Fictions of Freemasonry: Chapter 7, Hesse to Grass

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CHAPTER SEVEN

Neo- and Anti-Romanticism: Freemasonry from Hesse to Grass

ROMANTIC ILLUSIONS

If Thomas Mann’s Magic Mountain is, in Mann’s words, “an anti-romantic disillusionment,” then Hermann Hesse’s novels might be called the work of a “romantic illusionist.” To the delight of his millions of readers, Hesse had a lifelong affinity for secret societies and for the secrecy and mystery of the league novel. Hesse was well acquainted with German literature of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries when the league novel enjoyed its first popularity; in fact, he counted several league novels among his favorite works of fiction. As he points out in an autobiographical essay, “Childhood of the Magician” (“Kindheit des Zaubers”), he saw in these romantic novels expressions of the same magical world where he had been at home since early childhood: “I was not raised by parents and teachers alone, but also by higher, more hidden, and more secret powers.” One of these was his grandfather: “He was also a magician, a cognoscente, a wise man.... This man, the father of my mother, lived in a forest of secrets. ... People from many countries honored and visited him... and after long conversations again travelled away without a sign, perhaps his friends, perhaps his emissaries, perhaps his servants and agents” (Eigensinn, 39).

Near the beginning of The Journey to the East (Die Morgenlandfahrt, 1932) the narrator describes the mood in Germany immediately after the First World War:

Freemasonry from Hesse to Grass

At the time when I had the good fortune to be permitted to join the league, namely directly after the end of the great war, our country was full of savours, prophets, and discipleships, of sentiments of the end of the world or hopes for the beginning of a Third Reich. ... There were bacchanalian dance communities and rebaptising battle groups, there was much that seemed to beckon to a transcendent world and to miracles; there was also a widespread tendency to Indian, old-Persian, and other eastern secrets and cults at that time.3

Theodore Ziolkowski has pointed out that this not only describes contemporary conditions but also catalogues Hesse’s earlier works: the bacchanalian dancing of Steppenwolf (1927), the Eastern mysteries of Siddhartha (1922), and the discipleship of Demian (1919). Demian, the story of a young man led into an elite group by a powerful mentor, was enormously successful, reflecting the concerns and interests of many youthful Germans. The readers were members of the Wanderreis and similar leagues, advocates of Langbehn and Lagarde, disciples of Nietzsche and George, readers of Holländer, Lüns, Ewers, and Meyrink, and fanatic admirers of Hesse. A decade later, in The Journey to the East, H. H. theorizes about the effect of these popular tendencies on the league of pilgrims to the East: “all of this led to the fact that even our league, the ancient one, seemed to most people to be one of the fashionable plants that had blossomed so rapidly, and after a few years it fell with them into forgetfulness, in part, and in part into contempt and ill repute” (13). Clearly aware of the potential for triviality and even scurrilousness in secret societies like the one in his novel, Hesse still chooses to pattern his story after the league novel, needing, as the narrator explains, a center to which the events relate, a unifying factor that allows a sense for meaning and causality (35).

André Gide, who wrote a preface to one edition of The Journey to the East, found German predilection for secret societies telling:

For something primitive lingers in the Germanic soul when not ameliorated by culture ... a somewhat gregarious need to group themselves, to form Bund, a more or less secret society, and to weld their way in company toward an end often ill-defined, in appearance all the more noble because it is colored by mysticism and remains rather mysterious. That is, strictly speaking, the subject even of this book; and so it seems to me, in spite of its specious form, strangely revealing.8
Hesse’s beliefs indeed lent themselves to the form and content of the romantic league novel, and his novels are deeply rooted in that tradition, with few traces of the antiromantic side of Hans Castorp’s adventures. As Gide suggests, Hesse’s novel mirrors a general contemporary tendency to find answers to political, social, and religious problems in secret societies,”

ANTI-MASONRY IN THE WEIMAR AND NAZI PERIODS

While Hofmannsthal, Thomas Mann, and Hesse were finding the symbolism and history of Freemasonry a rich source of metaphor, less imaginative writers were spreading the old rumors about threatening Freemasonic conspiracies. Helmut Neuberger’s recent two-volume study of Freemasonry and National Socialism: The Persecution of German Freemasonry by the Völkisch Movement and National Socialism, 1918–1945 (Freimaurerei und National-sozialismus: Die Verfolgung der deutschen Freimaurerei durch völkische Bewegung und Nationalsozialismus 1918–1945) gives an excellent account of anti-Masonic movements culminating in the virtual destruction of the order by the Nazis.” Several examples demonstrate the extent and kind of anti-Masonic active in the Weimar Republic.

