

Lies and More Lies Fact and Fiction in Günter Grass's *Die Rättin*

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“Die Zwiemacht aus Zwietracht.
Zwiefach die eine Lüge getischt.”

“Bleibe einzig die These zu widerlegen, nach der alles Täuschung und Nachglanz nur ist.”¹

Critics have for the most part lambasted Günter Grass's recent novel, *Die Rättin*, as being a polemic against the slow progress toward disarmament in literary guise.² The intent of the author is apparently to jolt the lethargic reader into actively struggling against the ever-nearing nuclear destruction of the world by presenting a fictional description of life after the buttons have been pushed.³ On the surface, this vision of the impossibility of humans, even half-humans, to live in peace appears to be a cynical indictment of all efforts to prevent environmental destruction and nuclear war. The savagery with which the author attacks present efforts to halt the nuclear race, the ruination of nature, and governmental cover-ups reflects rage over the slow pace of change and a fatalistic view of the future. This attitude has become apparent in the later works of Grass, in which his negative depictions of contemporary life grow even gloomier than is customary for him. Grass appears in his latest work to have all but abandoned his hopes for a better future.

This novel, then, presents a foreshadowing of ineluctable retribution against the seeming inability of human beings to avert disaster. *Die Rättin* has more to transmit to the reader, however, than its political message. An examination of the motif of lying, which recurs throughout the novel, binding together the various plots, subplots, and images, will illustrate that Grass subverts his own message of hopelessness and justified punishment of the human race by demonstrating its irreality on every possible level. The conflicting motives of lying and the unmasking of lies mesh together to form the network supporting the narrative. An examination of this network will show that Grass is not advocating any

one particular solution. It reveals, rather, the complete lack of certainty of truth in any institution. More than being a “novel in which imaginative extravagance is yoked to a relentless jeremiad about the despoliation of the earth,”⁴ *Die Rättin* calls to question the very legitimacy of its so-called message. An examination of the various strands of lies throughout the narrative, such as literary, artistic, political, scientific, and those in the media, will expose the novel's assault on the notion of absolute truth. The only certainty is the presence of uncertainty.⁵ This article will focus its discussion on the struggle between the narrators, the various stories presented by those narrators, and the notions of fact, fiction, power, history, and time that are presented in the narrative.

Grass's authorial narrator, that is, his primary first-person narrator who shares common traits with the author,⁶ plays with the idea of the quest for truth—a truth that has been altered, embellished, or covered up. His exposure of various lies is thus an attempt to recover or discover that truth, but each time he appears to grasp it he detects another lie in its stead and is compelled to resume his sleuth work. The very medium of a conveyed message may make it suspect and worthy of closer scrutiny, e.g., fiction, video, TV, or fairy tales. Other so-called truths are more difficult to penetrate because they are often better disguised in the form of news items or governmental decrees. From a political standpoint, these messages would be merely discourse without any inherent value if they did not have the backing of the political system. The dominant power lends its authority to their promulgation, and they then become accepted as the truth. Thus, the struggle among the narrators to convince the reader and each other of the legitimacy of their version of history—the dominant one would have

more of a claim to the truth.⁷ The novel's ending is a draw, however. There is thus no revealed truth, but there are plenty of revealed lies. There is in fact a hierarchy of lies, which lays bare the author's own value system, or at the very least that of the author's persona that emanates from the text. Creative lying, although it is often politically impotent, is at the positive, and institutionalized hoaxes are at the negative, end of his spectrum of lies. Scientific claims to verity are located somewhere between the two.

The paradoxical use of lies as a means to gain access to the truth, which always also turns out to be another fabrication, manifests itself throughout the work. Absolute truth remains elusive. In each of the several stories, a lie or illusion is exposed, but that which is uncovered is not necessarily more genuine. For example, the green forests are shown to be an elaborate hoax for the chancellor; the notion of the "falsche Fuffziger" challenges the "Wirtschaftswunder"; the Pied Piper legend is demystified and retold from a different perspective; Damroka dissuades her shipmates from entering the laboratory during the Swedish demonstration in one version (254), but, in the other, she is the first one into the laboratory, thus presenting the reader with two conflicting accounts (398).⁸ Thematically, the narrated world appears to be constructed of lies: fact appears to be based on fiction, as at Anna Koljaiczek's birthday party. From the perspective of narrative voice, there is a struggle for the "true" narrative based on who is the "stronger" narrator, that is, on whose narrative contains the other's. And as for the narrative as a whole, the author's use of irony casts the whole quest for truth in a cynical light. Lies are not only statements contrary to the accepted view of reality; the term has been expanded to include creative endeavors, writing, reporting, video programs, painting, and scientific research (the motives behind it are questioned). All the different forms of deception vie with each other to gain legitimacy through the claims of each narrator that he or she possesses real knowledge. In the same manner, there are numerous attempts to uncover the illusory.

