

BETWEEN COMPLICITY AND CRITIQUE:
THE LIMITS OF SATIRE IN KARL KRAUS, ELIAS CANETTI AND ELSE LASKER-
SCHÜLER

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School

of Cornell University

In Partial Fulfillment for the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

by

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August 2013

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BETWEEN COMPLICITY AND CRITIQUE:
THE LIMITS OF SATIRE IN KARL KRAUS, ELIAS CANETTI AND ELSE LASKER-
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This dissertation addresses the discourse of twentieth-century German-language satire in three representative dramas: Karl Kraus's *Die letzten Tage der Menschheit* (1915-1922), Elias Canetti's *Komödie der Eitelkeit* (1934) and Else Lasker-Schüler's *Ich und Ich* (1940-1941). Using a wide range of theoretical approaches – from critical theory to contemporary theories of satire, laughter, parody and irony – and situating these dramas against the background of the two World Wars, this dissertation isolates a particular historical moment (1915-1941) in order to illuminate the ethical problems raised by modernist satire and the related phenomenon of the laughable. It asks: what are the stakes involved in producing a satire without the guarantee of an Archimedean point of authority, and what is entailed in laughing at historical catastrophe?

Guided by the observations of Walter Benjamin, Chapters 1 and 2 analyze Kraus's "absolute" satire (Hermann Broch), and specifically the use of quotation and repetition in his dramatic lampoon of World War I, in order to show how the central figure of the text – the *Nörgler* – must be understood dialectically: his ability to critique the war is a direct function of his recognition, consumption and subsequent reproduction of its "language." Chapter 3 shows how Canetti's allegorical drama attempts to abandon the Krausian mold and produce a less annihilating satire of totalitarianism, only to expose the ambiguity of its laughter. Such laughter mimics the structures of power it aims to negate, similarly evoking the hermeneutic predicament introduced by Kraus.

Chapter 4 shows how Lasker-Schüler's grotesque parody of National Socialism and "high" German culture alike invokes a different form of laughter altogether. Writing from the perspective of exile – which also manifests itself in the drama's aesthetics – Lasker-Schüler's laughter is not the embittered, authoritative laughter we find in Kraus and Canetti, but rather one that both embraces and is informed by an expression of subjectivity not bound to the single, ostensibly exterior authorial position. *IchundIch* thereby provides a model of how the comic disposition can maintain its legitimacy in times of terror without formally capitulating to its object of critique, while still pointing to a key internal aporia that lies at the core of twentieth-century satire.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Ari Linden received his BA in History at the University of California, Berkeley, in 2005. From 2006 to 2013, Ari studied German literature at Cornell University, receiving his MA in 2009 and his PhD in 2013, and having spent a year as a research fellow at the Humboldt Universität in Berlin, Germany. In August 2013, Ari began teaching in the Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures at the University of Kansas as a Visiting Assistant Professor.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As is the case with all long-term projects, this dissertation is the result of a collaborative effort, beginning with the guidance of my committee. I am deeply indebted to my advisor at Cornell, Patrizia McBride, for all of the time and effort she has invested in my project. Patrizia listened to every idea, reviewed every draft, responded to every email, wrote every letter of recommendation, and met with me whenever it felt necessary. Anette Schwarz has been a constant source of support over the years, making me feel so welcome in the German department since the day I arrived. Geoff Waite and I have had some provocative conversations in his office; I always appreciate his way of challenging conventional scholarly modes of thinking. And over the last two years, Paul Fleming has been an invaluable interlocutor, encouraging me to make more defined scholarly interventions and providing excellent feedback.

My gratitude goes out to other members of the German Studies department as well. Gunhild Lischke has shown me how to integrate my scholarly profile with my pedagogical inclinations. Leslie Adelson has taken an active role in my interest in German-Jewish studies, linking me to various networks that will be of great use as I pursue new academic endeavors. I have enjoyed arguing with Peter Gilgen about Karl Kraus, and credit him for piquing my interest in German Idealism. Peter Hohendahl took time to parse difficult passages of Adorno with me during my first year at Cornell; for that and similar gestures I am grateful. For being given the opportunity to spend a year as a research fellow at the Humboldt Universität in Berlin, I wish to thank Peter Hohendahl, Anette Schwarz, Miriam Zubal, Ursula Grawert, and all the others who support the infrastructure of this exchange. I would also like to thank Astrid Wallner from the Literaturhaus Wien and Thomas Ballhausen from the Filmarchiv Austria, who were generous with their time and allowed me to peruse their holdings during my year abroad.

I wish to also thank the members of our dissertation writing group in 2010-2011 – Carl Gelderloos, Cecily Swanson, Ulas Ince and Sarah Pickle – for reading drafts of two chapters and providing precise feedback over delicious food and libations. On that note, I extend my thanks to Mary Ahl and the other members of the Society for the Humanities for providing the funding for this group. To the members of the Hegel Reading Group (too many to name): this has been one of the most rewarding experiences I have had as a graduate student.

