For your orientation I should like to state at the outset that the first half of my lecture is devoted to a comparison of *Gulliver's Travels* and *Die Rättin*\(^1\) (The She-Rat), Günter Grass's recent novel, and the second half to a comparison of *Gulliver's Travels* and *Die Blechtrommel* (The Tin Drum), Grass's first and most successful novel.

'I cannot but conclude the bulk of your natives to be the most pernicious race of little odious vermin that Nature ever suffered to crawl upon the surface of the earth.' These words were pronounced, at least in published form, in the year 1726 and were uttered by a Giant, the King of Brobdingnag, to a human being named Lemuel Gulliver, a representative of this pernicious race of vermin who, the King flatteringly suggested, might have escaped some of the vices of his countrymen. In *Die Rättin* by Günter Grass, which was published two hundred and sixty years after the publication of *Gulliver's Travels*, man is described, not on one occasion as being a type of vermin, but throughout the book as being something lower than a rat. Man deserves this classification, according to the book, because of his failure to prevent the destruction of mankind as a result of nuclear warfare.

Gulliver, as the representative of his country, is entertained to a further devastating analysis of the human race during the course of his fourth voyage. On this occasion he is regarded, so he tells us, by a horse, the Master Houyhnhnm, in the following terms: 'he looked upon us as a sort of animals to whose share, by what accident he could not conjecture, some small pittance of reason had fallen, whereof we made no other use than by its assistance to aggravate our natural corruptions, and to acquire new ones which Nature had not given us.' In Günter Grass's book – neither it nor *Gulliver's Travels* is provided with any generic label – the denunciation of man also proceeds from the mouth of an animal, in this case from the mouth of a she-rat, and is not restricted

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to one section as is the case in *Gulliver's Travels*. In fact the whole of Grass’s recent book is based upon a dialogue between a narrator and a she-rat. By now it will be obvious that Swift’s and Grass’s books are linked at least superficially by one common feature: the two works are reliant upon a fantastic myth, a make-believe situation that animals can speak or, for example, that a giant may exist and that it is possible for a man to have a meaningful discourse with such creatures of the imagination. Each of these books creates its own world which operates in accordance with its own set of rules and regulations. In a sense both of them have much in common with fairy-tales.

In order to assist orientation let me give you a brief indication of the content of Grass’s novel. In *Die Rättin* Grass satirizes the monstrous inhumanity of the nuclear bomb. He creates, for example, the all-embracing myth, that the narrator can orbit the world in a satellite, whilst the latter remains in communication with a she-rat on earth capable of describing the before and after of a nuclear war. Like the Master Houyhnhnm or the King of the Brobdingnag the rat produces an indictment of man and his viciousness and comes to the conclusion that only by imitating the rat and its many good qualities will man manage to reform himself. The satire is, as one might expect, double-edged; the rat denounces man and yet is unmasked by the events in which ‘she’ is involved. The story itself is told by the narrator who views the world, and Danzig in particular, from above. Given the fact that the book is based upon a dialogue between narrator and rat – and given the fact also that there are five narrative strands – the viewpoint is constantly shifting.

As has been indicated the book consists of five narrative elements: firstly, the rat tells the story of the nuclear explosion; secondly, the narrator entertains the rat with the story of a voyage which a group of women undertake across the Baltic in order to establish the extent to which the Baltic is infested with jelly-fish. In the course of the voyage they are involved in a nuclear explosion. Thirdly, the narrator relates how Oskar Matzerath of *Tin Drum* fame visits Danzig in order to be present at his grandmother’s birthday celebrations. She and her guests also suffer the consequences of the nuclear attack. Fourthly, we are presented with the career of an artist who forges paintings in Lübeck and who mirrors in his activities the false policies of the fifties as pursued by Adenauer and Ulbricht. Fifthly, the narrator introduces the reader to characters from Grimm’s fairy-tales who unsuccessfully attempt to prevent the destruction of the German forests.