Important to this discussion is the author's own idea of truth and fiction. Grass has always regarded his storytelling as lying. From his childhood on, he found the truth often boring and thus began "die Wahrheit zu variieren oder andersherum zu erfinden."⁹ He, in fact, feels that lying is for him a compulsion, for he lies not necessarily to hide something or for any other practical reasons. He gives little weight to his oral lying for "am liebsten lüg[t] [er] gedruckt."¹⁰ Lying is for him connected to writing fiction, toward which he feels a natural inclination. On the other hand, he views his use of history in his fiction as a valid presentation of the past, in fact truer than "official" history. As he states in an interview, his goal in presenting history within the

framework of his novels is "genauere Fakten zu erfinden als die, die uns angeblich authentisch überliefert wurden."¹¹ He intends to evoke a spirit or a mood of the past, rather than a supposedly objective rendition based on documents.¹² Fiction is thus, on the one hand, embellished reality, lies. On the other hand, the artist regards his work as actually presenting more exact facts than one would find in what we call nonfictional discourse. The phrase "more exact facts" does not lay claim to absolute exactitude, however, only to relative accuracy.¹³

This reversal of the conventional view of fiction and nonfiction finds its echo throughout the novel. The most creative lies are those of the artistic types—Oskar, Malskat, and the other narrators. The most damaging are those spread by the government and other centers of power that refuse to worry about the future of the human race. Indeed, the fictional fairy-tale characters take flight from the lies emanating from Bonn. "In solcher Gegenwart ist kein Bleiben. Wir sind nicht mehr erwünscht," they explain. Grass challenges the conventional notions of objective facts and implies that their objectivity is merely institutionalized subjectivity. According to Grass, so-called fiction is superior to "fact" because fiction does not feign to be objective. However, the subjective is not necessarily true, either. The rejection of the "truth" propagated by the power structure is replaced not by a supposedly better "truth," but by a general skepticism of all attempts at truth. Literary truth is just as valid, if not more interesting, than factual truth. Yet it, too, is a lie.

The red thread of lying that holds together Grass's narrative demonstrates the complete lack of center or hold for any notion. But one can attempt to come closer to the truth, especially if one has an artistic nature, such as Malskat, who was inspired to create his Gothic-like paintings by a certain idea of truth barely visible under the original pictures: "Ermuntert von erkennbaren Resten des ursprünglichen Bildes . . ." (111). At the same time, however, the total lack of certainty arising from the narrative challenges the reader to keep searching for a truth. The failure of Grass's narrative to present an ultimate truth does not preclude him from presenting his own view of the world and its problems as worthy of consideration. As usual for Grass, the solution is left to the reader. The author's role is only to provoke a reaction, a sense that something is amiss, which he does here only too well.

The struggle for truth first manifests itself as the conflict between the authorial narrator and the rat. The rat at first serves as the authorial narrator's muse, who provokes him to tell his story, or rather, her story. He expresses his hope for inspiration from her right at the beginning, attempting to place his poetics in the tradition of Lessing: "Auf Weihnachten wünschte ich eine Ratte mir, hoffte ich doch auf Reizwörter für ein Gedicht, das von der Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts handelt"

(1). Because the rat speaks to the authorial narrator when he dreams, or when he thinks he is dreaming, he is the only one to hear her tale, which terrifies him and which he denounces as a lie. At the same time, however, he feels compelled to convey it into his own narrative. Grass thus establishes a connection between dreaming and creating fiction (and links his novel to the novels of Romanticism). The narrative itself is repeatedly referred to as a dream, both by the rat, who attempts thereby to assert the reality of her own narrative, and by the authorial narrator, who is uncertain about reality. The line between the two narrative realities becomes finer and finer as the rat insinuates that she is in fact the true narrator and that the authorial narrator is part of her narrative:

Streng plötzlich hörte ich sie: Das muß aufhören! Ausflüchte dulden wir nicht. Es könnte uns einfallen, dich zu vergessen, dich nicht mehr komisch zu finden, anderes als dich, säugende Schmeißfliegen etwa zu träumen. Ich hoffe, du verstehst meinen kleinen Hinweis. Wir stritten. Ich rief: Die gibt es überhaupt nicht, deine dämlichen Schmeißfliegen! Sie hielt gegen: Dich wird es demnächst nicht mehr geben! (481)

The rat takes on a power that is similar to that of the author himself—she supposedly creates the narrative and the other narrators. Her tales comprise the secondary narrative imbedded in the primary one. There is a fluidity between the two owing to mutual interruptions in the linearity of the other, but the narrative set in contemporary Germany serves as the basis of and introduction to the rat's narrative. Both main narrators address the reader, using the first person, but the authorial narrator refers to the rat's narrative in the third person when he addresses the reader, whereas the rat refers to him and his narrative in the second person. They begin to merge toward the end of the novel, however, at times together addressing the reader in the first person plural: "Die Rätin und ich . . ." (426). His narrative is thus directed outwards, whereas hers is toward only him, which would appear to demonstrate the dominance of his narrative—or that there are no readers for her narrative. Of course, the rat herself claims that the whole tale is in turn contained in her tale.

The implication here is that the narrative enclosing all the other narratives is the most powerful and thus has more of a claim to truth. But can one narrative be more fictional than another? Only the reader's own claim to existence can support the authorial narrator's intratextual claim to transmitting the real fiction, that is, that the world has not yet ended. Thus, the two main narrators vie for the position of power, which would be the ability of creating the other as well as of presenting the truth.

This struggle behind the scenes between narrators parallels the theme of the primary narrative: humans are doomed to compete until the bitter end, no matter their intellect or understanding of the conse-

quences. The battle between the narrators ends undecided; the authorial narrator has the last say, but the rat has caused him to doubt his own existence and thus his own tale when he says: "Vielleicht ist es aber auch so: der Schluß war schon. Es gibt uns nicht mehr. Wir leben nur noch als ob, ein Reflex und demnächst abklingendes Gezappel" (364). This questioning of the whole narrative betrays not only its fictionality in a manner reminiscent of romantic irony, but it also calls into doubt the validity of the doomsday message, which is merely fiction.

The conflict over the true story is expanded upon and embellished by the other narrators and their stories to form an intricate web of tales that run parallel to, contradict, or support each other. For example, the women tell stories as they knit, hoping not to lose their thread or run out of wool before achieving their goals, which indeed happens: "Von Wolle keine Rede mehr. Nichts mehr hätte erzählt oder noch einmal erzählt werden können" (251–52). And the Pied Piper story is gradually expanded upon to include rats and punk-like children, whose odd intercourse calls to mind the future Watsoncricks hidden on "Die Neue Ilsebill." The strongest narrator after the two main ones is the aging Oskar Matzerath, whose import can be seen in his collaboration with the authorial narrator to create a narrative on film. Oskar is not as strong a narrator as the rat, however, because his discussions with the authorial narrator are reported in either direct or indirect speech, that is, under the obvious control of the authorial narrator. He is powerful enough, though, to convince the authorial narrator to alter his own narrative and the events in the film.¹⁴

Grass, once again, also challenges the "reality" of past, present, and future as being diachronic. An attempt to integrate the different temporal levels in a different medium, albeit conveyed to us through the written word, are Matzerath's films of the fairy-tale characters and their attempts to save the forests as well as his videocassette of his grandmother's birthday party. The crossover from book to visual medium is a critique on the modern consumer who is more likely to watch something than to read it, and, if it is interesting enough, to believe it. "An Tatsachen glaubt ohnehin niemand mehr. Nur noch Träume aus der Trickkiste bringen stimmige Fakten. Machen wir uns nichts vor: Die Wahrheit heißt Donald Duck, und Mickey Mouse ist ihr Prophet!" (86–87), laments the authorial narrator. The film about the fairy-tale characters, however, although interesting, becomes more and more confusing as Oskar and the authorial narrator bicker about how to make the film. Early in the novel, the authorial narrator describes what he would like to have in the film as well as what is currently happening among the figures. He then depicts how the figures appear in the film, but at other times, these figures appear to be acting on their own. "Wilhelm sagt zu Jakob: 'Du siehst, Bruder, unsere

Märchen haben ihr Eigenleben' " (342). Again, Grass has a rather complicated arrangement: the authorial narrator writes about a fictional character who films some other fictional characters who attempt to expose the deceptive policies of the supposedly nonfictional government. There is thus a reversal of the conventional order—fiction has overtaken truth as the representative of the "real" world. Art, in the form of fiction, is reality.