Wichtl’s World-Freemasonry, World-Revolution, World-Republic (Weltfreimaurerei, Weltrevolution, Weltrepublik, 1919) was a particularly grotesque foray against Masonry, blaming the brotherhood for Germany’s “shameful” defeat in the war. But even more paranoid were the anti-Masonic publications of Erich and Mathilde Ludendorff. Erich Ludendorff, proud head of the German armed forces during the war, explained his and Germany’s defeat with the “knife-in-the-back” theory; and Freemasons became convenient wielders of the knife. In 1927 Ludendorff published his pamphlet Destruction of Freemasonry Through the Disclosure of Its Secrets (Ver- nachtung der Freimaurerei durch Enthüllung ihrer Geheimnisse), a supensely new exposé of Masonic secrets, but in reality simply a reprinting of rituals published over the last century and a half. It worked like new, however, and sold 182,000 copies, making it the best-selling anti-Masonic work in history.”

Freemasonry is to make peoples Jewish and to establish a Jewish-Jehovah government with the help of all peoples. . . . The leagues of Freemasons are dangerous to the state, perhaps even treasonable.” As insane as such assertions were, they were matched a year later by Mathilde Ludendorff’s The Unnatural Sacrilege Against Luther, Lessing, Mozart, and Schiller (Der ungestühlte Frevel an Luther, Lessing, Mozart und Schiller). The book uncovers new “facts” concerning the deaths of these august Germans—naturally at the hands of Freemasons revenging secrets disclosed in The Ghost-Seer, The Magic Flute, and Ernst and Falk. Goethe is said to have listened sorrowfully and helplessly while fellow lodge members planned to murder his friend Schiller. And so on.

Other right-wing politicians were likewise using Freemasons as scapegoats. In Rosenberg’s Freemasonic World-Politics in the Light of Critical Research (Freimaurerische Weltpolitik im Lichte der kritischen Forschung, 1929) and in his Myth of the 20th Century (Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts, 1930), the Nazi theoretician attacked Freemasonry and Christianity for transcending the national and racial borders he found organic and necessary. Sentiments like Rosenberg’s led to related “scholarly” essays on the “ Freemasonic Problem.” Adolf Bartels, a Ludendorff follower, wrote Freemasonry and Literature: Facts and Suspicions (Freimaurerei und Literatur: Feststellungen und Vermutungen, 1929). Bartels’s first paragraph is programmatic: “As a result of Ludendorff’s publications . . . something like a Freemasonic question has arisen . . . As a German literary historian I want to try here to establish exactly which German poets were Freemasons and to what degree they were active as Freemasons. . . . If one ignores Freemasonry in the life of a poet, the biography becomes incomplete.” In the almost hundred pages that follow, Bartels names names, insinuates, states flatly that this and that “Germanic” poet could not have been a Freemason, or that this “non-Germanic” poet was both a Freemason and a Jew. He must admit some Freemasonry in Weimar, but he recommends that its influence not be overestimated. He mentions the rumor about Schiller’s death at the hand of Freemasons and relegates it to the literary rubbish heap: “That is mostly nonsense” (42); but then he goes back to his painful discriminations between Freemasonic and non-Freemasonic writers.

Naturally, such anti-Masonic tracts drew satirical attention, of which these lines from Tucholsky’s 1928 poem “Ludendorff or Illusions of Persecution” (“Ludendorff oder der Verfolgungswahn”) are a good example:
And there were, as Arno Schmidt points out, interesting connections between the eighteenth-century league novel and the Nazi state.

**ARNO SCHMIDT ON THE LEAGUE NOVEL AND THE NAZI STATE**

In a provocative essay ("Dya Na Sore: Blondeste der Bestien"), Schmidt compares National Socialism with the secret society in Wilhelm Friedrich von Meyern’s league novel *Dya Na Sore* (1787–1791). The book is first introduced as “a 2500-page prophetic description of a Super=Third=Reich” (19). The two discus- sants in Schmidt’s “Dialogue in a Library” find it necessary because of extraordinary parallels to point out that the novel is not a cheap parody of Nazi practices but rather a forgotten book from the eighteenth century. Common to both the novel and the Nazi state are the cult of genealogy, the universal militarism taught to all levels and ages of society, unmitigated love for the Fatherland, a fanatical youth group, the education of officers in *Ordensburgen* (castles of knightly orders), the secret, hierarchical structuring of knowledge, the use of highly symbolic, even magical words to rule the mystified, the organizational hierarchy through which unknown heads can inspire fear and obedience, elaborate pedagogical institutes beginning and ending with strategy and gymnastics, and the use of great operatic festivals to inspire the people. After disclosing these striking parallels between Meyern’s early league novel and the Nazi state (and, we might add, the Armenian’s conspiracy in Schiller’s *Ghost-Seer*), one speaker expresses disgust at how literary historians have treated the novel:

And there were literary historians, who—just imagine!—wanted to be done with this *Dya Na Sore* by referring to the Bildungsrömer so popular at that time; who thought of the words “Rosicrucians” or even “Freemasons” in that context. Wachler, famous in his own time, suggests in his history of German literature that “Meyern undertakes morally deep reflections on humanity; and politicizes and humanizes in an original way...” The newest accomplishment in this area are the three-and-a-half lines of the Würzburger professor Dr. Wolfdietrich Rasch, who, in 1952, explained the “dogtrines” of *Dya* thus: “here an ideal state of true humanity is being founded”—in truth, these scholars have been separated from real life by a crust of tradition and methodology. (45)
FREEMASONRY FROM HESSE TO GRASS

