



Danzig: De blikken trommel ~ Kat en muis ~ Hondenjaren

Günter Grass , Koos Schuur (translator)

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Bevat de drie boeken van de *Danzig* trilogie *De blikken trommel*, *Kat en muis* en *Hondenjaren*.

Met zijn drie boeken over Danzig vestigde de Duitse schrijver Günter Grass zijn roem over de hele wereld. Zijn geboortestad maakte hij erin tot het mythische middelpunt van zijn rijke verbeelding. Hij schreef de boeken aan het eind van de jaren 50 en het begin van de jaren 60 van de twintigste eeuw, maar ze hebben niets aan literaire actualiteit ingeboet. Op onnavolgbare wijze brengt Grass de wereld van zijn jeugd in kaart, vooral die van de jaren 1930 en 1940. Niet alleen de kleine wereld van de mensen in Danzig, maar ook de grote wereld, die haar dreigende schaduw over een stad aan de Oostzee werpt.

Günter Grass kreeg in 1999 de Nobelprijs voor literatuur.

Danzig: De blikken trommel ~ Kat en muis ~ Hondenjaren Details

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Realini says

The Tin Drum by Gunter Grass
Inspiring at times

This is my third encounter with The Tin Drum. I have read the book, saw the very good film by Volker Schlöndorff (note: I am missing the German letters for the “covered” u and o).

This last meeting of Oskar and his drum was in the form of a play adapted for the radio. I am not quite sure what to make of it though. We are dealing with a very special, interesting and at times shocking novel, which I both like and somehow feel repelled by.

Gunter Grass, the Nobel Prize winner is a personage that has created some scandal. Rather noisy, since it reached my ears, which are at all attuned to what happens in Germany’s literary life.

In fact, I have not been so keen on anything German, except for their cars and the business our company does with a German firm. Nolens volens, I have a life- line and strong connection with a country of what I consider to be cold people. But I may be wrong. And I am not the warmest of creatures- I have a nephew staying over for a month and, instead of being pleasant and compassionate, I am irritated and displeased. My German experience has been rather mixed: impressed by their technical, mechanical accomplishments: trains, autobahns, clean streets, I was disappointed by the icy attitude, the number of junkies encountered in Berlin and some crooks we have met there, albeit some of the fraudsters had come from former Yugoslavia...I think.

The Germans are very efficient and because of the way they managed their economy we all benefit, throughout Europe. On the other hand, I cannot help thinking that the position my country is in has to do with World War II, the invasion of the Communists and the tyranny they brought along with them...and who has started that war?

I have both to thank the Germans for the trade which is keeping our privately owned company afloat and condemn them for about 25 miserable years of my life.

Speaking of the Great War, Gunter Grass has been in the German army, but did not say about it until very late. This was considered shameful, even if his role was insignificant, if I remember well.

In The Tin Drum, Oskar is a memorable character. I can’t say I like him. Noise is a sensitive issue for me, and to imagine someone drumming around me, even for short periods, makes my hair stand on end.

The moment when Oskar shouts and breaks every glass and window on a wide range is a good hyperbole, but somehow makes for a very unpleasant, disgusting feeling...at least for this reader

This is how The Tin Drum makes me feel. Acclaimed and recognized as one of the best books ever, it is not exactly among my favorites.

Yes, I get it. And even I can attest to its great value, but still...

It is not as cryptic as the poetry of Celan, of which I could make neither head nor tail, but it is not constantly exhilarating as Voyage au Bout De La Nuit by another great author, also tainted by his choosing the wrong side in World War II- Ferdinand Celine.

Voyage Au Bout De La Nuit is well established among my favorite masterpieces. As for The Tin Drum, I was hoping that a new reading, from a different angle, albeit in an abridged form, would make me discover new attractions, moments to love in the book.

As I try to think back at essential moments, the emotions I feel are not positive. One thing that I am sure of is that this is the last time I try and read the Tin Drum, in any form or shape.

If I were to use a word to describe the way I see the characters and events in the book that would be: WEIRD.

Another book comes to mind: The Painted Bird, by Jerzy Kosinski. I have read it only once and it made a tremendous impact upon me. If I am reading it again, it may lose some, maybe most of the charm, poignancy of the first meeting. Some books gain when I read them again, with others I lose interest. But at this stage, The Painted Bird seems a much better book than The Tin Drum, in my evaluation...for what is worth.

Eileen says

While not as spellbinding as The Tin Drum, Cat and Mouse and Dog Years continued in the same vein.

Bigmakmotorbreath says

i loved all of these books

Heather Eisenbarth says

I would like to visit Poland, my college roommate got lyme disease in the mountains there.