A very special thanks goes out to Carl Gelderloos (again), Paul Flaig and Katrina Nousek, who have not only been incredibly insightful colleagues and interlocutors, but more importantly, irreplaceable friends. I sincerely look forward to continuing our conversations from the past and starting new ones in the future. I extend a different kind of gratitude to my parents, Nancy and Jim, and my brother Seth, for the moral (and material) support they have given me over the years – I wouldn't be here without them. Finally, I would like to thank my partner, Anna, who has been with me through moments of doubt and moments of great elation. Her support, love and discerning eye have been constant over the last three years. I could not ask for anything more.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- ÄG *Ästhetische Grundbegriffe*
GW *Gesammelte Werke*
GS *Gesammelte Schriften*
F *Die Fackel*
DW *Dritte Walpurgisnacht*
LTM *Die letzten Tage der Menschheit*
GdW *Das Gewissen der Worte*
MuM *Masse und Macht*

INTRODUCTION

I. “Die fröhliche Apokalypse” and Absolute Satire

Toward the beginning of *Dritte Walpurgisnacht*—written on the eve of National Socialism though published posthumously—the Viennese satirist Karl Kraus reflects on his predicament at this precise historical moment: “Es waltet ein geheimnisvolles Einverständnis zwischen den Dingen, die sind, und ihrem Leugner: autarkisch stellen sie die Satire her, und der Stoff hat so völlig die Form, die ich ihm einst ersehen mußte, um ihn überlieferbar, glaubhaft und doch unglaublich zu machen: daß es meiner nicht mehr bedarf und mir zu ihm nichts mehr einfällt.”¹ In asserting that nothing more comes to mind regarding the historical events (the “Stoff”) that have just transpired, Kraus questions the very possibility of writing satire at this historical juncture: the moment of satire’s self-reflection thus marks the moment of its self-imposed limitation.² For Kraus, the obscene conditions of reality already provide the form that satire once had to envision for it, rendering any attempt to satirize the National Socialists superfluous and “unbelievable.” He thereby brings to light a paradox: satire can no longer be written—effectively reversing Juvenal’s famous lament, “it is difficult *not* to write a satire”³—and yet it must be. Indeed, later on in this long essay Kraus admits: “im Zuge der Betrachtung vielleicht doch etwas eingefallen ist.”⁴ Kraus writes himself out of existence, and yet *Dritte*

¹ See Karl Kraus, *Dritte Walpurgisnacht* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1989), 27.

² In this same passage Kraus also alludes to the notorious line that inaugurates the long essay: “zu Hitler fällt mir nichts ein.” See DW, 12.

³ Peter Green translates this famous line (and what follows) as: “. . . it is harder *not* to be writing satires; for who / Could endure this monstrous city, however callous at heart, / And swallow his wrath?” See Juvenal, *The Sixteen Satires* (New York: Penguin Books, 1979), 66.

⁴ Kraus, DW, 238. Since its publication in 1952, *Dritte Walpurgisnacht* has provoked a variety of different responses from critics and authors alike, the entire history of which cannot be recapitulated here. Anne Peitter has recently drawn a comparison between Kraus’s text and Victor Klemperer’s *Lingua Tertii Imperii*, insofar as both texts represent attempts to focus almost exclusively on the linguistic barbarity of Nazi discourse. Her aim is to illustrate, “dass Kraus’ problematischer Haltung zum Regime Dollfuß eine Sprachanalyse gegenübersteht, deren Hellsichtigkeit hinter der Klemperers nicht zurückbleibt.” See Peitter, *Komik und Gewalt*, 144. In his discussion of why DW had to wait until after the war to be published, the playwright Friedrich Dürrenmatt writes: “[Kraus] fürchtete, durch seine Schrift Juden zu gefährden, und dann war er sich bewußt, daß sein Werk als Schöpfung der

Walpurgisnacht continues because satire cannot capitulate, even when its content is no longer distinguishable from the reality it aims to negate. In a sense, Kraus is at a loss as to how to write satire after “the last days of mankind,” when it appears that the event (world war) is about to repeat itself on a grander scale. After nearly four decades of prolific literary and journalistic production, Kraus has arrived at a theoretical stalemate. Taking his position to be representative of a larger structural predicament (albeit one deeply informed by the historical moment), I thus pose the question of whether Kraus is pointing to a problem that is immanent to the logic of satire written in the twentieth century.

This dissertation addresses the limits of twentieth-century, German-language satire, specifically in the dramatic medium. Each author I investigate—Kraus, Walter Benjamin, Elias Canetti and Else Lasker-Schüler—employs or theorizes about, in distinct and overlapping ways, a variant of satire in their dramatic works, and each is responding to the limit cases of twentieth-century European history: the two World Wars and the rise of fascism. Because this dissertation is ultimately concerned with the theoretical stakes of satire, I will be situating their respective works not only in relation to each other, but also among theories of satire, laughter, parody and irony. Dramatic satire in particular stages a critique that has to contend with the question of what it means to laugh at catastrophe, since, more so than other media, drama presupposes an audience that is in one way or another *implicated* in the text—an audience that *mitlacht*. Considering the singularity of “absolute drama” in the twentieth century, Peter Szondi has thus argued that

Der echte Dramatiker – wie dann der Zuschauer – steht . . . in keinem Abstand von den dramatis personae: er ist mit ihnen eins oder ins Werk gar nicht einbezogen. Diese Identität von Dichter, Zuschauer und dramatis personae wird möglich, weil die Subjekte des Dramas allemal Projektionen des historischen Subjekts sind: sie stimmen mit dem Stand des Bewußtseins überein.⁵

Sprache unübersetzbar bleiben mußte und so, verboten bei den Deutschen und verloren für das Ausland, seine Bedeutung nur darin finden konnte, daß es geschrieben wurde, nicht daß es erschien. So schwieg er denn.” See Dürrenmatt, *Gesammelte Werke Band 7: Essays und Gedichte* (Zürich: Diogenes, 1991), 411-412.