Despite the decided and understandable bias of his two discussants against Meyern’s novel, and despite the insights their discussion affords as to possible ideological use of symbols and structures of the league novel, Schmidt has nothing against the genre per se. His title essay in another volume, “The Knight of Spirit” (“Der Ritter vom Geist”) introduces Karl Gutzkow as an unjustly forgotten writer and praises the political and economic vision of a league like the one in the novel:

the “salvation of a nation”—that is, the economic, social, political; finally also the aesthetic and scientific salvation—can not come from “above,” for example from a ruling noble priesthood, and even less can it come from below, from the people. But only from an “organization of the elite,” as Gutzkow wrote to his friend Levin Schücking, a “brain-trust of intellectuals”—for which, since then, the German formulation is: “The Knights of Spirit.” (39–40)

Schmidt’s elitist view of national salvation is shared by few of his contemporaries, but two of postwar Germany’s most prominent authors, Martin Walser and Günter Grass, fully agree with Schmidt’s negative assessment of ideologies, the rituals of secret societies, and their literary use in Dya Na Sore.

MARTIN WALSER: THE MASONRY OF CAPITALISM

“die bourgeoise Misere in Klubgestalt”
—Naphta, in Der Zauberberg

Martin Walser’s first novel, an important event for postwar literature, was Marriages in Philippensburg (Ehen in Philippensburg, 1957). The first of the novel’s four parts describes Hans Beumann’s initial contacts with Philippensburg society. Opportunistically dropping his youthful leftist leanings, Hans finds work with an industrialist, the father of a former student friend, Anne Volkmann. After career worries lead Hans to insist that Anne abort their child, the second and third parts show Hans working his way into the heart of Philippensburg society through one sordid incident after another (a suicide, a vehicular homicide, and another suicide). One powerful man Hans comes to know is the politician Dr. Alwin, who frequents the Sebastian, a nightclub “where he was a regular guest and a keyholder (for the Sebastian was a key club, exclusive in the

strictest sense of the word, and the keyholders were almost an order)” (249). At the beginning of the fourth part, Hans enjoys the fruits of his efforts. He is engaged to Anne, successful in his profession, acquainted with the powerful and important citizens of Philippensburg, and invited to undergo initiation into the Sebastian club.

One member leads Hans through a heavy door, through a winding staircase that seems to be in a tower, through a heavy curtain, into the dimly lit and strangely decorated nightclub, a “Temple of Sociability.” After some drinks and a risqué floor show, Hans finds that he is to be made a Knight of the Order of Sebastian. Friends lead him before the statue of Sebastian, the Sebastians form a circle around him, and two candles, glasses, a giant chain, an arrow, and a black box are brought. Maids of Honor are called to stand by Hans. He must take the arrow in his hand and let the chain be hung around his neck. The black box is held “as pillows of an order are carried at burials.” Two men pull out parchments and begin to read, and Hans must swear to stand by his new brothers and to come often to the club. They take a key from the black box and give it to Hans, telling him: “Arrow and key are the signs of his new worthiness, as long as he carries them he may call himself a Knight of the Order of Sebastian.” Finally he is given a certificate and a glass of champagne.

Immediately after Hans’s initiation, an unwelcome guest, the winner of a soccer lottery, demands to be taken in. Despite the kinship Hans feels with the man, whose dialect is that of his home town, he pushes him (accidentally?) down some steps to his death. His fellow club members immediately treat him like a hero, for the newest member of the order of Sebastian, valiant in his defence of the capitalist temple, has murdered a man representing the proletariat. The man is one more victim—after Hans’s unborn child, the suicide Birga Benrath, the motorcycle driver, and suicide Bertold Klaff—of Philippensburg society. With this murder Hans proves that he belongs.

Walser thus draws familiar motifs from the league novel to portray an exclusive, ruthless, immoral, capitalist society. The ideals central to the order—exclusiveness, pleasure, and profit—are expressed in the initiation ceremony. The trial Hans undergoes includes killing his own unborn child; and his task as a member is to oppress the proletariat, represented by the lottery winner. One symbol of the order is the heavy chain, the chain of capitalism, hung around Hans’s neck. Using virtually the same structure that
Freemasonry from Hesse to Grass

elsewhere depicts alchemical transformations, magical pedagogy, progressive and regressive politics, and semiotic concerns, Walser is able to portray a compromised, capitalist society that, through its elite emissaries and a set of trivial yet powerful symbols, directs the thinking and actions of a passive young man until he has become one of the decadent few. The postwar society whose attraction to esoteric symbols and exclusive secret societies was virtually unchanged despite recent Nazi manipulation of symbols in the service of a murderous totalitarian ideology found Walser's novel disconcerting. Equally provocative were the novels of Günter Grass.