In *Die Rättin* Grass does introduce or reintroduce us, as has been indicated, to a series of characters from Grimm’s fairy-tales, and in any case he prepared his reader in advance for the acceptance of talking creatures by writing *Der Butt* (*The Flounder*). In *Gulliver’s Travels* and in *Die Rättin* the use of the fantastic, of talking animals, or the presence of giants or minute-size human beings are reminiscent of fairy-tales. Nevertheless, neither book possesses the mood of a
fairy-tale, both have in many ways a strongly realistic tone – realistic in their attention to detail and realistic in their condemnation of the absurd aspects of man’s behaviour. It would perhaps be just as appropriate to refer to Swift’s book as an example of an adventure story full of fantastic voyages, imitating the travel books of his time in playful manner. Equally well it could be claimed that *Die Rättin* is also a traveller’s tale, for the narrator orbits the world whilst remaining in conversation with his she-rat, and furthermore the other stories he has to tell his audience, i.e. the rat and us, could also be classified as voyages: the women sail across the Baltic from Travemünde via Sweden to Gdansk, Oskar Matzerath travels from Düsseldorf to Gdansk, the fairy-tale figures make their outing to Bonn, and Malskat, the forger of paintings, flits to and fro in history and place, concentrating mainly on Lübeck. Both works share some of the characteristics of fairy-tales and adventure stories. Simultaneously each of them, by adventures and/or fairy-tale elements, achieves a release of imaginative momentum. Once the myth has been swallowed, once the make-believe has been accepted, a new, hitherto uncharted emotional world is opened up, and the innocent reader is drawn into it.

Having commented upon the fairy-tale element and the adventure-story element in the two books let us now look, firstly, at the narrative perspective, secondly, the ironic style, thirdly, the criteria which underlie the critical viewpoint and, fourthly, the parallelism between the content of the books and the happenings in the outside world.

Firstly, then, the narrative perspective with respect to *Gulliver’s Travels* and *Die Rättin*. In both books there is, broadly speaking, a tripartite division of narrative labour: the author (Swift or Grass), the narrator (Gulliver in the case of Swift’s book) and the partner in the dialogue (the rat, or the Emperor of Lilliput, the King of Brobdingnag or the Master Houyhnhnm). The author himself stands quite apart from the literary proceedings, he does not share in all the fuss and nonsense. We should not therefore be taken in when Gulliver, in totally unscientific manner, refers to himself as the author. This fact perhaps led naive critics, such as Mr Thackeray, to conclude that Swift and Gulliver were identical in their attitudes and pronouncements. Hence Mr Thackeray was adamant in his castigation of Swift’s misanthropy in Gulliver’s voyage to the Houyhnhnhms. However, it is clear that the author employs the narrator as a narrative device, a mask behind which he conveniently hides. Neither Swift nor Grass intervenes in the narrative process to indicate his standpoint. Nevertheless the gulf between author and narrator in *Die Rättin* is narrower than between author and Oskar Matzerath in *Die Blechtrommel*. There is, however, a fundamental distinction between *Die Blechtrommel* and *Die Rättin* in that the recent book Grass has his narrator state what his objective is in acting as narrator. Criteria are at hand in both *Gulliver’s Travels* and *Die Rättin*. Nevertheless one is always haunted
by the residual fear that one is liable to misinterpret simply because the words in question proceed from the mouth of the narrator or from the correspondent. In *Gulliver's Travels*, for example, the King of Brobdingnag ventures to explain his view of the world: ‘And he gave it for his opinion, that whoever could make two ears of corn, or two blades of grass, to grow upon a spot of ground where only one grew before, would deserve better of mankind, and do more essential service to his country, than the whole race of politicians put together.’ There is a moral yardstick here – the idea of devoting oneself to the service of others is a noble sentiment. In the topsy-turvy fictional world of Dean Swift there still remains the difficulty of how we should apply it in the book. In *Die Rättin* Grass has his narrator explain the narrative perspective and narrative objective at one and the same time:

Dann träumte mir: ich sitze in einer Raumkapsel, bin aber nicht aufstellare Erscheinungen fixiert, sondern bemühe mich, was auf der Erde geschieht, in meine Technik zu füttern, damit man endlich begreift, daß es nicht weitergehen kann so. Ich meine die vielen Probleme, die, von oben gesehen, überall deutlich ungelöst rumliegen. Zum Beispiel: Wohin mit dem Müll? oder: Wie sollen die viel zu vielen Quallen gezahlt werden? Und wer wird die sterbenden Wälder wieder gesundmachen, sobald wir, wie im Märchen der Prinz, die Fehlerquelle endlich entdeckt haben? (p. 233).²

In *Die Blechtrommel* the narrator enjoys an underview of situations, now twenty-seven years later the narrator chooses an overview of events. The change in perspective is accompanied by a change in the range and subject matter of the book. Oskar concerns himself with Germany and things German, whilst the narrator in *Die Rättin* adopts a world view, he looks at problems which have global implications. At least the book in its totality adopts a global perspective. Like *Gulliver's Travels*, *Die Rättin* is a work of political satire, though this is not to say that religion itself escapes unscathed.

