Headbirths*, *Nation*, 24 April 1982, p. 502.
- 38 John Updike, "The Squeeze Is On," rev. of *Headbirths*, by Günter Grass, and *The Safety Net*, by Heinrich Böll, *New Yorker*, 14 June 1982, p. 129.
- 39 See "Urlaub vom Weltuntergang," *Der Spiegel*, 7 May 1984, p. 194.
- 40 Grass, *Headbirths*, p. 89.
- 41 This was the title of a colloquy at the German Book Fair in New York City in March 1983 in which, among other writers, Grass, Joyce Carol Oates, and John Irving participated. See Herbert Mitgang, "Author Activism a Topic at German Book Fair," *New York Times*, 8 March 1983.
- 42 The following essays from the collection *Widerstand lernen* (n. 22, above) are now available in Günter Grass, *On Writing and Politics, 1967-1983*, trans. Ralph Manheim, introd. Salman Rushdie (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1985): "The Destruction of Mankind Has Begun" (see n. 35, above), "On the Right to Resist," and "Superpower Backyards" (see n. 25, above).