GUENTER GRASS: MYTHS, FREEMASONRY, AND THE PATTERNING OF HISTORY

The Tin Drum (Die Blechtrommel, 1959), Grass's first novel, is an autobiographical account written by thirty-year-old Oskar Matzerath from his asylum bed. The story takes in the people and environs of Danzig and postwar Düsseldorf as seen from Oskar's perspective, that of a bizarrely talented dwarf. The reader sees him performing artistic miracles, is given intimate (often uncomfortably intimate) views of the petty bourgeois society surrounding him, sees the Nazis and Oskar come of age, and watches Germany and Oskar rebuild after the war. Most interesting for our purposes, the novel is an account by an artist of his own artistry, of his own use and misuse (most often the latter) of symbols.

When Oskar decides to provide his neighborhood with mystical closure, to become Christ's successor, he finds his first disciples in the Stäuberbande, a kind of hybrid secret society/sect/anarchist group ripe for his kind of leadership. The Stäuberbande's rituals include a secret language ("they used a jargon which I did not try to understand"), new names ("remarkable names like Ritschhase, Kohlenklau, Mister, Löwenherz, Blaubart, Störtebeker"), an oath of loyalty ("the Stäuber Formula... a text which was so absurd and full of hocuspocus that I can no longer remember it") which they must swear holding the left hand on Oskar's drum ("which the boys viewed... as a kind of symbol"), and a cellar meeting place decorated with religious ritual articles. Such hocuspocus was the rule in Nazi Germany, the novel asserts, and the end of the war brings no change. Secret rites also prevail in a postwar bohemian nightclub in Düsseldorf's old town: "Not everyone was permitted in the Onion Cellar," but those who do find their way into the exclusive club climb down five steps to a small landing, and then descend four further steps to the check-room. There the owner welcomes each guest, "as if it were necessary to conduct an initiatory game with every new guest." Finally, guests in the Onion Cellar are given onions they ritually cut up to elicit tears, hoping to thereby release long repressed emotions. These cathartic rites performed in postwar Germany to overcome the effects of the war are a clear satire of real but ineffectual attempts at overcoming the past (Vergangenheitsbewältigung). A past based on ritual, the novel suggests, is hardly overcome by instituting new ritual.

At the end of The Tin Drum, facing imminent expulsion from the asylum at the age of thirty, Oskar ponders the possibility of forming another ritually cathartic group: "Or, I shall give in, shall let myself be nailed down, shall go out, just because I am thirty, and mine for them the Messiah which they see in me, shall, against better judgment, make more of my drum than it can well represent, let the drum become a symbol, found a sect, party, or even a lodge" (490). Despite lessons of the Nazi time, Oskar cannot rid himself of the need to manipulate others through symbols and secret rites. He is well trained to so act, for he has himself been educated by a mentor patterned on the traditional emissary of the league novel. Like Wilhelm Meister, Oskar unfolds from within: "I educated myself and formed my own judgment." And like Wilhelm, he too is guided by an emissary: "It was left to him to open the world for Oskar and to make of him what he is today, a person whom I, for lack of a better word, shall give the inadequate title of cosmopolitan" (252-253). Bebra is this mentor's name, and he and Oskar, true to the tradition of Masonic mentor and pupil, recognize one another as fellows by their eyes; Bebra's are described as "intelligent, lightbrown, ageless eyes" (264). Oskar immediately accepts Bebra as his master and receives guidance through him as the novel progresses. The next time they meet, Bebra has with him the beautiful and somnambulic dwarf Roswitha Raguna, who, like Schiller's beautiful Greek, uses her charms to lead Oskar along the predetermined path.

At this point Bebra has accepted Goebbels as his own master and tells Oskar: "I have failed... how could I continue to be your teacher? Oh, dirty politics!" (140). Thus the master of Oskar's education, the fellow dwarf and artist Oskar almost deifies, is a politically suspect artist who is close to the Reich's propaganda minister and who excuses his actions with reference to the court
fools of the Middle Ages. Although Oskar rejects this viewpoint for
the time being, there are, as he says, “slight, but not inconsequential
political differences” (253), and they are indeed overcome in short
order. At their next meeting, Bebra offers Oskar a position in his
troupe which entertains German soldiers. Although “Bebra alone
could not have talked me into the trip,” Oskar writes, the great som-
nambulist Roswitha helps convince him to join them in spreading
Goebbels’s gospel through art.

After the war Bebra becomes the powerful and rich head of
a concert agency; and Oskar begins to do concerts for the agency as
a magician, healer, and messiah (464). Shortly after Bebra dies, Oskar
enters the asylum where he writes his memoirs, ordering his past
with lies and omissions and clever additions in a final self-
reflective act of education. Oskar thus completes his training as art-
ist, taught by emissaries from the society of those who have ceased
growing—dwarfs who are artists, artists who are dwarfs. And now
Oskar plans to go out, against his own better judgment, to pass on
the word, to establish a sect, a party, or a lodge. He will continue
Bebra’s work, promoting mysticism and absolutist political ideologies
through art and will once again establish the guild of artistic
dwarfs who serve the often evoked “Black Cook” (violent mysti-
cism). This will be an easy task, for the children of this generation,
when they sing, “no longer sing: / Is the Black Cook there? Yes—
Yes—Yes!” The artists who should guard against superstition and
brutality are themselves purveyors of these evils. As it states in
Grass’s second novel, Dog Years: “In the worm is the worm.”