In *Die Rättin* the narrator surveys the world from on high – from his space capsule – and all the information which is supplied to the reader stems from this source. Nevertheless the viewpoint is never static. The satiric attack comes from a number of different quarters and can unpredictably change direction. As in *Gulliver's Travels* the narrator and his partner can act as the medium of satire and yet can equally well be exposed to ridicule. Both narrator and partners in the two works are narrative devices and hence do not operate within the

² ‘Then I dream that I am sitting in a space capsule, I am not, however, obsessed by stellar phenomena but am attempting to feed earthly happenings into my technology, so that we can finally understand that it can’t go on like this. I am thinking of the many problems, which, looked at from above, lie around everywhere unresolved. For example: where should we put our waste materials? Or: how should the far too many jelly fish be counted? And who will revitalize the dying woods, as soon as we have finally detected the source of the error, just like the Prince in the fairy-tale?’ Own translation.
framework of normal – or abnormal – psychology. Their authors indulge in pretence and make-believe. Accordingly author and narrator can twist and turn as they think fit. The reader is, in a sense, a victim of their unpredictability. Neither Swift nor Grass conveys any insight into character or into feeling. The author’s intention is to create an intensity of feeling, to project an essential negativism, as Leavis maintains in his article on Swift’s irony. Both Gulliver and the narrator in Die Rättin are ‘refractive windows on the world’.

As we have already observed, the satire in both Gulliver’s Travels and Die Rättin can proceed from a number of angles and is constantly changing direction. The unpredictability of this attack and hence the vulnerability of the reader are enhanced by the fact that both books consist of a set of narrative units. In Gulliver’s Travels the narrative units, such as the voyages, succeed one another; in Die Rättin the five narrative units are broken down into a number of sections, each unit advancing simultaneously at a similar pace and being united in the climax of the book. Each narrative unit differs in its story content and its satiric intensity. The mere fact that the voyages to Lilliput and Brobdingnag can be offered to children is an indication of their quality as exciting adventure tales. In Die Rättin the stories which deal with the fairy-tale figures or the women’s voyage across the Baltic are at least initially much milder – as one might expect – than the episode in which the narrator and the rat are involved. The voyages which Gulliver undertakes force him to view the world differently, simply because he has to accustom himself to a new set of dimensions. In Die Rättin each narrative unit tends to have a different target: the narrator/rat episode concentrates on the nuclear bomb, the story of the characters from Grimm’s fairy-tales on the problem of pollution and the accompanying destruction of the forests, and the career of Malskat on the divisive and backward-looking policies of Adenauer and Ulbricht in the fifties. The variation in narrative and satiric content accentuates the impact of the satire once the onslaught gathers momentum. The attack which comes after a period of relatively calm narrative weather is much more devastating than a barrage which never abates. Each book could be claimed to reach a climax in its closing stages, though some qualifications are appropriate with regard to Gulliver’s Travels. It is certainly true to say that the satire reaches a higher level of intensity and bitterness in the Fourth Voyage than is the case elsewhere, though it could be maintained that Gulliver’s idealistic conversion to the Houyhnhnms’ rationality smacks of comic absurdity. In Die Rättin there are no reservations: the use of the nuclear bomb is utterly condemned. The narrative does reach its

climax in the final stages of the book in that the characters from three of the narrative strands are affected by the nuclear explosion and a fourth – the Malskat episode – is implicated in this final dénouement. In the narrator’s dream Oskar Matzerath, Anna Koljaiczk (i.e. the grandmother) and her relatives, and Damroka plus her companions, in short, all mankind with the exception of the narrator in orbit perish in the nuclear explosions which envelop the world.

Now let us comment, secondly, on the irony. The common feature of both these works is, of course, the ironical style. They share this characteristic with Die Blechtrommel though in the latter novel there are no stated or implied criteria, and Grass employs the grotesque, which is an aspect of irony, as his means of reduction. In Gulliver’s Travels and Die Rättin the irony is more militant than in Die Blechtrommel though in many cases it still remains open-ended. In both Swift and Grass the irony extends over the full range from the hilarious to the savagely grim. Both works provide us with clear-cut examples of full-throated invective, and both come to similar conclusions about the history of man. The King of Brobdingnag produces the following analysis:

He was perfectly astonished with the historical account I gave him of our affairs during the last century; protesting it was only a heap of conspiracies, rebellions, murders, massacres, revolutions, banishments; the very worst effects that avarice, faction, hypocrisy, perfidiousness, cruelty, rage, madness, hatred, envy, lust, malice and ambition could produce.

