



Dog Years

By Gunter Grass

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A novel set in three parts, beginning in the 1920s and ending in the 1950s, that follows the lives of two friends from the prewar years in Germany through an apocalyptic period and its startling aftermath. Translated by Ralph Manheim. A Helen and Kurt Wolff Book

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Dog Years By Gunter Grass Bibliography

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Editorial Review

Review

Dog Years is a meditation on modern history in the guise of a novel, a study of Germany before, during and after the Second World War, a tale of the interrelated fortunes of two friends, Walter Matern, Aryan, and Eddi Amsel, half-Jew. In its well-nigh stupefying length, in its almost ritual use of distortions, shifting perspectives, and completely unaccommodating, dispassionate weaving of minutiae (at once quaint, brutal, and poetic), and in the terrible geniality of its denunciatory spirit and in its disgusts, it is without doubt one of the most astonishing literary performances since *Finnegans Wake*. It is also, naturally, one of the most troubling. By comparison, *The Tin Drum* is a mere roller coaster ride through the Absurd. Grass' technique—a mingling of Beckett, Brecht, and his own half-solemn, half-winking naturalism—juxtaposes the traditional order of character and situation with quasi-allegorical effects: e.g., the recurrent word play on Heideggerian concepts; the deadpan caricature of mass media, the cool nightmarish descriptions of industry; the quirky, staccato close-ups of front line fighting; above all, the underlying canine metaphor whereby a stud dog, involved in the adolescence of all the participants, fathers der Fuhrer's favorite hound, Pluto, later picked up by Matern on his hellish post-war Journey. *Lupus est homo homini* etc...?? Matern, of course, represents history's adjustable man: protector and tormentor of his "sheeny" friend, battered about the Left and Right ("I was red, put on brown, wore black, dyed myself red. Spit on me..."); Amsel, of course, is his alter ego. *Dog Years* is a product of the Cold War, in which absolutes boringly teeter on the brink, in which men (who have become sociologized "topics of discussion") scowl at each other or try to touch through a thick universal pane of glass. An important book which will receive an important press. (*Kirkus Reviews*)

Language Notes

Text: English, German (translation)

About the Author

GÜNTER GRASS (1927–2015), Germany's most celebrated contemporary writer, attained worldwide renown with the publication of his novel *The Tin Drum* in 1959. A man of remarkable versatility, Grass was a poet, playwright, social critic, graphic artist, and novelist. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1999.

Users Review

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