Dog Years (Hundejahre, 1963), begins with the phrases:
“You tell. No, you tell! Or you tell,” an exchange that would
remind a Freemason of the passage in Masonic ritual—“you begin.
No, begin you. You begin.” The novel ends with the pointedly
Freemasonic initiation of Walter Matern into the mysteries of Braux-
el’s underground factory, each detail of which has its direct counter-
part in Masonic initiation rites. Matern, referred to again and again
as a stranger to the mine, and thus in need of initiation, is led past a
doorkeeper, receives instruction, signs a statement affirming his in-
tention to go into the mine, must take off his clothing and exchange
it for “zünftige Kluft” (clothing appropriate for a guild or craft), and
descends in an elevator hung by a mystical cable while a bell is rung three and then five times. During the descent Brauex instructs
Matern as to the makeup, care, and importance of the cable. And
the lesson ends with “light” as the elevator arrives and Matern is led
into the mine. Between the Freemasonic beginning and ending,
very near the mathematical center of the novel, the reader is told
that Oswald Brunies, the teacher of the novel’s three narrators, was
a Freemason (337).

Roughly parallel to this Freemasonic structure is a numerolo-

gical pattern: the novel begins with a thirty-two-chapter section,
ends with a visit to the thirty-two rooms of Brauex’s mine, and has
its high point when Amsel’s thirty-two teeth are knocked out as he
is brutally “transformed” in the snow scene. And between these
Masonic and numerological beginnings and endings, surrounding
their centers, are hundreds of related references to astrology, myth,
superstition, magical transformation, and divination of the future.

Given this profusion of related motifs in Hundejahre, the
modes of interpretation most often resorted to are naturally theo-

dological, mythical, or numerological.11 Readers conditioned by

the most common, mythical readings of Thomas Mann’s Magic Moun-

tain, which likewise extensively uses symbolic numbers, contains
lengthy descriptions of Freemasonic ritual and features a mythical

revelation in the snow, are especially apt to rummage through Dog

Years with delight. But as we have argued, Mann’s novel, as mythi-
cal as it is, calls its own romantic center into question; and further,
Nazi use of symbols and myths has intervened, requiring a new sort
of reading (and writing). In a speech given in West Berlin at the
opening of the exhibition “People in Auschwitz” (“Menschen in
Auschwitz”), a speech he called “A Father’s Difficulties in Explain-
ing Auschwitz to His Children” (“Schwierigkeiten eines Vaters, se-
nen Kindern Auschwitz zu erklären”). Grass commented on the his-
tory intervening between art of the Weimar period and his own:
“Adorno’s statement that after Auschwitz no more poems could be
written has provoked so many misunderstandings that an interpre-
tation must be added or at least attempted: poems which have been
written since Auschwitz will have to submit to the measure of
Auschwitz.” But just what is the new perspective from which one
must view Grass’s postwar Magic Mountain?

Grass’s statements about myth and history are a good place
to begin. When asked about his Flounder as a personification of He-
gel’s Weltgeist, Grass answered: “Yes, I was considering a satire on
the German preoccupation with assigning hidden meanings to his-
tory. History to me is chaos, plain and simple.” In a letter pub-
lished in Der Spiegel Grass addressed another facet of the same
problem. After referring to “Idealism” as Germany’s basic problem,
whether used to support rightist or leftist absolute claims, he writes: "It is always idealistic difficulties which make it impossible for the apotesis of salvation to withstand the contradictions of reality and to continually confront their own impotence." In other words, Grass is concerned with the fact that people, faced by the contradictions of reality and conditioned by "Idealism," turn all too quickly to an ideology, to a mythic history promising a millennium, or to a heroic leader. Grass is not alone in seeing in myth an attempt to reconcile historical contradictions. Two of the twentieth-century's leading theoreticians of myth—Claude Lévi-Strauss and Ernst Cassirer—touch on this very point.

In his *Structural Anthropology*, after suggesting that "myths are still widely interpreted in conflicting ways: as collective dreams, as the outcome of a kind of aesthetic play, or as the basis of ritual," Lévi-Strauss defines myth: "the purpose of myth is to provide a logical model capable of overcoming a contradiction (an impossible achievement if, as it happens, the contradiction is real)." Although the attempt to overcome a contradiction with such a logical model is, in Lévi-Strauss's view, a more positive activity than in Grass's view, the basic concept is the same; and indeed, the parenthetical comment on a "real" contradiction seems very close to Grass's own position. In addition, Lévi-Strauss compares "myth and what appears to have largely replaced it in modern societies, namely, politics." Here he contrasts the historian's view of the French Revolution—"a sequence of past happenings, a non-reversible series of events the remote consequences of which may still be felt at present"—with that of a politician, who sees in the same events a pattern from which he can infer future developments. This is the very patterning of history that Grass fears.

