

## Book Review

Monika Shafi, ed. **Approaches to Teaching Grass's *The Tin Drum***. New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2008.

*Approaches to Teaching Grass's *The Tin Drum** provides multiple techniques for teaching school, and undergraduate, students about Grass's first novel, *The Tin Drum*. Each chapter in the book explains how to critically engage with the novel from a different point of view. Part One (Materials) briefly highlights extraneous resources to enhance readers' understanding of the text and its context. It discusses further reading for students as well as films and other audiovisual resources to assist their understanding of the novel. Part Two (Approaches) presents eighteen chapters, each instructing the reader how to interpret the novel according to a specific perspective and how to instruct others in this interpretation. The chapters are grouped under four headings: historical contexts; narrative and reading strategies; teaching issues of race and gender; and teaching the film *Die Blechtrommel*.

The **historical contexts** chapters examine Grass's unique way of narrating and accounting for his particular representation of history in the novel. Of note, the ways Grass refuses to demonise the Nazis or to idealise their victims, and chooses to represent history by utilising characters that symbolise people with limited knowledge of the socio-political state of affairs beyond their own field of reference. This historical section of the text also explores the novel's motifs (fascination with outsiders and misfits; borderland culture of Slavic peoples; and anti-fascist resistance) to link them to the novel's main theme of German denial of the past.

The **narrative and reading strategies** chapters essentially explain how to engage students in such a long novel. This collection argues that the novel is as much about the act of narrating as about telling a story and that it deviates from conventions of the realist novel. Clues to interpretation of *The Tin Drum* are presented by linking literature and artwork to the text, and by studying the novel's theatrical and musical moments in reference to the nature of art. Absurdity and humour, fairytale and myth, and the narratives of secondary characters also feature as entry points to the novel.

The **teaching issues of race and gender** chapters demonstrate how the novel can be interpreted by feminist and psychoanalytic theories, and read via the perspectives of Jewish culture and holocaust studies. It also shows how the novel's structure and content examines the Nazis' persecution of minority groups. The **teaching the film *Die Blechtrommel*** section discusses the depiction of sexualised childhood; explains how sound and image keep time by re-creating, referencing and critiquing history, and it analyses the desire to narrate or fear to narrate.

For enthusiasts of *The Tin Drum*, this publication may appear exciting due to the plethora of topics it covers and the particular moments it makes reference to in the chapter headings (for example, "From Sea to Soup: Teaching the Image of the Eel", "Triumph of the Creative Dwarf: How Grass uses Oskar to Defy the Power of Evil", or "Getting back to the Umbilical Cord: Feminist and Psychoanalytic Theory and *The Tin Drum*"). Yet, they may quickly tire of the pedagogic theme which sees the analyses of the novel interrupted at regular intervals by suggestions for teaching the text. *Approaches to Teaching Grass's The Tin Drum* can be forgiven for this sole criticism as its primary objective is to teach teachers how to teach the novel to students. The book is successful in meeting its goals,

...to present teachers with background information and critical approaches, highlight dominant themes as well as formal and linguistic elements, and provide different ideas and strategies on how to teach those features. (Shafi, M. 2008: xiii)

There are already many publications about Gunter Grass and *The Tin Drum*, but what makes this book unique is its teaching emphasis. Other texts have investigated *The Tin Drum* at length but do not include the tools for teachers to pass on these notions to novices. As such, this is an excellent 'cheat's guide' for teachers and for tertiary students who both wish to improve the way they communicate about the book to others.

REBECCA SCOLLEN  
University of Southern Queensland

(626 words)