



## Crabwalk

*By Gunter Grass*

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Hailed by critics and readers alike as Günter Grass's best book since *The Tin Drum*, *Crabwalk* is an engrossing account of the sinking of the *Wilhelm Gustloff* and a critical meditation on Germany's struggle with its wartime memories.

The *Gustloff*, a German cruise ship turned refugee carrier, was attacked by a Soviet submarine in January 1945. Some nine thousand people went down in the Baltic Sea, making it the deadliest maritime disaster of all time. Born to an unwed mother on a lifeboat the night of the attack, Paul Pokriefke is a middle-aged journalist trying to piece together the tragic events. For his teenage son, who dabbles in the dark, far-right corners of the Internet, the *Gustloff* embodies the denial of Germany's suffering. *Crabwalk* is at once a captivating tale of a tragedy at sea and a fearless examination of the ways different generations of Germans now view their past.

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## Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

In a novel that has already attracted attention on both sides of the Atlantic, Nobelist Grass (*Too Far Afield*) employs a compelling vehicle for his latest excursion into Germany's tortured past. The Wilhelm Gustloff was a Nazi cruise ship refitted to rescue German refugees from the approaching Russian army in the waning days of WWII. The vessel was torpedoed by a Russian sub in the Baltic Sea, resulting in the deaths of 9,000 people and becoming the largest maritime disaster of the 20th century. Grass's unlikely narrator is second-rate journalist Paul Pokriefke, whose mother gave birth to him while the ship was collapsing. Pokriefke's irreverent narrative, couched in colloquial language, moves back and forth through the history of the incident, starting with the story of Gustloff, a Nazi functionary who was shot in 1936 by a Jewish medical student named David Frankfurter. Grass also weaves in details about the Russian sub commander, Aleksandr Marinesko, but the decidedly modern touch is the inclusion of Pokriefke's son, Konrad, an unbalanced loner who becomes deeply involved with the Web site dedicated to commemorating Gustloff's "martyrdom" and the vessel Hitler named after him. Though the elliptical narration and multiple subplots intentionally impede dramatic momentum, this is one of Grass's most accessible novels, and the closing chapters about the rescue of Pokriefke's mother are simply riveting. The final irony is the fate of Konrad, who, in search of revenge, goes after a man posing as Frankfurter on the Web site. Grass has covered many of these issues in earlier novels, but this time he addresses the suffering of German civilians during and after the conflict. A writer who refuses to avert his eyes from unpleasant truths, he remains an eloquent explorer of his country's troubled 20th-century history.

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From Library Journal

In 1945, a Soviet submarine sunk the German refugee ship Wilhelm Gustoff, resulting in 9000 deaths-the worst maritime disaster ever. Grass here reimagines not just the event but the consequences for postwar Germany.

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From [Booklist](#)

The latest novel by this Nobel laureate is a stunning work of historical fiction, centering on the worst maritime disaster in history, the sinking of *Wilhelm Gustloff* on January 30, 1945, by a Soviet submarine. Packed with more than 10,000 people, mostly refugees, only 1,238 survived the sinking. Grass' narrator, a journalist named Paul Pokriefke, is a survivor of that disaster--of sorts. His mother was on board and nine months pregnant on that fateful day, and Paul was born soon after she was rescued. Because of his connection with the disaster, Pokriefke is hired to write its history. While researching on the Internet, Pokriefke discovers that his estranged teenage son is also interested in the disaster, spurred on by his grandmother, whose postwar life was spent in East Germany, and by the rising skinhead movement. It is here that fate overtakes the Pokriefke family. The ship's history and that of the Pokriefkes is too strongly intertwined, and one tragedy leads to the next. *Frank Caso*

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