⁵ See Peter Szondi, *Theorie des modernen Dramas (1880-1950)* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1981), 84.

This conflation of author, spectator and character as various reflections of the historical moment rings truest, I suggest, in the case of the satirical dramas under investigation, in part because their sweeping critique necessarily does away with these distinctions. Kraus's *Die letzten Tage der Menschheit* (1915-1922) is most explicit about this, as it takes up virtually every position vis-à-vis the First World War only to deflate it as unsustainable and deserving of reproach; but such a critical gesture can be traced, to varying degrees, in Canetti's *Komödie der Eitelkeit* (1934) and in Lasker-Schüler's *Ich und Ich* (1940/41) as well, the two other dramas I will be closely reading in this study. What happens when satirical laughter—conceived of in different ways in each text we confront—becomes, as it were, too loud? How are we to interpret the formal techniques employed by these dramas—quotation, repetition, allegory, interruption and parody—both against the background of these historical events and in light of this theoretical predicament? How does the problem of satire touch upon the very problem of cultural critique itself?

I begin with Kraus because he serves in many ways as the anchor of this project: Benjamin and Canetti both attended Kraus's readings (the latter quite regularly during his time in Vienna in the late twenties and early thirties) and both wrote about him extensively; Kraus and Lasker-Schüler overlapped in their respective literary circles and maintained an epistolary correspondence during the teens—Lasker-Schüler dedicated a volume of poetry to the figure she dubbed “der Herzog von Wien.”⁶ Kraus thus serves as a ‘specter’ of sorts in the work of Canetti and Lasker-Schüler, and it is Kraus whom Benjamin identifies as being among the most crucial figures for understanding the paradoxes and vicissitudes of modernity.

⁶ For more on the Kraus-Canetti relationship, see Gerald Stieg, *Der Brenner und Die Fackel: Ein Beitrag zur Wirkungsgeschichte von Karl Kraus* (Salzburg: O. Müller, 1976); “Ein Dichter braucht Ahnen”: *Elias Canetti und die Europäische Tradition*, eds. Gerald Stieg and Jean Marie Valentin (Bern and New York: Peter Lang, 1997); and Canetti's own account of his relationship to Kraus in *Die Fackel im Ohr: Lebensgeschichte 1921-1931* (Frankfurt: Fischer Verlag, 2005). For more on Kraus's relationship to Lasker-Schüler, see her *Briefe an Karl Kraus* (Cologne: Kiepenhauer & Witsch, 1959).

This is a modernity that needs, however, to be briefly unpacked before arriving at definitions, genealogies and the larger stakes of the project. With a keen eye for the cultural conditions surrounding the fall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the critic and author Hermann Broch has offered one of the more compelling explanations for why *Die Fackel*—the satirical pamphlet Kraus published from 1899 to 1936—emerged when it did.⁷ Broch was among the first critics to thoroughly reflect on the types of art forms that developed during what he called “die fröhliche Apokalypse.”⁸ In his post-war, historical-philosophical reflection *Hofmannsthal und seine Zeit* (1955), he follows the life and career of the eponymous poet and dramatist in order to critique the development of historical consciousness in Austria from the mid-nineteenth century through the end of the monarchy.⁹ Broadly conceived, Broch argues that Austria, lacking true political (and “ethical”) foundations, slowly devolved into an empire resting on ornamentation and “kitsch,” which he defines as art minus its essential ethical substratum.¹⁰ This decline had been, for Broch, best expressed in Hofmannsthal’s turn to aestheticism, coupled with a mystical Catholicism that was marked more by nostalgia than religious conviction. Such a culture of kitsch necessarily spread into the domain of politics, opening up a space for the pseudo-political

⁷ There are many important (and recent) studies of this historical epoch, each of which employs a different methodological approach and thus illuminates distinct aspects of Austrian/Viennese modernism, variously highlighting its political, religious, visual, or philosophical culture. Stephen Beller’s book, *Vienna and the Jews, 1867-1938: A Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), traces the Jewish experience in Vienna up until the *Anschluss*; Jacques Le Rider’s *Modernity and Crises of Identity: Culture and Society in Fin-de-Siècle Vienna*, trans. Rosemary Harris (New York: Continuum, 1993) addresses the discourse of decadence during the period; Stephen Toulmin and Allan Janik’s *Wittgenstein’s Vienna* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996), casts the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein in the role of protagonist in order to explore the cultural and philosophical tensions being negotiated during this period; Massimo Cacciari’s *Posthumous People: Vienna at the Turning Point* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996) takes a more philosophical approach to this period, placing several important figures in conversation with each other; and finally there is Carl Schorske’s seminal study, *Fin-de-siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (New York: Vintage, 1981).