The she-rat instructs its offspring in the rudiments of European history both between rats and between human beings:


The juxtaposition of the serious and the comic coupled with the listing of items contributes to the intensification of feeling and accentuates the sense of revulsion on the part of the reader. Elsewhere the double voice of irony, its dual perception of the comic and the tragic, borders

5 'It was not only Poles and Germans. It was just as murderous in human history between Serbs and Croats, English and Irish, Turks and Kurds, Blacks and Blacks, Orientals and Orientals, Christians and Jews, Jews and Arabs, Christians and Christians, Indians and Eskimos. They have slit each other's throats and mowed each other down, starved each other to death and exterminated each other. And all that first started in their brains. And because man thought it out, and executed his plans, humanity no longer exists.' Own translation.
on the grotesque, as is apparent in the following quotation from Swift\(^6\) (though not from *Gulliver’s Travels*): ‘Last week I saw a woman flayed, and you will hardly believe how much it altered her person for the worse.’ A not dissimilar effect is produced in *Die Rättin* in describing the appearance of men after the atomic explosion: ‘Diese Gestik! Soviel leidvolle Körpersprache! Wir erinnerten Zeiten frühgotischer Ekstase. Nein, nie zuvor hat der Mensch stärkeren Ausdruck gefunden als im Zustand seiner Entsaftung.’ (p. 172)\(^7\) The tongue-in-cheek attitude results in a surface meaning being belied by the underlying, more substantial and yet unstated meaning. This double-stopping, the co-existence of disparate elements, generates an intensity of feeling which borders on a gut-reaction of rejection. And yet the statement is clothed in a dispassionate, matter-of-fact tone.

Both narrators adopt a down-to-earth, unemotional mode of writing. They are both meticulous in their attention to detail. Gulliver, for example, describes in precise manner his family background, and he gives us a step by step account of how he came to be shipwrecked on the island of Lilliput. He is so concerned to give us a realistic picture of his personality and his adventures that within a short period of time we might be inclined to think of him as thoroughly trustworthy and incapable of exaggeration. The details testify, so we might imagine, to the authenticity of the account. We are totally absorbed into his world, so much so that we are almost prepared to suspend disbelief on learning that he, a giant in a land of minute pygmies, has been tied down to the ground by a host of diminutive creatures. From that moment onwards we enter a world in which plausible, wild and grotesque elements jostle each other in topsy-turvy manner. We are shuttled mercilessly between the real and the unreal. The factual concentration on aspects of events and environment coupled with the fantastic enhances the impact of the satire, and the innocent reader is thus left pitilessly exposed to the caustic comments of the narrator and/or his partner. And so it is with *Die Rättin*. The narrator clothes his world with plausibility. He provides us, for example, with an exact historical description of the ship on which the women undertake their voyage across the Baltic (pp. 18–21); the narrator introduces the reader one by one to the guests at the grandmother’s birthday celebrations along with the presents they bring from distant parts of the globe (pp. 215–19, 261–6, 295–302), and he leads us street by street through Gdansk after the human race has been obliterated (pp. 205–15). The realistic soon merges into the horrific when the narrator refers to the shrivelled, desiccated human corpses being eaten by the

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\(^6\) Jonathan Swift, *Tale of a Tub* (1704), ch.IX.

\(^7\) ‘These gestures! So much sorrowful body language! We were reminded of periods of early Gothic ecstasy. Never before has man found such perfect expression as he did in this state of nuclear desiccation.’ Own translation.
rats. The story which started as a dream has turned into a nightmare which in turn has become more real than reality. We see the same kind of progression in Der Butt (The Flounder) where Grimm's fairy-tale of the insatiable fisher's wife is converted in political terms into its grim male counter-version.

Having looked at the narrative perspective and the irony, let us now comment, thirdly, on the criteria on which judgement is based. The more one compares the two texts, the more one realizes that the ultimate criterion from which both authors launch their attack upon human history and human behaviour is the yardstick of reason. In Gulliver's Travels we have already noted how the Master Houyhnhnm accuses man of having used his reason to accentuate his shortcomings rather than for the advantage of mankind. The suggestion is implied that reason should be the yardstick of human behaviour, and this is not the only one in the book. Günter Grass in his work of fiction places reason in the forefront of the reader's mind by constantly referring by title to Lessing's Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts (The Education of Mankind) which was published in 1780, some fifty-four years after the appearance of Gulliver's Travels, and which attaches prime importance to reason in the education of man. Though Grass does not mention Lessing by name, his belief in the values of the Enlightenment, in rationalism and humanitarianism, has been well documented in his theoretical writings. In Die Rättin the author has Oskar Matzerath produce the bitterly sardonic comment that man has educated himself for the Big Bang: 'Auf dieses Ereignis hin hat sich das Menschengeschlecht erzogen.' (p. 458). Elsewhere the rat satirizes man for surrendering his reason to the computer and thus abandoning all responsibility: 'Ihr Narren! Die letzten Reste Vernunft wie Käsebrocklein an nimmersatte Computer verfüttert, damit sie Verantwortung trügen . . . ' (p. 168). In both works reason is the implied or sometimes even openly stated criterion by which the indictment of man proceeds.