Derwood Pamphilon says

Stunning characterization and description of a key period in German history

Albert says

I read these books many years ago, as well as the Flounder, and have always enjoyed the writing and storytelling of Grass. One of my literary partners in crime, Phillip Lee Duncan, turned me on to him early in our relationship, and by strange happenstance, the author came to Houston for a book signing which we attended. I still have my autographed copy of "The Flounder" which is still my favorite of his books. That being said, all of these books are great as well, just my contrary nature makes me have to choose a less talked about book for my favorite, but all three of these are right on par, if not superior, and are essential Grass. Never mind his more recent history that has shamed him in the eyes of many (look it up, Wiki-dude) and just read the books. His details are lush and invigorating to the mind, and you will be transported directly into his world of struggle and ugly post-WWII realities, his humanizing the cold annals of understood historical record, and just pure inventiveness. Pynchonian but with (dare I say it from a cold German) soul and humanity.

Jamie says

The tin drum and cat and mouse are entertaining books, but the story often feels drawn out, particularly the last book. Oscar is certainly a memorable character and the first book is the most recommended, but overall experience was detracted by the last book.

Louie says

My favorite German author.

Michael Battaglia says

I think its pretty safe to say that when most people think about the words "magical realism" (if they think about the term at all) they probably link it with, in approximate order, Latin American literature, Penn and Teller and live-action role playing, with German literature appearing way, way down the line. So an entire trilogy centered around Germany before, during and after World War II featuring magical realist elements might be a tough sell for a lot of people, especially when you sweeten the pot by mentioning the unreliable narrators, oblique descriptions of events, and general literary tomfoolery. But hey, a challenge is a challenge.

If you had told me about any of these I might have hesitated but alas, I tend to buy these kinds of books blindly and thus had no idea what I was in for. And while its tough going at times, the moments that work mostly make up for the times when you're wondering if the book was translated correctly.

Gunter Grass was a German novelist born in what is now Poland but back then was considered a (deep breath) semi-autonomous city-state called the Free City of Danzig, which is where the trilogy is mostly centered in and around. One thing I probably should have done before starting the trilogy was do a little background reading on Danzig, which might have explained some of the events going on in the course of the novel, including things like Nazis taking over the government and treating people in the typically horrific way they treated anyone who wasn't a Nazi, a brief relocation in West Prussia (before that went "poof" as well), the Soviets coming in and clearing the city out and then it eventually becoming part of Poland again. A lot more of the references would have made sense and while the novels are not that autobiographical except for the historical parts (presumably Grass didn't spend time as a dwarf or be transformed while trapped inside a snowman) it does help ground the proceedings in the real world, perhaps more than the book itself does. So I recommend that as a primer for anyone looking to brave a thousand pages of this stuff.

The trilogy is probably the work Grass is most famous for, with the first book "The Tin Drum" made into a decently received movie at one point. Its probably the flashiest of the three books, featuring a fairly outrageous character and situation as we're told the story by Oskar, a dwarf who is currently locked in an asylum. Having been born with the awareness of an adult, he does what every rational would do and decides to remain the size of a three year old. He's also very attached to a series of drums, or as you might call them, metaphors, running through one after the other as he attempts to enact a Germanic magical realist version of Todd Rundgren's hit song "Bang the Drum All Day". Oh, and did I mention he has a penchant for screaming at such a high volume that he literally shatters glass. Later on he manages some control over this and basically starts a one man European version of the X-Men.

With that as our starting point, Grass via Oskar takes us through the history of Danzig from just before the war to during it, along the way mixing realistic characters with slightly more ridiculous ones, all with the background of historical events. Oskar is a fairly weird narrator, randomly referring to himself in the third person and sometimes lurching about through facts like an actual three year old. Anyone who has read Michael Moorcock's Colonel Pyat sequence might find some of this familiar, although instead of the narrator masking his racist delusions here Oskar proves to have a somewhat fluid interpretation of events at times, especially when it comes to personal relationships.

But he's a personable narrator, which is good because otherwise the book might devolve into parody. Grass' prose here (and through all three books in the trilogy) is a dense rippling of paragraphs that often only number two or three to a page, his characters are loquacious and don't skimp on the detail, meaning that the reader is forced to parse some rather thick sentences (I generally read fairly quickly and this is the slowest I've ever read an author since Proust) and event seen through the eyes of someone who lives in that particular time and place, which means a little context goes a long way.

He gets a decent amount of mileage out of the novelty of Oskar's condition, but where it works best is when he ties it into a ground level view of what it was like for everyone to live in those times, which wind up being a combination of the terrible and the absurd. Events like the attack on the Polish Post Office serve as microcosms on how warped this all is (and again, background reading is enlightening) and while it can hard at times to feel too emotionally attached to Oskar, when Grass offs a couple of the regular cast its a weird imposition on reality on what otherwise could be interpreted as a bit of a wacky lark, especially when Oskar does things like join a jazz band and play solos that literally take people back.