⁸ See Hermann Broch, *Hofmannsthal und seine Zeit* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2001), 80. Kraus himself also famously called fin-de-siècle Vienna the “Versuchsstation des Weltuntergangs.” See Kraus, *Fackel* 400, 2, 1914.

⁹ For a solid introduction to basic premises of Broch’s text, including how it can be situated within Broch’s literary output and intellectual development, see Michael Steinberg, “Translator’s Introduction,” *Hugo von Hofmannsthal and his Time*, trans. Michael Steinberg (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 1-33.

¹⁰ Broch, 80.

ethos that defined Vienna during the first decades of the twentieth century. Only in such an atmosphere could the aforementioned apocalypse, which culminated in the outbreak of the First World War, erupt almost without being registered: “Das Apokalyptische schwebte in der ganzen Welt, am hektischsten in Deutschland, am mildesten im eigentlichen Untergangszentrum, also in Österreich, denn im Zentrum des Taifuns herrscht immer das Vakuum und seine Stille.”¹¹

It was amidst this historical climate, Broch suggests, that a satirist could arise who was able to deem the entire epoch that stood before him illegitimate.¹² Broch’s assessment of Kraus therefore highlights the features of his work that respond directly to the corruption and violence that constituted modernity in Kraus’s eyes. It is worth reproducing a long excerpt from Broch’s essay to get a sense of the meaning, function and form of this new satire as Broch conceives of it:

Das geistige Äquivalent des Richtbeils ist der Hohn . . . das letzte sozusagen noch geistige Diskussionsmittel zwischen zwei Widersachern, die wegen völliger Verschiedenheit ihrer Gedankensysteme einander weder zu überzeugen noch zu widerlegen vermögen, und zugleich ist er auch schon das erste Symbol ihres gegenseitigen Vernichtungswillens. Nichtsdestoweniger, bei aller Verschiedenheit der beiden sich befeindeten Gedankensysteme, sie müssen, da sie ja sonst ihre sachliche Divergenz nicht konstatieren könnten, eine gewisse Sprachübereinstimmung besitzen, und an dieser setzt der Hohn an, indem er vor allem imitiert: und gerade hier zeigt sich wieder, wie nahe der Hohn mit dem physischen Angriff verwandt ist, denn abgesehen davon, daß die physischen Eigenschaften des Gegners meistens gleichfalls zum Objekt der Imitation gemacht werden, es ist . . . das physische Lachen, es ist dieses schier an das physische Schlagen heranreichende Argument, mit dem die Imitation die von ihr intendierte Erniedrigung zu erzielen trachtet, besonders wenn sie hierzu, dem Wesen des Lachens gemäß, auch noch Gesinnungsgenossen in Gestalt physischer, mitlachender Zeugen gewinnt. Je besser der Hohn imitiert, je genauer er des Gegners physische Häßlichkeit zeigt, je dokumentarischer er seine bösen Taten festhält, je mehr er ihm die Worte aus dem Mund nimmt und reproduziert, dartuend, daß sie in sich selber inadäquat sind und daher einer, sei es bewußten, sei es unbewußten, Verlogenheit entspringen, desto mehr wird gelacht, desto vernichtender wird des Hohnes Wirkung: Bei allen subjektiven Einschlägen, es ist der Hohn dort, wo er ‘trifft’ ein objectives Verfahren, d.h. eines, das seine eigene logische Absolutheit gewinnt, wenn es des Gegners innere Widersprüche aufgedeckt und ihn damit der Verlogenheit ‘überführt’ hat; das allein ist der Absolutheitsinhalt des Hohnes Und das eben ist die Absolutheit der Satire, die in allem steckt, was ethische Kunst genannt werden kann, aber sofort zerstört wird Die Satire ist die ethische Kunst kat’exochen.¹³

¹¹ Broch, 183. For recent work on Broch, and specifically on *Hofmannsthal*, see *Hermann Broch: Politik, Menschenrechte – und Literatur?*, eds. Thomas Eicher, Paul Michael Lützeler, Hartmut Steinecke (Oberhausen: Athena, 2005), and Paul Michael Lützeler, “Nachwort,” *Hofmannsthal und seine Zeit*, 235-262.

¹² For more on the specific relationship between Broch and Kraus, see Lützeler, “Hermann Broch und Karl Kraus: Zum Zusammenhang von Kritik und Utopie in der modernen Satire,” *Modern Austrian Literature*, Vol. 8, No. 1/2, 1975, 211-239.

¹³ Broch, 188-189.

In comparing verbal (or written) mockery to the executioner's axe, Broch shows how both aim for the kill in their respective practices; his reference to medieval justice points to the legalistic practice of mockery or derision. What he alludes to in both is the *violence* that underscores satire and its object: the one who mocks, i.e., the satirist, cannot convince his "opponent" nor be convinced by his opponent's "system of thought," since each is invariably after the other's destruction. Mockery is at its most forceful when it assumes the form of *imitation*, or when it makes an "agreement" with the language of its enemy. What are the repercussions of such an unsettling agreement for the structure and effectiveness of satire under these circumstances? What results from this form of imitation? Broch then suggests that it is not only the imitation of the opponent's "physical qualities" that makes such an act violent; it is also the laughter that emerges as a result of such imitation. He thus raises the question of how this particular type of laughter turns an audience—what he calls the "Gesinnungsgenossen"—into a collective "witness" to the shaming enacted by satirical imitation. Similar to the triangulation that Freud describes in the joke-telling process, in which an initially indifferent listener becomes, by virtue of laughing at the object of ridicule, a "Mithasser oder Mitverächter,"¹⁴ laughter according to Broch participates *in* the satirical process: the more accurate the satirical imitation, the more annihilating the laughter. This dissertation will also address the role of laughter—less as an affect than as a concept—in the respective works and writers I consider.