Another example of the role of the media is the radio, especially the Third Program, which is supposed to offer an alternative to the two main government programs and to thus somehow offer a more balanced version of the "truth." But the news and educational programs on this station prove to be no closer to alerting the populace to the rampant governmental lying and imminent nuclear war than the conventional ones. The authorial narrator is repeatedly disappointed in the enlightenment he receives from this channel, which serves as a parallel to the general impotence of the alternative movements to avert disaster—yet this official-sounding report of various facts soothes him when he doubts his narrative. He regards it as his "tagtäglich Existenzbeweis" (439).

The most intriguing combination of visual and literary media with "reality" is Oskar's video about Anna Koljaiczek's birthday party. The video depicts all that happened at the party almost exactly as it occurred, although it was filmed in the West before the party took place. Oskar's manipulation of reality through fiction not only reflects the attempts on the part of the power structure to alter the people's perception of reality by, for example, projecting the image of a healthy forest on television and using the chancellor's presence to increase the credibility of the deception. It also contrasts with Grass's own attempt to prevent a real nuclear war by presenting it as a *fait accompli* in his fiction. By depicting the apparent powerlessness of the birthday guests to determine their fate, Grass hopes to provoke his readers to act before their reality corresponds to that in his narrative. This version of life imitating art, even without coming into contact with the art form is also another example of Grass's overturning of represented temporality. The video displays the past but was conceived and created when that past was still the future. In just such a manner is the narrative as a whole contrived: the story of the rat is that of the past, but it too is created for the audience or readership while the past is still the future. And just as the video predicts almost exactly how the party will go, so too does the narrative purport to depict the last days of humankind on earth. (Of course, this kind of playing with time while stressing the inevitability of what is being represented will not necessarily inspire the reader to go out and fight for change before it is too late, because, if one follows the logic of the rat, it is already too late.) On the other hand, the open ending

calls into question the validity of the rat's tale, which implies that there still may be a chance to change the insane policies of the superpowers. If the present determines the future, then one can alter the future by changing the present.

Grass hypothesizes that our present has become the past and the future the present; he even has his authorial narrator present in the bleak future, cast out in space, separated from humanity, but nonetheless a participant in the secondary narrative. Grass's blend of times and realities corresponds to the confusion over present politics and history—no one is quite sure what to believe or knows what has really happened. By including the Brothers Grimm as representatives of German Romanticism, who appear to be upholding the status quo as government officials for the environment and forestry (Jakob is minister of the forests and Wilhelm is his undersecretary, responsible for limiting damage to the forests), Grass draws a parallel between fairy tales and politics.¹⁵ As the narrative progresses, the tension between the collectors of the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* and politicians becomes more marked. Faced with the threat of *Waldsterben*, the fairy tales rebel against the political lies, which are threatening their very existence. But this rebellion is also against their "creators," the Grimms, who have been controlling them to prevent them from challenging too overtly the status quo. This revolt horrifies the Grimms, "Es könnte ein Chaos ausbrechen!" (344), who urge the characters to reconsider: "Wir dürfen, was geschrieben steht, nicht allzu genau nehmen" (346). Literary representations of reality are thus accorded a higher position in the hierarchy of lying than political ones. On the other hand, politics destroys the literary competitor through sheer force. By chasing the fairy tales back to the past, however, the distortion of reality by the power structure appears to have more of a claim to truth and thus succeeds in lulling the populace into acquiescence. The negative depiction of political "truths," however, demonstrates that, although they can deceive and thereby exert control over many, there are more aware individuals who perceive their fallacy and who can offer alternate versions of political reality, which, however, may not be as pleasurable as the officially fabricated ones. "Selbst wenn die Fälschung erkannt wurde, blieb man dem schönen Schein treu" (273), notes the authorial narrator. One means of counteracting the allure of conventional facts is to present the alternate facts in an entertaining form, such as in a fairy tale, or, for that matter, a video.