And now a fourth and final point with regard to Gulliver's Travels and Die Rättin - the parallels between internal and external happenings. Since political satire gains its momentum from the political scene at the time of its inception, correspondences are bound to be established between the two spheres, between the situation in the work of art and the activities in the real political sphere. In short, there is bound to be an interplay between the imaginary internal events and the events external to the work of art. In John Gay's Beggar's Opera or in Dryden's Absolom and Achitophel, for example, indirect parallels may be drawn between the characters in the work concerned and the political personalities of the day. This is the case also in Gulliver's

8 'You fools! Feeding the last remnants of reason like crumbs of cheese to insatiable computers, so that they could bear the responsibility.' Own translation.
Travels; the goings-on in Lilliput are meant to resemble the political machinations associated with Prime Minister Walpole, and the parallel is employed as a method of satiric reduction. The names of the political personalities at the time are, however, not stated. In Die Rättin, for example, the aggressive territorial expansion of the ‘Menschenratten’ (human rats) is likened to the activities of the Teutonic Knights (p. 425). On other occasions correspondences are established between the disputes amongst groups of rats and the religious arguments of previous centuries (p. 306). The similarity is stated quite openly. There are other occasions when the narrator keeps his cards close to his chest. The antics of the fairy-tale characters are a case in point. Their objectives are laudable, preventing the contamination of the air and the rivers and preventing the destruction of the forests (see p. 404). What they actually do has no political relevance. They try to gain power, with the assistance of Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm, they attempt to bring the machinery of the state and of society to a halt by encouraging massive plant growth and are ultimately eliminated, apart from Hänsel and Gretel, by military assault vehicles. The reader wonders, or at least this reader wonders, whether in this episode Grass cum narrator is not burlesquing the attitudes and activities of the Greens.

Gulliver’s Travels and Die Rättin have much in common. Both books may be classified as political satire, they apply the same criteria, attack similar targets, employ a wide range of comparable satiric methods and yet create an atmosphere of ambiguity and ambivalence, leaving the reader much bewildered. In both works a unitary interpretation is wellnigh impossible as is the case with Die Blechtrommel. They generate above all an intensity of negative feeling. Creative powers are exhibited paradoxically in negation. There is an intensity of feelings, though we are not granted any insight into them. In both works we witness ‘a fusion of moral insight and imaginative translation’. Like Swift, Grass has accomplished a felicitous union of politics and art and thus put to flight those German critics who claim that dabbling in politics ruins art. It is perhaps not inappropriate to compare Grass with a great established satirist, i.e. Swift, in order to give respectability to political satire, which is sometimes accorded reluctant recognition in the German realm, and of which Grass has now provided a splendid example.

So far we have been concerned to highlight the correspondences which exist between Gulliver’s Travels and Die Rättin. At the same time we have indicated in passing that there are equally interesting analogies which can be drawn between Gulliver’s Travels and Grass’s

9 Leavis, Determinations, 29.
first novel *Die Blechtrommel* which many critics would regard as his best novel. The starting point for a comparison between *Gulliver's Travels* and *Die Rättin* was the fact that in both works an animal soundly berated man for his misdeeds. *Gulliver's Travels* and *Die Blechtrommel* provide at least initially a slightly different common denominator, a different narrative perspective. In both works we are confronted with 'the device of relative size' and this enables man or German man to be seen from a startling angle. In *Gulliver's Travels* we have what John F. Ross has described as 'the incredible double scale of size, human and Lilliputian, reported without comment by Gulliver, who accepts the Lilliputian scale as easily as the human'. In *Die Blechtrommel* the narrator, Oskar Matzerath, is a child who at the age of three decides to halt his growth by throwing himself down some cellar steps. This is the starting point for the eccentric narrative perspective. We are naturally given his height – 1 metre 21 cm. Oskar thus views the world from the perspective of the child. He can observe as he sits under a table how his uncle’s foot disappears into his mother’s skirt whilst above the table uncle and mother play cards with Oskar’s father at Christmas. It could be maintained that Oskar is closer to the lower regions of man and of woman. He is closer (by virtue of his physical proportions) to that animal which Swift referred to as the animal capable of reason rather than as a rational animal. It must be emphasized, however, that Oskar does not sit in judgement on humanity or on ‘animality’. He merely supplies the reader with an underview of the world. Even in *Katz und Maus*, the ‘Novelle’ which Grass published in 1961, it could be maintained – perhaps with a larger dose of ingenuity – that the reader is faced with a double scale of size in that the narrator, Pilenz, is a pygmy in terms of maturity when he sets himself the task of describing the death of a school-friend which took place during the war. But in one sense this is also Oskar’s problem, for he has the intelligence of a child but it is not coupled with the maturity which physical growth brings with it. Furthermore, Oskar is treated as a child because of his size and thus is not encouraged to escape his childish perspective. In any case the mask of the child is a convenient shield behind which he can conceal himself and evade the responsibility of the adult world. In short, both Oskar in *Die Blechtrommel* and Pilenz in *Katz und Maus* are unreliable, immature narrators.