For Broch, the satirical "process" becomes "objective" and obtains "logical absoluteness" the moment it exposes nothing more than the "inner contradictions" of its enemy by imitating his language, revealing its likeness to dialectical thought, which, for Theodor Adorno, "appropriates

¹⁴ Freud is specifically concerned here with the joke he identifies as the "tendenziöser Witz," the effect of which he describes as follows: "Bei der aggressiven Tendenz verwandelt er den anfänglich indifferenten Zuhörer durch das nämliche Mittel in einen Mithasser oder Mitverächter und schafft de Feind ein Heer von Gegnern, wo erst nur ein einziger war." See Freud, *Der Witz und seine Beziehung zum Unbewußten* (Leipzig and Weimar: Gustav Kiepenhauer Verlag, 1985), 122.

even the powers that are most hostile” to it, and which “insinuates” itself into such powers.¹⁵ It is thus not the satire that is produced for entertainment and that serves as an implicit apologia for what is that is elevated into the “ethical art” of the twentieth century, but rather *absolute* satire. Broch’s concern is the historical necessity of its emergence and its function as an antidote against the resolute failure of art and politics to reconnect with the ethical fundament that has deserted them both. Kraus serves for Broch as absolute satire’s most salient representative.¹⁶

In Wien war Karl Kraus aufgewachsen . . . und in Wien, oder richtiger, gegen Wien, hat er fünfunddreißig Jahre hindurch mit rastloser Angriffslust sein satirisches Werk vollbracht; man hat ihn darum vielfach für einen Lokalsatiriker gehalten, aber was er geschaffen hat, war die allgemein-gültige Absolute-Satire, war das prophetische Bild der Welt-Apokalypse, enthüllt an den österreichischen “Mißständen.”¹⁷

Kraus’s satire is not bound to the spatial-temporal coordinates of fin-de-siècle Vienna, a point that Kraus repeatedly emphasizes in his own satires. Indeed for Broch, absolute satire attacks the particular—be it an individual, a headline, a quotation—in order to show how it reflects in its particularity the *false* totality that informs it. With the pathos of a modern-day prophet, the absolute satirist combats “radical evil,” demanding first its “komplette Vernichtung,” although Broch never fully explains what this amounts to in practical terms, nor the implications of such an annihilating critique. For Broch, there is no identifiable aim to absolute satire apart from the total annihilation of its object of ridicule, from showing its audience that such “Bösheitsfakten” are “in ihrer teuflischen Lächerlichkeit wegräumbar.”¹⁸ And thus one of the crucial insights I take from Broch emerges in the form of an absence: the satire he begins to describe is not tied to particular political parties, ideologies, sloganeering, etc. It is no coincidence that the figures who

¹⁵ See Theodor Adorno, “Aspects of Hegel’s Philosophy,” in *Hegel: Three Studies*, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 1993), 42.

¹⁶ Kraus himself frequently aligned the “aesthete” and the “politician” in his aphorisms and his glosses, distancing himself from both categories, and seeing in them two sides of the same problematic coin insofar as the former is concerned with pure content and the latter, with pure form. For more on this topic, see Jakob Norberg, “Creative Destruction: Karl Kraus and the Paradox of Satire,” in *seminar* 49:1 (February 2013), 38-51.

¹⁷ Broch, 191.

¹⁸ Broch, 190.

constitute this dissertation all avoided explicit engagements with the dominant left-wing political movements of their era, despite the fact that all were anti-fascist, and, to an extent that will need to be further qualified, anti-war. This explains why I have omitted from this project an obvious candidate like Bertolt Brecht, many of whose dramas are unthinkable without their indebtedness to Marxist thought.¹⁹

Yet Broch never fully elaborates on the analytical potential inherent in the concept of absolute satire, wrapping it instead in a cloak of pseudo-mysticism. It is the task of this study to expand upon its referential field, and in so doing, to move beyond Kraus alone. Drama as the most dialogical of media—we will see how the primacy of language is foregrounded in each one of these authors—is also the most dialectical, which, as I have alluded to and will continue to argue, is the mode of critique most closely aligned with twentieth-century satire.²⁰ As a study of a particular genre (though defining what satire is will prove to be a difficult task), however, it is necessary to examine both the reception of satire in the German tradition as well as the recent scholarship on the authors that make up this dissertation in order to identify precisely where I will be making my intervention.

