

What needed saying

Günter Grass

Why have I kept silent – silent for so long
About something that's plain to see
Something long rehearsed in war games
Something we will survive, if at all, as footnotes

It is the so-called right to a first strike.
That could wipe out the Iranian people –
kept in line and corralled to cheer by a loudmouth
whose land is believed to be building an atom bomb

Yet why do I stop myself calling that other land by its name
whose nuclear capacity has been growing for years,
secretly and out of control, since no-one may inspect it?

We all keep quiet about the facts of the matter
I myself have kept in line, kept silent
But I find it is an incriminating lie and a coercion:
the punishment is there as soon as you break the rules.
The verdict of anti-semitism is familiar

But now, since my country from time to time
is compelled to confront its essential crime beyond compare
then delivers another submarine to Israel
(blandly declared as reparation
but done in an absolutely businesslike manner)
the submarine which specializes in delivering annihilating warheads
to a place where the existence of a single atom bomb is unproven
(but then fear turns suspicion into proof)
I say what must be said.

But why have I kept my silence for so long?

I believed the place I came from

Marked by a stain which can never be washed away

forbade me openly to speak the truth

I could not do that to Israel – the land to which I am bound –

The land to which I will remain obliged.

Why do I say now, after all this time,

aged and with my last drops of ink:

The nuclear power Israel endangers

the already fragile peace of the world?

Because something that must be said

that tomorrow might come too late

and since we – already burdened enough as Germans –

could be sub-contractors to an outrage –

a predictable outrage – so our complicity

could not be redeemed with any of the usual excuses.

Granted – I am silent no longer

Because I am sick of the hypocrisy of the West

And hopeful that many will free themselves from silence

And bring the perpetrator of the perceptible danger

To renounce violence

And to insist that both countries agree to

an unhindered and permanent oversight

of Israel's nuclear potential

and the Iranian nuclear sites

by an international body.

This is the only way for everyone – Israelis and Palestinians –

Indeed all the people of this region occupied by madness

who live cheek by jowl with their enemies

And in the end, it is the only way out for us too.

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