A complementary view of myth comes from Ernst Cassirer, who, in Volume II of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, defines myth positively as "a unitary energy of the human spirit: as a self-contained form of interpretation which asserts itself amid all the diversity of the objective material it presents." But having witnessed the political manipulation of myths described in *Hundetagebuch*, Cassirer writes of another aspect of myth in *The Myth of the State*:

"In the times of inflation and unemployment Germany's whole social and economic system was threatened with a complete collapse. The normal resources seemed to have been exhausted. This was the natural soil upon which the political myths could grow up and in which they found ample nourishment. ... Myth reaches its full force when man has to face an unusual and dangerous situation." Both Lévi-Strauss and Cassirer, then, see in myth an attempt to overcome a contradiction or dangerous situation, often political, and Cassirer specifically refers to the political myths of Nazi Germany as natural attempts to establish order in a chaotic environment. This is the tendency of which Grass would warn.

Only ideologists need symbols to manifest themselves. Nazis with their swastikas, Communists with their hammers and sickles, the Roman Catholics with their arsenals full of images, the capitalists with their trademarks. I am even afraid of turning anti-ideology into an ideology. I just know what I want and don't want—the danger is when these things become a system.

Grass's position is quite different from Thomas Mann's, whose work is, among other things, a magnificent system of symbols and myths. In the subchapter "Snow," for example, confronting the contradictions between Naphta's radical irrationalism and SETTEMBRINI'S enlightened rationalism, Hans Castorp achieves a synthesis through the mediation of myth. Of course, the undercutting irony of *The Magic Mountain* must be taken into account as must Castorp's subsequent fascination with romantic Freemasonry, spiritualism, and death. But if, as opposed to Mann, Grass thoroughly distrusts ideologies, symbols, and mythical histories, how is one to interpret *Dog Years*, an extraordinarily complex novel bristling with Freemasonic ritual, astrology, numerology, symbols, myths, and ideologies?

*Dog Years* is named after a family of German shepherds. They are all black and fatefuly attach themselves to anyone who espouses the kind of mystical, mythical, barbaric thought that helped the Nazis come to power and that, according to Grass, still flourishes in the postwar world. The novel is a collection of three accounts of life in a small suburb of Danzig. EDDI AMSEL (also known as Brauxel) describes prewar Danzig in his "Morning Shifts," HARRY LIEBENAUS tells of the war years in his "Love-Letters," and WALTER MATERN reports on postwar Germany in his "Materniads." Amsel, a half-Jew, is an artist whose medium is scarecrows, creations that most often depict mythological figures. Matern is Amsel's friend and protector who turns against him in the Nazi years and knocks out his teeth in the bloody attack in the snow. And Harry
Liebenau, a younger acquaintance of the other two narrators, in a bizarre public discussion, brings Matern to trial for his misdeeds as a Nazi. From the very beginning Grass focuses on these three narrators as narrators.

Even the ritual, Masonic, opening sentences of the novel—"You tell, No, you tell! Or you tell!"—leave no question as to the primacy of the problem of narration. In the first paragraph the narrator repeatedly emphasizes the fact that he is the narrator: "He who wields the pen here is, for the time being, called Brau nel. . . . The pen-wielder usually writes Brau nel like Castrop-Rauxel. . . . He who wields the pen here"—all on the first page! This is definitely a narrated text, and the emphasis leads the reader to examine the narrators more closely. Who are these three men through whose eyes a crucial era in Germany's history is seen? How were they educated? And what was the result of that education?

Eddi Amsel, Harry Liebenau, and Walter Matern grow up in Danzig in an atmosphere saturated with myth. In their accounts they refer to three men who exert powerful pedagogical influences on them. Mr. Olschewski, a "reform-addicted young teacher in elementary school," teaches social studies (Heimatkunde); but when Eddi asks him about the origin of the name Pluto he lectures for weeks on mythology—Germanic, Greek, and especially Polish myths—about "the gods which existed earlier, still exist today, already existed back then." Since that school experience, Brau nel reports, "Amsel has become devoted to mythology" (68). A second teacher, Oswald Brunies, is a grand old humanist who refuses to have anything to do with the Nazis. But he is also an absurd rooster, scratching in the schoolyard for rare pebbles: "Nothing happened naturally in his case, everywhere he sensed hidden powers. . . . He pretended to be an ancient Celtic druid, or a Prussian oak-tree god, or Zoroaster—he is thought to be a Freemason" (144). This pedagogue, charged with teaching history and German, is addicted to romanticism and to its metaphor in the novel: sweets. His students learn neither spelling nor history; but they do know something. Eichendorff, they come to see ballet shoes as magical objects, they can write essays in which they fantasize about marriage customs of the Zulus, they get a large dose of the mystical, romantic geology found in Schubert's Views of the Night-Side of Natural Science (Ansichten von der Nachtseite der Naturwissenschaft), and there are indications that they adopt Brunies's Freemasonry. They certainly do not learn his aversion to the Nazis. In The Magic Mountain, when

Naphta explains Freemasonry to Hans, he depicts an institution with a rational, enlightened beginning and a subsequent turn to an irrational romanticism. Brunies embodies both sides of Freemasonry, but the synthesis of the two, as might be expected here, tips heavily toward the irrational.

