Perhaps its fitting that the 1999 winner of the Nobel Prize for literature, Günter Grass, should be the one to see the old millennium out in style. His My Century is comprised of 100 short chapters, one for each year of the 20th century, each told by a different narrator. And of course, since Grass is German, the century he refers to is German as well—a fact that could prove a little daunting to readers not familiar with the intricacies of that country's history. 1900, for example, throws us smack in the middle of the Chinese Boxer Rebellion from a German soldier's point of view. 1903 jumps us into the head of a young student who, clad in a new boater, admires the first Zeppelin, buys a copy of Thomas Mann's latest book, Buddenbrooks, and attends the launching of the world's largest ship, Imperator, among other historical events. 1904 is concerned with a miners strike and 1906 is all about German-Moroccan foreign relations. Yet as year succumbs to year and one narrative voice piles on top of the next, My Century becomes more than the sum of its parts. And Grass always manages to surprise. The chapters 1914 through 1918, for example, rather than being narrated by the usual suspects—young soldiers in the trenches, worried mothers at home, embittered war widows or shell-
shocked veterans--are relayed by a 60s-era young woman who brings two great German chroniclers of the war together. As the now-elderly Erich Maria Remarque (All Quiet on the Western Front) and Ernst Jünger (On the Marble Cliffs) meet and spar over the course of several meals, their reminiscences of the Great War present two radically different views. Jünger, for example, says: I can state without compunction: As the years went by, the flame of the prolonged battle produced an increasingly pure and valiant warrior caste... Remarques response is to laugh in Jüngers face: Come on, Jünger! You sound like a country squire. Cannon fodder quaking in oversized boots--that's what they were. Animals. All right, maybe they were beyond fear, but death never left their minds. So what could they do? Play cards, curse, fantasize about spread-eagled women, and wage war--murder on command, that is. Which took some expertise. They discussed the advantages of the shovel over the bayonet: the shovel not only let you thrust below the chin; it gave you a good solid blow, on the diagonal, say, between neck and shoulder, which then cut right down to the chest, while the bayonet tended to get caught between the ribs and you had to go all the way up to the stomach to pull it loose. It may be Remarque and Jünger talking, but the prose is pure Grass. The years leading up to and including World War II are narrated by a variety of voices: a communist in a forced-labor camp in 1936; a schoolboy playing Spanish Civil War with his classmates in 1937. The events of Kristallnacht, November 9, 1938, become inextricably linked with the November 9, 1989, fall of the Berlin Wall, as a German schoolteacher gets in trouble with the Parent-Teacher Association for his obsession with the past. Indeed, it is the way Grass mixes past and present, the voices of the famous and the ordinary, that lends such power to My Century; and by the time he brings the reader up to the last weird and wonderful chapter, his century has become ours as well. --Alix Wilber

**Personal Review: My Century: A Novel by Gunter Grass**

How does a cultured society slip into unspeakable brutality and then return to the civilized world? Grass tells how, in a series of brief portraits, each told from a different perspective. Nothing I've read gives such a viceral feeling of what it was like to live through this. I'll never forget Trummerfrauen. There are lessons here for the present situation in the United States. If we tolerate brutality in our name, our individual share in the crime makes us all guilty. Grass teaches us that dehumanization, destruction, and decay are not destiny. The individual citizen must struggle, even as the foul tide rises neck deep.

For More 5 Star Customer Reviews and Lowest Price: 