It all adds up to a fairly unique experience in literature, a historical novel narrated by someone who may or may not be actively crazy but in some way that seems to be the point, that there's no real way to process these events as rational unless you're a little touched in the head.

But while "Tin Drum" is the best known of the trilogy, the others mine similar territory with nearly as effective results. "Cat and Mouse" is far shorter, barely a hundred pages and plays like a slow motion tragedy that starts among schoolboys, where our vaguely coherent narrator Pilenz tells about alienated Mahlke as they grow up heading into the 1940s and the war. Pilenz is if anything even more of a challenge than Oskar was (who cameos here and there, blending into the background as a much as a screaming dwarf playing a drum constantly can) since he tends to be resolutely nonlinear in telling us the story but doesn't exactly clue us in to when he's slipping in and out of time. When the book starts to cohere, especially during the tragic latter pages, it starts to gain some momentum and weight but prior to that it feels like a series of scenes searching for a story. Grass' keen eye for detail and prose style save a lot of this from being too tedious (the length helps too) but that depends on how much you enjoy being told a story in the most obtuse and abstract form possible. He gets some nice imagery out of the proceedings, however, with a sunken minesweeping ship that the kids play on serving as both a literal and metaphorical anchor to events. Mahlke himself stands out as well, the narration conveying his loner nature and feelings of separation from everyone else despite the narrator doing his best to tell us a cut up version of events.

Reading the trilogy in order it makes for a nice palette cleanser (if your method of cleansing your palette from difficult literature is to read a shorter work of equally difficult literature) and the first two make for a nice preparation for "Dog Years", if anything can prepare you for it.

"Dog Years" is a weird one, because while I was reading it I was constantly asking myself "where is he going with this?" and now that its over I think it might actually be the best of the three, both in audacity and getting its aims across. Or maybe I was just more attuned to the style by then. Its much tougher going at first.

Without the shortness of "Cat and Mouse" or the cuteness of a crazy dwarf musician narrator to make things go down easier. Reading the cover copy you'd think it would be the most straightforward, as the publisher of my version describes the book as a boy and Hitler's dog avenging Nazi war crimes in post-war Germany, which sounds like a great idea for a TV show ("He's a traumatized soldier unable to come to grips with his past, the other used to enjoy belly rubs from unrepentant blots on humanity. Together, they fight crime.") but by the time that even becomes relevant you're way into the book.

Indeed Grass seems to be going out of his way to double down on being oblique, with the book divided into three parts, each from the point of view of someone else. The first part tells of two boys, Edward Amsel (who's half-Jewish and you'd be foolish to think that doesn't come into play at some point) and Walter Matern as they grow up with friends and families, doing the stuff that kids do, like make bizarre designs for scarecrows and deal with the country gradually falling into war. That stuff hits the hardest but it tends to percolate in the background while Grass focuses more on the scarecrows and other bits of magical realism (this is around where the snowman transformation takes place, causing an overweight girl to transform into a star ballerina), none of which seems to cohere into anything resembling plot momentum, forcing the less patient to ask the aforementioned "what is he doing?" question. I know I did.

Turns out he's playing the long game as things become more focused in the second part, which is a series of letters from someone on the periphery of events to his cousin, further describing not only the changing friendship between Walter and Edward but the world of ballet dancing and the changing emotions of the times as Germany starts to go off the rails into fairly scary territory. The nod to an epistolary style is much easier to digest and feels like a breath of fresh air compared to the denser earlier part.

The third part is what brings it all together, as Matern takes center stage as the narrator, picking up Prinz (Hitler's dog) and proceeding to take a rambling path across post-war Germany enacting revenge. Those hoping this turns into a Quentin Tarantino film are going to be sorely disappointed as the "revenge" either takes place off-screen or amounts to driving to someone's front door to tell them what a terrible person they are. What makes the difference is the focus on the still evolving friendship of Amsel and Matern, along with how a man named Brauxel fits into all of it and how Germany tries to pick up the pieces of itself after the war and take the first steps to coming to grips with the not very exemplary things they helped along as a country.

To that end Grass puts forward several decent set pieces amidst all the wandering around. A bit about glasses that allows kids to see their parents as they really are speaks a lot about how parents weren't exactly forthcoming in telling their kids what they were up to in the 1940s and another longer sequence where Matern participates in a discussion that sort of puts everyone on trial for the stuff they'd rather not talk about. But it's not until the final sequence that you see the real arc of things, as Grass brings back the scarecrow motif from earlier, mixes it in with what seems to start out as a reenactment of Dante's Hell and seems to point a way for Germany to understand its own recent past. It feels like a real culmination (unlike "The Tin Drum" which seems to simply run out of plot) and makes the book feel like a more fully formed work. It's something that demands you engage it on its own terms and I'm not going to lie, at times it hit me more intellectually than anything else as I tried to figure out where all the symbolism and themes fit in.