Oskar Matzerath, the hero of Grass's first novel, is referred to as a third teacher: "Brau nel and his co-authors were taught by someone who was busy his life long on enameled tin" (117). This is no recommendation, as we have seen, for Oskar has been guilty of making his drum into a symbol, of using art to promote mythical thinking, of setting himself up as a messiah. The narrators of Dog Years learn his skills well.

Walter Matern, for example, is described by Grass as an addicted disciple of ideologies: "In the novel Dog Years I have, I feel, successfully created in the figure of Matern a German-Idealist bearer of ideas who, in the shortest time, finds the doctrine of salvation in Communism, National Socialism, Catholicism, and finally in ideological anti-Fascism." While living with his father, who can hear flour worms predicting Germany's economic future, Walter Matern develops his own economic and historical theories and speaks "of history as a dialectical worm-process . . . [Matern] disseminates Marx-nourished worm-myths which are made to support the theory of the necessity of all development" (507–508). This is clearly the ideological patterning of history or the combination of myth and history Grass so vocally opposes. And Matern is not alone in his beliefs.

Harry Liebenau is in love with barbarous Tulla, and, like Matern, also demonstrates a strong interest in mythical history. Liebenau is "a knowledgeable person who read historical and philosophical books indiscriminately." He is "melancholic," a category Grass describes along with "utopian" in From the Diary of a Snail (Aus dem Tagebuch einer Schnecke, 1972) as being opposed to the rational attitude of doubt. In addition, Liebenau is "a dreamer who lied a lot, spoke softly, became red when, believed this and that, and viewed the continuing war as an extension of the school curriculum." His list of heroes includes Hitler, whose mythical history brought the Nazis to power, and the historian Heinrich von Treitschke, whose ideologically slanted and anti-Semitic history of the early nineteenth century powerfully affected the historical consciousness of Germany. "With the help of these models," it is said, "he was successful in covering over an actual mountain of human bones with medieval allegories" (375).
Liebenau reduces the tensions of history with allegory and myth and Matern too seeks salvation through myth; but what about Eddi Amsel, who, as Brauxel, heads the authors' collective? Amsel has often been seen as the quintessential postwar writer, vigorously struggling to overcome Germany's past. John Reddick, for example, writes that where Matern attempts to mask reality, Amsel always sees clearly. Reddick even identifies Amsel at times with Grass himself. But if one looks at Amsel from the same perspective from which Matern and Liebenau have just been observed, a different figure emerges.

In the account of Olschewski's teaching and Amsel's turn to mythology, mythical thinking is identified with a series of violent and mystical figures, including a black and pregnant German shepherd. Following this terrifying series comes the phrase "but also Eddi Amsel" (68). Later in the book, when Walter Matern is asked in the public discussion to name several "important, influential childhood experiences," he begins with the names of three gods of Prussian mythology; then he lists the same violent and mystical figures seen before; and finally he ends with "but also Eddi Amsel" (604). Eddi Amsel, the artist whose work could teach a rational acceptance of historical contradictions, instead intensifies Matern's mythical thinking. Amsel's mythical scarecrows frighten away birds; but some are birds themselves and strengthen the superstition of the villagers. During the Nazi period his mechanical figures reinterpret history on the basis of Nazi myths and romantic heroes. Eddi also sponsors miller Matern in his economic divination. As Brauxel, he predicts the end of the world astrologically, dabbles in numerology, and weaves Masonic patterns into his narrative. And most telling of all, he takes over the care of Pluto in the end, leaving the black dog ("SS schwarz, priesterschwarz, Amselschwarz") to guard his factory. Amsel is clearly as guilty as the rest.

Eddi Amsel, Harry Liebenau, Walter Matern, the narrators of Dog Years, are not only victimized by but also responsible for those years. The relation of these three would-be overcomers of the past to their past is manifest by the Erkenntnisbrille (perception glasses) they use during the public discussion of Matern's guilt. The glasses, a ubiquitous postwar symbol for overcoming the past, are produced in Dog Years by Brauxel and company; and "qualified opticians, trained in Jena" (548) act as consultants for the glasses. Jena is not only famous for lenses, of course, but for German romanticism. The glasses' secret ingredient is mica, collected by "romantic" Os-wald Brunies. Looking through the glasses one can indeed see the horrors of the past; but the romantic lenses distort the view, and the viewers demonize Hitler and Matern, having no insight into their own guilt. Thus, the glasses made to overcome the past are themselves products of the past. Postwar writers (or at least Dog Years' postwar narrators), seeking to overcome romantic thinking, use tools forged by the romantics. Mythical histories are replaced by more mythical histories. Eddi Amsel is a black bird attempting to scare off black birds. Walter Matern attacks fascism with fascist methods. And Harry Liebenau tries and convicts Matern as a Nazi while himself praying to the black German shepherd.