The fairy-tale motif continues throughout the work. The fairy-tale characters are not "real" characters, that is, they are not creations of the author, rather they are borrowed. They become doubly, even triply fictional—Grass takes them from the Grimms, who took them from folk literature. Each character is depicted by a motif or set of motives that represent the narratives to which the

characters belong, such as the prince repeatedly kissing Sleeping Beauty to awaken her. The characters, now participants in a new narrative, are also due to become figures in a joint video venture by Oskar Matzerath and the authorial narrator, transferring them from a literary to a visual medium. The fictionality of the fairy-tale characters will then become fused with that of video characters, making them more accessible to the TV generation and compounding their fictionality even more. The relationship of the characters to their romantic past is never broken, however—they are always in the forest, attempting to draw the attention of the populace back to nature, back to its German roots, in more than one sense of the word. Nature has become artificial, however; even the bird songs are from tape recordings. Only those not so contaminated by contemporary culture, that is, children, can see behind the facade of the “forest” set up for the televised visit of the chancellor, who munches Black Forest torte on his way to give legitimacy to the fake forest. The fairy-tale characters and the children, who metamorphose into Hansel and Gretel, become the only ones who can actually see the truth of what is happening to the environment, even better than the authorial narrator, whom the female rat must constantly force away from his apparent digressions.

The Malskat forgery, much trumpeted before it is actually recounted, thematizes the whole lie/truth dichotomy. The lies perpetrated are the embodiment of the desire of the Germans for a certain type of past that they wish had occurred. The intent of the artist (parallel to that of the authorial narrator or even author) is to create something, a work of art, using his knowledge of the past and of Gothic art. He embellishes according to his own concept of art and influenced by his favorite movie star, Hansi Knoteck. He is just as surprised as any about the reaction of the critics, who take his work to be genuine, and boasts of his success (199), which demonstrates the innocence of his forgeries. He does not proclaim them to be true or false. He merely creates and lets others interpret. Although he does nothing to dissuade them from carrying on about the possible discovery of America by Germanic tribes and about the rich Gothic past projected in the windows, an outbreak of repressed guilt for the successful swindle compels him to confess. “Fromm wie er malte, verstand er Blitz und Donner als Fingerzeig” (390) and thereafter admitted his guilt. The politicians, however, do not seem to have a bad conscience—perhaps they believe their forgery.

The creative lying is contrasted to the calculated lies of the Ulbricht-Adenauer era, which sought to create the myth of two separate and distinct Germanys. The division of Germany into two countries under two different political systems is presented as a hoax that the authorial narrator attempts to reveal by having Malskat expose his forgery. By stressing the common German

heritage, the narrative undermines the notion that the two Germanys have become essentially different since the end of World War II. By having Adenauer attend church and admire Malskat’s artistic success, Grass emphasizes the parallel relationship between the political and artistic creations of a fictional past, the former exploiting the latter to strengthen its legitimacy. Malskat is punished for his honest confession to sprucing up the Gothic paintings in contrast to the treatment of the politicians, whose forgery goes largely unremarked and uncensored by the general public. Once again, although the more sinister lying maintains a claim on the truth, the creative lying is portrayed in a more positive light.

The present environmental policies of the contemporary West German government can also be placed into the category of lies, a category that displays a general distrust of scientific facts, which, owing to their reliance on the results of experiments and observation, are often regarded as truly objective. Any scientific research, however, derives from certain subjective perspectives and sometimes consciously manipulated data. The attempt to cover up the *Waldsterben* is only one example of the botched policy to prevent the populace from discovering the truth about the environment while using scientific data to deny any danger. The women’s jellyfish experiments are another.

The women’s voyage to ascertain the density of the jellyfish population appears to be a genuine attempt to find out the truth about the environmental situation. Yet, even this scientific voyage is only a pretext for the real search for the submerged island of Vineta, where a matriarchy once thrived. In addition, there are some genetic experiments smuggled aboard when the women watch (or participate in) a demonstration in Sweden. They are thus carrying around the future survivors of the nuclear war while searching for the remnants of a lost civilization of women. There is a contrast here between searching for something and at the same time concealing, inadvertently, something else. The two are related: the thing sought is a lost civilization, the seekers are members of a civilization about to disappear, and they are concealing, albeit unwittingly, the seeds of the survivors of their civilization, who, however, will not be looking for them. This ironic look at the women’s search for a better past mocks the general glorification of the past in contemporary Germany. By concentrating their energy on finding Vineta, the women are distracting themselves from acting on the problems in the present, which will only worsen in the future. As the past is always different, depending on the perspective from which it is viewed, a real or “true” past can never be pinned down. The past is fiction. The only truth for the women is their present existence and the future “Manipels” they are carrying on board. Any efforts at seeking solutions to present conundrums by looking backwards are wasted.