Grass compounds the bewilderment of the reader by the opening sentence of *Die Blechtrommel*: ‘Zugegeben: ich bin Insasse einer Heil- und Pflegeanstalt, mein Pfleger beobachtet mich, läßt mich kaum aus...’

dem Auge; denn in der Tür ist ein Guckloch, und meines Pflegers Auge ist von jenem Braun, welches mich, den Blauäugigen, nicht durchschauen kann.\textsuperscript{13} This opening sentence casts its shadow over the whole narrative. A person who pretends to be a child relates his experiences in Germany in the years between 1924 and 1954 from within a mental asylum. Given these facts the comment C.J. Rawson\textsuperscript{14} makes about Gulliver is equally applicable to Oskar: ‘we do not . . . think of him as a “character” at all in more than a very attenuated sense: the emphasis is so preponderantly on what can be shown through him (including what he says and thinks) than on his person in its own right, that we are never allowed to accustom ourselves to him as a real personality . . .’ In both books the author ruthlessly exploits the narrator as a narrative device, as a mask or persona through which (not whom) the ways of the world, the absurdity of the human condition, may be displayed. In \textit{Die Blechtrommel} in particular it is exceptionally difficult to identify oneself with or sympathize with Oskar, partly because we gain no insight into the workings of his mind – except in a very general sense – and partly because his motives are obscured by concealment and pretence. Nevertheless, through the narrative device of Oskar we gain an underview of events which took place primarily in the years between 1924 and 1954. This is not to say, of course, that we are presented with a series of grandiose happenings which stem from the monumental view of history as depicted in our history text books. We are introduced rather to a topsy-turvy world of inconsequential incidents which are rooted in the petit bourgeois atmosphere of Danzig and then later of postwar Düsseldorf.

Narrative perspective is the first area which allows us to establish a correspondence between \textit{Gulliver's Travels} and \textit{Die Blechtrommel}. Irony constitutes the second link, for the ironic style is the hallmark of both works. Both authors, or the narrators who ostensibly write on their behalf, consistently put their tongue in their cheek, so much so that in \textit{Die Blechtrommel} we are frequently bereft of all orientation. Since the ironist is wont to say the opposite of what he thinks, he unsettles the reader, leaves him bewildered and, as C.J. Rawson\textsuperscript{15} states, gives a curious precariousness to the reader’s grasp of what is going on. The ironist speaks with a forked tongue; he conveys a surface meaning to which the reader produces a counter-response. The two meanings conflict one with another and generate a third more intense compound of meaning. The poise of the reader is undermined

\textsuperscript{13} ‘Granted: I am an inmate of a mental hospital; my keeper is watching me, he never lets me out of his sight; there’s a peephole in the door, and my keeper’s eye is the shade of brown that can never see through a blue-eyed type like me.’ Penguin translation.
\textsuperscript{15} Rawson, \textit{The Gentle Reader}, 5.
furthermore by what Leavis\textsuperscript{16} has called ‘the unpredictable movement of the attack’. In \textit{Gulliver’s Travels} the satirical thrust may come from a number of directions and seek out a series of different targets. And sometimes the narrator has to bear the brunt of the onslaught and sometimes it is the reader who is trapped. When Gulliver naively describes the causes of war to the Master Houyhnhnm, it is quite clear what is being denounced:

Difference in opinion has cost many millions of lives: for instance, whether flesh be bread, or bread be flesh; whether the juice of a certain berry be blood or wine . . . Neither are any wars so furious and bloody, or of so long continuance, as those occasioned by difference of opinion, especially if it be in things indifferent.