None of it is easy but all of it feels necessary in a way (and Grass' later admission that he wasn't quite honest about what he did during the war (instead of spending all of it in a labor service, he was drafted into a tank unit . . . considering his moralizing throughout his life, it's not out of line to criticize him as a little bit of a hypocrite for leaving that part out for years) really changes nothing about the book's impact, even if it might change how you feel about him personally). It's not really an door into the mindset of how this madness might have happened but it tries to depict what it was like to live through that confusion, make decisions that

might have been prudent under the circumstances but later seem a bit ill-informed, and then try to decide if one can make one's peace with those decisions. Its three books where almost no one comes off well and it makes them both wrong and deeply human in the process, a window into a time both mentally and geographically everything was going to hell. And if the people to show us that are all damaged in some way, that skewed and absurdist view may be the only way to confront and understand it, to see a world so twisted that the only rational response is to vow to never let it happen again.

Mans says

Eerder dit jaar zag ik de film naar de blikken trommel voor de tweede keer, nu op tv. Net als indertijd in de bioscoop: sterk!

Nu stond een stadsreis naar Gdansk/danzig op ons programma: een goede aanleiding om de Danzig/trilogie erbij te pakken.

Konstantin grimm says

famos

Kelsey says

I love The Tin Drum, and am re-reading in preparation for finishing the trilogy.

<3 <3

Kate says

A classic of the 20th Century. One you should read before you die, but only when you're ready to shut yourself off from the world for many days. Flawed, yes, and perhaps too long-winded at times (reduced by a third it would have been perfect) but this is an important, mind-expanding trilogy that you can absolutely lose yourself in. It shows you what a novel can achieve and it opened the door for so many great writers, such as John Irving and Salman Rushdie, etc etc

Kim says

Some of the most amazing characters I've ever encountered. Truly.

Phil says

This huge volume is stuffed with the guilt-plagued writings of Gunter Grass, the Good German. In the last few years, as his membership in the Waffen SS at the end of the war came to light he was accused of hypocrisy but that was nonsense. He was a seventeen-year-old private during the last months of the war. The books in the trilogy range from the brilliant Tin Drum, the forgettable Cat and Mouse, and the ponderous Dog Years. The Tin Drum, whose first half was made into Volker Schlöndorff's masterpiece film, is amazing. It's the best example of Grass' Joycean stream-of-consciousness writing and flows along with few drops into obsession and overkill. Cat and Mouse starts well but flounders early. Very forgettable. Dog Years was supposed to be the magnum opus. Although it contains some interesting passages it declines into a dull exposition involving astrology and attempts to go in an almost science fiction direction. Tin Drum is well worth the price of the whole volume, the other two are worth reading once.

John Doe says

This is three novels taken together: The Tin Drum, Cat and Mouse, and Dog Years. The Tin Drum is probably the best and the most famous of the three. It is better than the movie, and the movie is pretty good.

Cat and Mouse is about teens in Germany. The sex stuff is rather surprising. Sometime kids can be gross and these kids are no exception. I liked Cat and Mouse best because it reminded me of living in Germany as a exchange student.

I didn't like Dog Years at first, but it grew on me. I am trying to think of it and I have a rather vague recollection of someone writing letters to his cousin-- love letters? and, not sending them? I don't recall the details but they form the narration for much of the book.

All of the three a very good. Highly recommended!

Shanna says

My review is too long to accommodate Goodreads standards: <http://2aughlikecrazy.wordpress.com/2...>

Mike says

Fastastic writing, in every sense of the word. I'm not really into WWII stories but this reaches beyond all that.

Sarah says

"The Tin Drum" is one of my favorite books just because it's so bizarre. I couldn't get into "Cat and Mouse" and "Dog Years" in the same way. The plot of "Dog Years" seemed really complex and hard to follow. In many parts, I wasn't sure if I was following what Grass was trying to say. Also, he has this obsession with listing things, which gets tired when you're struggling with the plot.

I still respect Grass as a writer because of his way with words. His translator must have had a hell of a time.

Ryan says

The Tin Drum is the best of the three. But two and three have their merits. I was hooked at the second sentence "and my keeper's eye is the shade of brown that can never see through by a blue-eyed type like me." The narrator's first memory is of a ceiling fan in his living room. The image has been in my head for years. Most of what Gunther Grass writes is shit. This is him possessed by genius.