Dog Years, then, is not a romantic/mythical/occult novel; it is a realistic novel about romanticism, myth, and the supernatural. The "Morning Shifts," "Love-Letters," and "Materniads" written by Amsel, Liebenau, and Matern are mythical interpretations of segments of twentieth-century history, interpretations of a sequence of events in which all three narrators have vested interests. And the three accounts, beyond any nominal overcoming of the past, admittedly attempt to establish a monument to neoromantic Oswald Brunies. Dog Years is about its narrators, and readers must resist the tendency to think in their categories. Their accounts of German history are "confessions" of misled, devious, defensive, and representative minds. After recognizing the myths, the Freemasonry, and the numerology, the reader must step back from the seemingly systematic but ultimately chaotic mass of supernatural and suprahistorical phenomena depicted and read the novel as a realistic account of a common and dangerous flight into the reassuring world of symbol and myth. Fredric Jameson argues that Walter Benjamin read Goethe's Elective Affinities (Wahlverwandtschaften) in this way, interpreting "symbolic objects to the second power":

It is the originality of Benjamin to have cut across the sterile opposition between the arbitrary interpretations of the symbol on the one hand, and the blank failure to see what it means on the other: Elective Affinities is to be read not as a novel by a symbolic writer, but as a novel about symbolism. If objects of a symbolic nature loom large in this work, it is not because they were chosen to underlie the theme of adultery in some decorative manner, but rather because the real underlying subject is precisely the surrender to the power of symbols of people who have lost their autonomy as human beings. "When people sink to this level, even the life of apparently lifeless things grows strong. Gundolf quite
FREEMASONRY FROM HESSE TO GRASS

rightly underlined the crucial role of objects in this story. Yet the intrusion of the thinglike into human life is precisely a criterion of the mythical universe." We are required to read these symbolic objects to the second power: not so much directly to decipher in them a one-to-one meaning, as to sense that of which the very fact of symbolism is itself symptomatic.46

It is Grass’s genius to recognize in both Nazi and postwar society the natural and potentially destructive human addiction to symbols and to further recognize his own (and other artists’) production of symbols as feeding and perpetuating that desire. League-novel emissaries and a romantic Freemason join proponents of numerology, astrology, myth, pseudo-Catholic idolatry, and ideologies of various sorts to make Grass’s novelic paens to scepticism necessary.

This chapter began with a discussion of Hesse, whose Demian and Journey to the East, with themes and figures drawn from romantic league novels, appealed strongly to a population suffering from intense destabilization (of many sorts) following Germany’s defeat in the World War. People had lost their faith, as a line from Journey to the East suggests: "everything now seemed to become unreliable and doubtful, everything threatened to lose its worth, its sense" (30). In compensation, the country was "full of saviours, prophets, and disciplets, of presentiments of the end of the world or hopes for the beginning of a Third Reich" (13). Hesse’s earlier works, like Demian, were part of this movement, providing the fulfillment and the closure so lacking in contemporary Germany. By 1932, when Journey to the East was published, the desire for a political (or economic or spiritual) center was no less great; but the novel, while thematizing the familiar desires and romantic league-novel solutions, also questions the general enterprise. Discussing difficulties with writing history or telling stories, the narrator asks the same questions that would, after the Third Reich, guide Schmidt’s, Walser’s, and Grass’s thinking concerning the transcendence promised in a secret society:

Where is a center of the events, something in common, something to which they relate and which holds them together? For something like connection, like causality, like meaning to arise, so that, in fact, anything on earth can become narratable, the historian must invent unities: a hero, a people, an idea; and what really happened namelessly must be said to have happened to this invented unity.

But if even this is so difficult, to coherently narrate a number of actual, documented events, then in my case it is much more difficult, for everything becomes uncertain as soon as I want to observe it exactly, everything slips and dissolves. . . . Nowhere is there a unity, a center, around which the wheel turns. (35)

After the Nazis’ success in providing a center around which the wheel could turn—a success based as much on eradicating Freemasons, Jews, and others whose centers challenged that of the Nazis as on providing a center of their own—postwar authors naturally became suspicious of the desire for power and certainty that makes secret societies (or Nazi ideology) so attractive.

Arno Schmidt found strong parallels between the early league novel Dya Na Sore and the Nazi state and excoriated a postwar critic who failed to see the similarities. Martin Walser found the center of a corrupt capitalist society in a secret, exclusive club, implying that while the Nazis’ defeat may have brought about some changes, at the heart of things lay the same corruption, nurtured by a secret society. And Günter Grass has dealt with the issue of human attraction to figures and symbols promising transcendence. Although Freemasonry itself plays a rather minor explicit role in The Tin Drum and Dog Years, the issues repeated in more than two centuries of varied league novels are at the center of Grass’s novels, and Freemasonry and the league novel provide access to Grass’s most important themes. Where Hesse’s narrator in Journey to the East finds that "behind the intention and hope, behind my entire, irrepensible desire to tell our story, is a fatal doubt" (36), Oskar Matzerath and the three narrators of Hundehälfte express no such doubts. They are intent on writing a monument to their romantic, Masonic mentor Oswald Brunies, on founding a sect, or party, or lodge, on gaining power by providing the sweet, transcendent symbols to which their fellow citizens have long been addicted.