The narrative is thus woven together from the various strands of untruths—the Malskat forgery, the videos, the governmental policies, the women's voyage, German history, to name a few. Indeed, there is not much that is not a lie, but not all lies are equivalent. According to the value system evident in the narrative, the more creative and interesting the lie, and, most important, the more willing the liar is to admit his forgeries, the greater value those lies have. Writing fiction belongs in this category, as does any kind of artistic venture such as painting or making films. Once the lying becomes intentionally more opaque, however, the value of the lie decreases. Oskar's videocassettes cannot be ranked as highly as his and the authorial narrator's film, which, in turn, has a lower rating than Malskat's paintings. Moreover, the "purer" the lie, the less power it appears to exert in convincing others to take its content seriously. Malskat's forgery is accepted and lauded until he reveals its inauthenticity. Yet, the political statements, which are easier to discern as lies if one takes the trouble to consider them, maintain their grip on representing "truth." The narrative thus criticizes the public for their lack of perspicacity and appreciation for artistic integrity.

If, as implied, nothing can be certain, then all is subject to change. At the very least, statements are subject to reexamination and can be viewed from another perspective. History also varies, depending on the interpretation, and is thus a form of fiction and can be reinterpreted by the writer.¹⁶ The contrast here between fiction as falsehood and fictional history as fact is reflected in every layer of the fabric of *Die Rättin*. The double negation of Grass's history—invented facts narrated within an invented story—does not add up to a positive or "real" depiction of the past. There is no ultimate truth lying hidden behind the lies: "Nur noch Spuren" (445). One can only approximate it.¹⁷ The women's search for the lost matriarchy as well as contemporary Germany's refuge in its romantic past are thus futile endeavors—Damroka and her cohort were so near Vineta; yet it was not exactly as they had imagined, nor were they able to reach it.¹⁸ Concentrating too much on the past is dangerous because it distracts attention from contemporary problems. The future is also hidden, as the seeds of the future Watsoncricks were hidden on the ship. The influence of present actions on the direction that events take in the future can often be so great that they can almost determine the future. Oskar's birthday video attests to the power of present policies over future happenings. High technology is almost beyond our control and already controls the future. As Oskar asserts: "Früher nannte man es göttliche Vorsehung, heute sind es winzige Mikroprozessoren, die alles speichern, was war, und ausspucken, was sein wird" (315). The videos also suggest the immutability of history. The future is so simple to predict because history appears so repetitive. "Truth" also gains legitimacy through repetition and duration, assisting the political

system to remain intact and, at the same time, retaining its validity because of its alignment with the political power structure. One thus needs to be aware of who is producing the "true" ideas in order to offer different perspectives of verity.¹⁹

Grass's description of fiction as lying explains his use of the lying motif in *Die Rättin*. The central forger, Malskat, who is the most genuine of the liars, is in a way analogous to Grass and, just as Grass hopes to do directly, through his creative lying he indirectly calls attention to the dangerous lying of political figures. Grass's credo has always been to write for social change. He attempts here "durch Wörter das Ende auf[zuschieben" (16), that is, to use his fiction to prevent nuclear holocaust. Although his novel portrays such a horrible vision, Grass undermines the imminence of "posthuman society" by ironically exposing its fictionality, which appears to provide him with an escape from its predetermined nihilism and place his narrative in the same vein as all the previous ones—an incitement to better, and, in this case, to save humanity from destruction. But then again, one should not discount the rat's narrative. As the birthday video implies, fiction gives rise to facts.²⁰ Thus, in order to prevent this fiction from becoming "true," Grass's readers must first cultivate a skepticism of all perceived truths and the regimes producing those truths.

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NOTES

1. Günter Grass, *Die Rättin* (Darmstadt und Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1986), p. 274; p. 470. Subsequent references to this edition will be indicated parenthetically in the text.