II. “Der heilige Haß”: Satire in the German Context

Referring to perhaps satire’s most conspicuous ambiguity, the critic Helmut Arntzen has recently admitted to the difficulty in determining “ob von (einer oder mehreren) Gattungen oder

¹⁹ This is not to say, however, that Brecht and Kraus have nothing to do with one another; indeed, they were personal friends (up until Kraus’s declaration of his support for the Austro-fascist Dollfuß), and shared mutual respect for one another’s work. Brecht was also explicitly and implicitly influenced by Kraus’s dramatic work, specifically *Die letzten Tage der Menschheit*, a fact that has been attested to by Günter Harting among others. Referring to one of the similarities between the two in terms of their visions of art, Harting writes: “Brecht, der wie sein Vorbild Karl Kraus stets auf der Eigengesetzlichkeit, der Autonomie der künstlerischen Produktion bestanden hat, wollte doch, ebenso wie jener, nie in eine Trennung von Person und Sache und eine Kunst willigen, die sich der Verantwortung vor der Menschheit entzogen hätte.” See Harting, *Der Dichter Bertolt Brecht: Zwölf Studien* (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2004), 328.

²⁰ Even if the dramas I analyze do not overlap with Szondi’s, it is important to recall that it is not arbitrary that Szondi applies Hegelian-Lukácsian dialectics to his reading of twentieth-century drama.

von einer Weltbetrachtung, einer ästhetischen Darstellung, einem literarischen Sprechen zu reden sei.”²¹ Indeed, the confusion caused by what satire actually *is*—it is not enough to accept the standard definition that satire is “the literary art of diminishing or derogating a subject by making it ridiculous and evoking toward it attitudes of amusement, contempt, scorn or indignation”²²—might partially account for the small number of major critical studies devoted to German-language satire over the last several decades, certainly relative to the English tradition.²³ In the 1960s, Arntzen began publishing articles and monographs on twentieth-century satire, using Kraus as his focal point; more recently, Stephan Braese has provided rich analyses of the satirical responses to National Socialism, essentially where this dissertation ends in terms of its historical scope.²⁴ But there are no major recent English-language attempts that thoroughly address the thorny discourse of German satire. There are several important studies on various aspects of Kraus’s work and life (as well as on Canetti),²⁵ but the specifically satirical dimension of their work has often been ignored or bracketed out in their analyses.

²¹ Helmut Arntzen, “Satire.” *Ästhetische Grundbegriffe*, Ed. Karlheinz Barck. Vol. 5 (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2003), 345.

²² The definition continues: “It differs from the *comic* in that comedy evokes laughter mainly as an end in itself, while satire derides; that is, it uses laughter as a weapon, and against a butt that exists outside the work itself.” See M. H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *A Glossary of Literary Terms: Eighth Edition* (Boston: Thomson Wadsworth, 2005), 284-285. Searching for definitions in etymology yields interesting but not exact results, since these origins remain a matter of speculation. Charles Knight devotes a chapter of his book to the mysteriously shrouded origins of satire, which are reflected through this ambiguous etymology (does the word “satire” derive from “Satyroi,” “Lanx saturate,” “Farcimen,” or “Lex per Saturam”?). For more on this, see Knight, *The Literature of Satire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 13-49.

²³ In the English-language context, Frederic Bogel and Jonathan Greenberg have published recent studies of eighteenth-century satire (Swift, Fielding, Byron, Pope) and twentieth-century modernist satire, respectively. See Frederic Bogel, *The Difference Satire Makes: Rhetoric and Reading from Jonson to Byron* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), and Jonathan Greenberg, *Modernism, Satire, and the Novel* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011). See also Knight, *The Literature of Satire*, which offers a theoretical overview of the long history of satire, culminating in the twentieth century with Kraus.

²⁴ See Helmut Arntzen, *Satire in der deutschen Literatur* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1989), and *Literatur im Zeitalter der Information: Aufsätze, Essays, Glossen* (Frankfurt am Main: Athenäum, 1971); Stephan Braese, *Das teure Experiment: Satire und NS-Faschismus* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1996). For a recent, more “functional” analysis of satire and the satirical, see Jörg Schönert, “Theorie der (literarischen) Satire: ein funktionales Modell zur Beschreibung von Textstruktur und kommunikativer Wirkung.” *Textpraxis: Digitales Journal für Philologie* 2.1 (2011). 12 Jun. 2012 <www.textpraxis.net>.

²⁵ See Edward Timms, *Karl Kraus, Apocalyptic Satirist: The Post-War Crisis and the Rise of the Swastika* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005); Gilbert Carr, “Figures of Repetition: Continuity and Discontinuity in Karl

There are external factors that might further explain this lacuna. Since the rise of satire's close relative, irony, in the early nineteenth century under the auspices of German Romanticism and its notion of an infinitely self-reflexive, fragmented literature, the humanities at large have given this aesthetic/philosophical category more attention. Twentieth-century critics such as Walter Benjamin, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Paul de Man all took up the question of Romantic irony in monumental studies that continue to resonate within literary criticism today.²⁶ Another reason for the avoidance of sustained theoretical engagement with the question of satire in the twentieth century could be the postmodern turn away from the satiric impulse of *parody*—with which I will be specifically engaging in my chapter on Lasker-Schüler—and, following Fredric Jameson, toward the facile and complicit tendencies inherent in *pastiche*. If we take this thesis at its word, one could speculate that such a shift in cultural production would invariably have an effect on the critical reception of satire, which might be perceived to have renounced its authorial ground within the “cultural logic of late capitalism.”²⁷ Indeed, the question of satirical authority will be foregrounded in the chapters that follow.