There are examples of irony of this kind in \textit{Die Blechtrommel} though they are much fewer in number. One such instance is a trooper’s expulsion from the Sturmbteilung (SA) because of cruelty to animals:

Selbst als sich der SA-Mann während der Nacht vom achten zum neunten November achtunddreißig, die man später die Kristallnacht nannte, besonders mutig hervortat, die Langfuhrer Synagoge im Michaelisweg mit anderen in Brand steckte, auch kräftig mittat, als am folgenden Morgen mehrere, zuvor genau bezeichnete Geschäfte geräumt werden mußten, konnte all sein Eifer seine Entfernung aus der Reiter-SA nicht verhindern. Wegen unmenschlicher Tierqualerei wurde er degradiert und von der Mitgliederliste gestrichen.\textsuperscript{17}

The fact that cruelty to human beings is placed on a lower scale than cruelty to animals fuels the satirical attack, and there can be little room for misunderstanding. The criteria by which the evaluation takes place are implied and not stated. In \textit{Die Blechtrommel} there are no characters who provide a moral yardstick, and the author’s voice is absent from his creation. In \textit{Gulliver’s Travels} the author also keeps his distance, but there are characters who talk sense, even if this is not always the case. The Emperor of Lilliput, the King of Brobdingnag or the Master Houyhnhnm and Gulliver himself – sometimes naively or unwittingly – do provide the reader with a kind of orientation. In \textit{Die Blechtrommel} there are no such guidelines. The reader is dependent upon recognizing the clash of opposites, the confrontation between appearance and reality. He is forced to react to the juxtaposition of the tragic and the comic, he laughs and cries at the same time. In short, the distinctive feature of Grass’s prose style is the grotesque. For example, Albrecht Greff, a greengrocer, has just received a summons to appear

\textsuperscript{16} Leavis, \textit{Determinations}, 19.

\textsuperscript{17} ‘Even his conspicuous bravery on the night of 8 November, which later became known as Crystal Night, when he helped set fire to the Langfuhrer synagogue in Michaelisweg, even his meritorious activity the following morning when a number of stores, carefully designated in advance, were closed down for the good of the nation, could not halt his expulsion from the Mounted SA. For inhuman cruelty to animals he was stricken from the membership list.’ Penguin translation.
in court because of a sexual offence and hangs himself on a platform in the cellar of his shop so that, when his body is released, a drumming machine produces a weird set of sounds and potatoes come cascading down:


The reader is amused and horrified simultaneously. It could be maintained, of course, that the comic is outweighed by the fearful, if not gruesome, element. The amusement is accompanied by a gut reaction of rejection and nausea on the part of the reader. The passage produces an alienating and disorientating effect upon the mind of the reader. A didactic element is absent, there are no moral criteria. This still remains the case when the reader realizes that Greff's personal predicament coincides with the impending disaster of the German army in Stalingrad towards the end of 1942. After all, Stalingrad was Hitler's grand finale, and Hitler's highest aspiration was to be a drummer. Nevertheless, the reader remains perplexed, being surrounded by all this ambiguity and ambivalence. The remark which C.J. Rawson makes in connection with Swift is just as applicable to Günter Grass: 'The tense hovering between laughter and something else, . . . the ironic twists and counter-twists, and the endless flickering uncertainties of local effect suggest that one of Swift's most active satiric weapons is bewilderment.' 19 A further observation from the pen of C.J. Rawson has a validity for both Swift and Grass: 'the proper focus for Swift's precise sober narrative links is paradoxically a blurred focus, because we do not know what to make of all the precision.' 20 One only needs to look at the passage describing Greff's suicide to realize that Grass displays a meticulous attention to detail. Nevertheless, despite the parallelism between personal experiences

18 'The ambulance siren aroused me from my meditations about the greengrocer's death. A moment later they came hobbling down the cellar stairs, mounted the steps to the platform, and took the dangling Greff in hand. No sooner had they lifted him than the potato baskets making a counterweight fell with a crash, releasing a mechanism similar to that of the drumming machine, housed on top of the scaffolding but discreetly sheathed in plywood. While down below potatoes rolled over the platform or fell directly to the concrete floor, up above clappers pounded upon tin, wood, bronze, and glass, an orchestra of drums was unleashed: Albrecht Greff's grand finale.' Penguin translation.
20 Rawson, The Gentle Reader, 10.
and political events in *Die Blechtrommel*, the specific target of the attack remains unidentifiable. What Grass arouses in the mind of the reader is a generalized feeling of revulsion against the atmosphere of an age. What differentiates Swift from Grass in the two works we have been discussing is that Grass’s irony has a greater emotional intensity — and this is in keeping with his use of the grotesque — than is the case with Swift whose irony, though not lacking emotional momentum, has a greater intellectual thrust.