2. The author's political and social involvement and his outspoken criticism of contemporary West German politics have diverted attention from the literary aspects of the novel. Paul Gray, for example, who reads the novel as a struggle between art and political argumentation, asserts: "The loser, hands down, is art." Paul Gray, "Sinking Ship," *Time*, 20 July 1987, p. 73. Most critics, especially in the FRG, concur and have decreed it to be an artistic failure. Michael Hierholzer, for example, states: "Das Urteil über den 1986 erschienenen Roman 'Die Rättin' fiel nahezu einhellig aus. Es hagelte Verrisse. . . . Nach dem Debakel wegen der 'Rättin' hatte sich Grass für einige Monate nach Indien abgemeldet." Michael Hierholzer, *Kulturchronik* 5.6 (1987): 2. Gray has a harsher view: "If the human race is truly as pigheaded and suicidal as it is portrayed here, then such a book will only add to the 'garbage mountain' from which the She-rat speaks her eulogy." Paul Gray, p. 73. On the positive side, Vormweg states: "Doch die aggressiven Beschimpfungen, ja Verhöhnungen, die *Die Rättin* auf sich gezogen hat, während die Leser sich auch um dieses Buch rissen, sind schwer zu begreifen. Im Vergleich mit der Literatur jüngster Zeit ist auch dieser Roman nämlich ganz sicher ein Ereignis." Heinrich Vormweg, *Günter Grass* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1986), p. 119. Hierholzer also adds: "Nicht die Vermittlung seiner Botschaft ist seine Stärke, sondern die Gestaltung von Bildern." Hierholzer, p. 2.

3. Erhard Friedrichsmeyer maintains, however, that Grass's depiction of doomsday is intentionally less horrific than it could be. Readers have encountered so many apocalyptic visions in film and literature that they have become immune to the fear these are supposed to evoke. For Friedrichsmeyer, the "nuclear apocalypse has become

fiction, illusion, myth . . . and it has become lost as a reality" (22). Grass's novel is an attempt to destroy the illusions that have replaced the reality of impending doomsday. However, Friedrichsmeyer disregards the fact that for Grass this reality from which the reader has become separated is also only a construct. Erhard Friedrichsmeyer, "Günter Grass's 'The Rat': Making Room for Doomsday," *South Atlantic Review* 54.4 (1989): 21–31.

4. Paul Gray, p. 73.

5. Thor A. Larsen's statement about *Der Butt* also applies here: "Das Unsichere ist also vorläufig das einzige Sichere, Feststehende. Dies berechtigt auch, das Unsichere als des Dichters Wahrheit, als seine Schau der Wirklichkeit zu nehmen." Thor A. Larsen, " 'Das ist die Wahrheit, jedesmal anders erzählt.' Zum Roman 'Der Butt,' " *Zu Günter Grass, Geschichte auf dem poetischen Prüfstand*, ed. Manfred Durzak (Stuttgart: Klett, 1985), p. 123.

6. Patrick O'Neill posits another narrative voice in the more distanced statements of the authorial narrator and ascribes to it, as an entity separate from the author, the balancing of the various perspectives in the text. Patrick O'Neill, "Grass's Doomsday Book: *Die Rätin*," *Critical Essays on Günter Grass*, ed. Patrick O'Neill (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1987), p. 221.

7. Grass's depiction of a struggle for dominance in presenting the truth reflects the assertions of Michel Foucault on the relationship between truth and power: "There is a battle 'for truth,' or at least 'around truth'—it being understood once again that by truth I do not mean 'the ensemble of truths which are to be discovered and accepted,' but rather 'the ensemble of rules according to which the true and the false are separated and specific effects of power attached to the true,' it being understood also that it's a matter not of a battle 'on behalf' of the truth, but of a battle about the status of truth and the economic and political role it plays. It is necessary to think of the political problems of intellectuals not in terms of 'science' and 'ideology,' but in terms of 'truth' and power." "Truth and Power. An Interview with Michel Foucault," *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984), p. 74.

8. These different versions call to mind the different versions of the fairy tale "Der Fischer und seine Frau" in *Der Butt*.

9. "Am liebsten lüge ich gedruckt. Interviews mit Günter Grass," *Der Spiegel* 14 (1979): 219.

10. Grass continues: "Es liegt wohl daran, daß mich die Wahrheit in bestimmten Situationen langweilt und ich dann anfangs, die Wahrheit zu variieren oder andersherum zu erfinden. Das hat natürlich manchmal schreckliche Folgen. . . . Ich gebe diesen Lügen, wenn ich sie ausspreche, nur wenig Gewicht, denn am liebsten lüge ich gedruckt. Das steht auch sicher in Beziehung mit dem Hang zur Fiktion, zum Erzählen, zum Erfinden, zum Märchenerzählen in Formen, die uns heute noch möglich sind." *Der Spiegel*: 219.