But by returning to the question of what satire is we are necessarily taken down the path of its complicated reception within the German tradition, a path that both explains this relative absence—Georg Lukács once called satire the “Stiefkind der bürgerlichen Literaturtheorie in

Kraus's Satire,” *The Modern Language Review* 102, no. 3, 768-780 (2007); Paul Reitter, *The Anti-Journalist: Karl Kraus and Jewish Self-Fashioning in Fin-de-Siècle Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008); and Friedrich Rothe, *Karl Kraus: Die Biographie* (Munich: Piper, 2003).

²⁶ See Walter Benjamin, *Der Begriff der Kunstkritik in der deutschen Romantik* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1985); Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean Luc Nancy, *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism*, trans. Philip Barnard and Cheryl Lester (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988); and Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971). For the most recent account and theoretical take on irony, see Kevin Newmark, *Irony on Occasion: From Schlegel and Kierkegaard to Derrida and De Man* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012).

²⁷ Jameson writes, “parody finds itself without a vocation; it has lived, and that strange new thing pastiche slowly comes to take its place. Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic mask But it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody's ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter” See Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 17.

Deutschland”²⁸—as well as anticipates some of the theoretical problems satire raises in the twentieth century. When I arrive at the texts that make up this study, it should become clear that the earlier problems associated with satire (including the suspicion it once invoked) do not disappear in the twentieth century, but are, rather, transformed and exposed in all of their implications. It will also become clear that the wholesale and unabashed praise of twentieth-century satire advocated by critics like Arntzen, informed as it is by a thorough engagement with the tradition, ignores crucial aspects of satire as a problematic.²⁹

While the first satirists of note in the Latin tradition—Horace, Juvenal and Persius—wrote in verse and offered either playful (Horace) or scathing (Juvenal) criticisms of Roman society that were anchored in values and norms of the past,³⁰ German satire emerged from the domain of theology, which is significant in light of its subsequent historical development. Indeed, one of my claims is that twentieth-century satire retained a trace of these theological origins long after the religious conviction disappeared. “Die Satire bis zur Aufklärung ist nur richtig auf dem theologischen Hintergrund zu erkennen und zu deuten. Der Satz von der vor Gott sündigen Welt ist für die satirische Gestaltung entscheidend. Kein Wunder, daß am Anfang der deutschen Satire die Strafpredigten des Laienbruders Heinrich von Melk stehen”³¹ Satire and religious moralizing are, for Arntzen, inextricable at their Christian origins, since satire qua the *Strafpredigt* proceeds from the notion that this world is ultimately a sinful one, irredeemable and corrupt at its core. Indeed, in the lay brother Heinrich von Melk’s *Von des todes gehugde*,

²⁸ Georg Lukács, “Zur Frage der Satire,” in *Essays Über Realismus* (Neuwied and Berlin: Luchterhand, 1971), 83.

²⁹ Though the satire that concerns this study is that which, like Arntzen’s preferred expression thereof, purports to serve as “ständige Ideologieabwehr,” there is something suspiciously abstract about upholding, conversely, the satire that is what he subsequently refers to as “immer menschheitliche.” See Arntzen, *Ästhetische Grundbegriffe*, 363.

³⁰ For recent work on Horace, see “Horatian performances,” in Knight, 156-202. On Juvenal’s predicament, Peter Green writes: “His particular dilemma, like that of many another *laudator temporis* yearning for some mythical Golden Age, is that he is living by a set of moral and social assumptions that were obsolete before he was born. For more on Juvenal, see Green’s “Introduction” to *The Sixteen Satires*, 9-64.

³¹ Arntzen, *Gegen-Zeitung: Deutsche Satire des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Heidelberg: Wolfgang Rothe Verlag, 1964), 7.

Heinrich admonishes his parishioners for their crass materialism, for turning away from the *Jenseits* and toward the *Diesseits*, warning them of the punishment that awaits them for partaking in such profligacy. The following passage typifies the sentiment of the entire tract (which has below been translated into modern German). It also, however, indexes the rise of a threatening secularism:³²

Wer in dem Reichtum angetroffen wird, / den ihm Habgier verschafft hat, / dem ist das
Himmelreich verschlossen. / Dann hat er schlecht genutzt, / was er jemals an Besitz erwarb; / genauso hat
es uns Gottes Sohn verkündet . . . / Gleich ob Gold, Silber oder Kleidung / oder sonst etwas, das irgend
jemand erworben hat, / das muß er alles hinter sich zurücklassen. / Wie ein Dieb überfällt dich der Jüngste
Tag; / dein Besitz kann dir keinen Schutz gewähren. / Du läßt ihn ganz hinter dir zurück. / Dann ist deine
Reue unvollkommen, / wenig hilft dir deine Beichte . . .³³

With the word of god behind him, Heinrich possesses unquestionable moral authority. Quoting from the New Testament, these ordinances are valid for all of eternity. And threatened by the signs of the more material-based existence he detects, Heinrich castigates his community and claims that its only hope for redemption lies in its absolute renunciation of worldly concerns and consequent dedication to the world to come. This harangue constitutes the Ur-form of German satire: harsh, humorless, and aimed at providing a corrective to moral deviations. As part of the larger theologically-inspired genre of “*contemptus-mundi*”—the contempt of the world—texts of this sort pursue “das Ziel, die Vergänglichkeit der Welt darzustellen, um dadurch den Blick des Menschen von der Nichtigkeit des Diesseits auf die Seligkeit des Jenseits zu lenken” (209). The onset of satire in the German context could thus be seen as coeval with the beginning of secular modernity, since it is only with the imminent threat of a more secular life that such moralization would obtain this harsh form and this bitter tone. The notion that satire emerges at a point of historical transition will be taken up again in the early nineteenth century, and it will continue to

³² See “Einführung in das Werk,” eds. Thomas Bein, Trude Ehlert, Peter Konietzko, Stephan Speicher, Karin Trimborn, in Heinrich von Melk, *Von des todes gehugde [Mahnrede über den Tod]* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1994), 157-215.