One final point about irony. John F. Ross advises us to be on our ‘guard against simplifying an elaborate ironist’, and surely this is correct advice with regard to both Swift and Grass. Ernest Tuveson produces an equally valid warning against imposing a unitary interpretation on a work of Swift and goes on to state that ‘just as there is no single “meaning” of *King Lear*, but many interrelated and probably paradoxical ones, so there is no single “meaning” of *Gulliver’s Travels*.’ Both Shakespeare and Swift — Grass would be flattered to be mentioned in the company of Shakespeare — convey a sense of the complexity and ultimately unstatable mystery of man, at least according to John F. Ross. For this reason the irony in *Gulliver’s Travels* and in *Die Blechtrommel* cannot be grasped within one single formula.

We have mentioned narrative perspective and irony in *Gulliver’s Travels* and *Die Blechtrommel*. Now let us look at the theme of reason in the two works. On a number of occasions in *Gulliver’s Travels* Swift raises the banner of reason as the ultimate criterion by which the absurdity of man’s behaviour may be judged. He objected, admittedly, to Pope’s definition of man as ‘animal rationale’ and revised it by describing man as ‘rationis capax’ — a terminological change which is more in tune with the twentieth-century view of man. In his theoretical works Grass is equally keen to sing the praises of reason as the yardstick of human affairs. As we have stated earlier, it is obviously not coincidental that in *Die Rättin* Grass should make frequent references to Lessing’s *Die Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts*. If one looks at the novel of *Die Blechtrommel* the reader will find that the word for reason is unobtrusively tucked away in the narrative, and the inattentive eye might scarcely detect its presence. In general terms it can be maintained that the personal happenings within the novel coupled with the imagery suggest that on the personal level, and by implication on the political level, reason has been vanquished by unreason. All the amorous adventures which are described in the novel conform to this emotional pattern. The confrontation between reason and unreason is allusively suggested by the imagery of ‘Kopf’ (head) and ‘Schwanz’ (tail). In one particular scene Oskar describes

how the sexual triangle of his mother, his putative father and his uncle observe eels – by implication the equivalent of ‘tail’ (or ‘Schwanz’) – devouring a horse’s head. Agnes, the mother – like many readers after her – is nauseated by this sight, for she regards it instinctively as the objectivization of her own sexual predicament in which she has been engaged with Jan Bronski, Oskar’s uncle. As is usual with the episodes in Grass’s novel, there is a clustering of associations which allow a number of interpretations to be simultaneously valid. This scene re-echoes yet again the principal features of other comparable happenings in the novel and conjures up a sexual vision in which passion and lust emerge victorious over reason and moderation. The imagery, ably assisted by the incidents themselves, acquires a persuasive, if not argumentative, quality and supplies the reader obliquely and insidiously with clearly perceivable hints of orientation. Oskar initiates himself into the rites of love-making by pouring sherbet into the navel of his girlfriend, adding his own saliva, and thereby producing an eruption of volcanic fury. The novel abounds in acts of love-making which combine amusing and sordid elements in varying proportions.

Aldous Huxley23, you will recall, claims that Swift’s hatred of the bowels is the essence of his misanthropy and underlies the whole of his work. Middleton Murry24 for his part spoke of Swift’s ‘Excremental Vision’. At a later date Norman O. Brown25 rode valiantly to the defence of Swift and proposed that we should seek to appreciate Swift’s excremental vision as a mode of insight into the universal neurosis of mankind. It was Swift’s achievement, so he claimed, to have recognized the close intimate relationship between the physical and the spiritual and to have portrayed man’s degeneration in terms of the victory of the body over the mind, or, to use Grass’s terms, the victory of the tail over the head. If Swift’s vision of the world is excremental, then Grass’s vision is sexual. Indeed, a legal case was brought against Grass precisely because of this sexual vision which in the court, of course, was termed pornography. Part of the case was based upon a scene in Katz und Maus in which a group of boys indulge in a collective act of masturbation. One could defend Grass in this instance by stating that during the National Socialist period the youth of Germany committed acts of emotional – and political – self-abuse and were victimized and abused by the criminal regime they wittingly or unwittingly supported. In short, the sexual vision of Grass, like the excremental vision of Swift, becomes a vehicle through which the inhumanity of man can be illuminated and denounced. Both Swift and Grass – in their various ways – give us an insight into the neurosis of mankind. They venture to embark, as Freud might have said, upon

the pathology of a cultural community. They both condemn obliquely the irrationality of man’s behaviour.

In conclusion, it may be stated that the narrative perspective, the ironical style and the theme of reason allow correspondences to be established between *Gulliver's Travels*, *Die Rättin* and *Die Blechtrommel*. Swift has said of himself that 'the chief end I propose to myself in all my labours is to vex the world rather than divert it'. This may well have been his purpose, but one could equally well claim that he succeeds simultaneously in diverting and vexing the world. This, I think, is also Günter Grass’s achievement.