11. Heinz Ludwig Arnold, "Gespräche mit Günter Grass," *Günter Grass, Text + Kritik* 1/1a (Juni 1978): 31.

12. Grass asserts: "Mir ist auch bei der Vorarbeit noch deutlicher geworden, als ich es vorher geahnt habe, wie sehr unsere Geschichtsschreibung, die sich als authentisch ausgibt, weil sie auf Dokumenten fußt, Fiktion ist: nicht zugegebene Fiktion. Man merkt sehr rasch, daß diese Dokumente, das gesamte Frühmittelalter betreffend, die zufällig überwinterten, alle aus der Tendenz ihrer Zeit heraus geschrieben wurden von Leuten, die schreiben konnten. . . . Bis Gutenberg; da beginnt dann auf einmal etwas Breiteres, da kommen dann auch Gegenmeinungen zu Papier, aber vorher ist das alles entweder kirchliche oder fürstliche Schreiberei jeweils zu dieser oder jener Position, und damit arbeiten Historiker. Die Löcher dazwischen sind für den Schriftsteller interessant. Ich sehe mich in der Lage, genauere Fakten zu erfinden als die, die uns als angeblich authentisch überliefert wurden."

Arnold, p. 31. Richard Lawson has also commented on Grass's view of history: "In Grass's view conventional history, based as it is on the written documents of special interests (for example, ecclesiastical), is in fact fiction. As a fiction writer, not relying on documentation reflecting special interest, Grass is able to invent facts of superior authenticity." Richard H. Lawson, *Günter Grass* (New York: Ungar, 1985), p. 114.

13. Hanspeter Brode discussed this topic after the appearance of *Der Butt*: "Wir stoßen hier auf das alte, schon früher besprochene Problem des Verhältnisses von Realität und Fiktion bei Grass. Im Falle des 'Butt' geht es darum, herkömmliche Geschichtsschreibung zu überholen und mittels des Zugriffs der Phantasie das einzubringen, was im Schulgeschichtsbuch unterdrückt bleibt." Hanspeter Brode, *Günter Grass* (Munich: Beck, 1979), p. 182.

14. See, for example, p. 344, where the authorial narrator has his way, and p. 459, where Oskar's will is stronger.

15. There is an implicit criticism of alternative political movements, such as the Greens, to effect much change because of their romantic views of reality, see especially p. 121.

16. Lawson maintains: "Believing as he does that fiction is truer than history, he magisterially rearranges historical details in the service of his fiction." Lawson, p. 154.

17. Grass's view of history is quite in keeping with the contemporary debate on the literary origins of historiography as well as with Derrida's denial of any absolute center or origin of meaning. As Hayden White in "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact" maintains, the writing of history is very similar to the writing of any other kind of story. There are certain events and characters that form the base of the story line. Even in fiction, the characters may in fact be based on real people. The writer then draws the character and events together by presenting them in a literary format, which in turn prompts the reader to conjure up a certain image. Conventional historiography relies on motivations and consequences to bind the elements of the story together. Even well documented events and characters from the past, however, are subject to different interpretations. Any historian, depending on his or her perspective, omits and embellishes the "facts." But as Grass contends the facts themselves are also interpretations, equally dependent on what the writer of the document has chosen to omit, include, expand, reduce, and invent. There is indeed no center, no one source of meaning. Each fact is derived from another, which is also an interpretation. Grass is thus skeptical of official history. His experiences of life in fascist Germany have also taught him to distrust official doctrine. But his belief in a common German past and his need to transmit it to the present generation make the presentation of the past of utmost importance to him.

18. Irmgard Hunt insists that this futile searching creates a *Schwebzustand* that provides the novel with an underpinning of hope. Irmgard Hunt, "Zur Ästhetik des Schwebens: Utopieentwurf und Utopieverwurf in Günter Grass' 'Die Rätin,'" *Monatshefte* 81 (1989): 286–297.

19. "The essential political problem for the intellectual is not to criticize the ideological contents supposedly linked to science, or to ensure that his own scientific practice is accompanied by constituting a new politics of truth. The problem is not changing people's consciousness—or what's in their heads—but the political, economic, institutional regime of the production of truth." Foucault, p. 74.

20. I agree with Friedrichsmeyer that Grass intends for *Die Rätin* to provoke his readers to confront their fear of nuclear holocaust and work against its occurrence. However, Grass also stresses that fiction can become so ingrained that it appears real. He does not attempt to destroy fiction to get at the factual, but rather urges his readers to question the immutability of facts.