³³ Heinrich, 59.

play a crucial role in my own theoretical framework, as will the question of *authority* and its various implications.

Ignoring these religious origins, Enlightenment thinkers tended to conceive of satire as bound to the verse form that developed in ancient Rome, and yet its relation to some form of moralizing could not be ignored. Johann Gottsched thus defined satire as “ein moralisches Strafgedicht über einreißende Laster, darinn [*sic*] entweder das Lächerliche derselben entdeckt; oder das abscheuliche Wesen der Bosheit, mit lebhaften Farben abgemalt wird.”³⁴ At the beginning of the German Enlightenment we thus encounter a definition of satire that makes no reference to god or the afterlife, but nonetheless affirms satire’s moral foundations. What appears new in this conception of satire is its relationship to the “ridiculous” or the “laughable,” as well as its implicit move away from sin as its primary object of ridicule, though this shift in content did not completely result in a new conception of satire’s function: “Denn [die Satire] kann weiter von einem archimedischen Punkt aus, der nun im Glauben an die Vernunft zu finden ist, die verkehrte Welt aus den Angeln heben. Wichtig aber ist, daß nun die Besserungstendenz der Strafgedichte nicht mehr in einem unaufhebbaren Widerstreit zur totalen Sündhaftigkeit der Welt liegt.”³⁵ Under this (early) modern optic, the world of the satirist—Gottlieb Rabener and Christian Liscow count among the notable early eighteenth-century practitioners of the literary art—was envisioned as a “verkehrte Welt,” perverted, however, because of human folly and malice as opposed to original sin.

³⁴ See Gottsched, *Handlexicon oder Kurzgefaßtes Wörterbuch der schönen Wissenschaften und freyen Künste* (Hildesheim and New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1970), 1442.

³⁵ Arntzen, *Gegen-Zeitung*, 8.

It was only during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century that satire officially left the nest of theology whence it emerged and began to be discussed as an aesthetic discourse.³⁶ But in the context of the late Enlightenment, we must also consider the transition from the treatment of “satire” to the treatment of the “satirical,” that is, from a discussion of a specific form of poetry to an aesthetic disposition that could take on a multitude of forms. This is an important distinction because it is precisely this protean quality of satire that both liberated it from the constraints of verse poetry, but also made it potentially dangerous, since—and this will only truly become explicit in the twentieth century—it could now attach itself not only to any poetic form, but also to any particular idea or ideology. It made satire more a matter of the whim of the satirist, placing, I would argue, the satirist’s erstwhile moral authority into question. The three aestheticians of this period that I will soon examine—Friedrich Schiller, Jean Paul, and G.W.F. Hegel—never address this problem, demonstrating both what was gained and what was lost during this new phase of satire’s reception. Each of these figures highlights different features of, and potential problems related to the satirical disposition while also ignoring others, a product of their distinct philosophical projects and systems, and their accounts provided the contours of the aesthetic debates that would ensue for the rest of the century. This period, as we will see, paradoxically marks the beginning of satire’s emancipation as well as its curious decline as a serious aesthetic category vis-à-vis the related categories of the comic or humor with which it is increasingly associated.

The Kant-inspired Schiller is the first prominent theorist to suggest that the satirist “ist überhaupt nicht mehr an bestimmte Formen und Inhalte gebunden. Seine Subjektivität, seine

³⁶ Gert Ueding has accordingly pointed to the moment of satire’s modernization: “In Deutschland vollendet sich im Unterschied zu England und Frankreich erst im 18. Jh. jener Prozeß, der die S[atire] aus der theologisch-bestimmten Narrrenschaue und dem barocken *contemptus mundi* lost.” See Ueding, *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik, Band 8: Rhet-St* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2007), 456.

Reflexion als Dichter konstituiert das Satirische. Die Reflexion . . . ist eine ästhetische, schon insofern es die Reflexion des Dichters ist und nicht die des an eine Poetik gebundenen Satirikers.”³⁷ In his aesthetic treatise *Über die naive und sentimentalische Dichtung* (1795), Schiller essentially divides the ancients and the moderns into two camps: the former are the “naïve” poets who possess pure intuition because they are not divided subjects; the latter are the “sentimental” poets for whom aesthetic reflection is a constitutive burden. Schiller’s modernity is irrevocably sundered from itself and thus in search of wholeness, or what he interchangeably calls the “ideal” and “nature.” Self-reflection is the curse or sickness of modernity, overcoming it, the goal: “Unser Gefühl für Natur,” he writes, gleicht die Empfindung des Kranken für die Gesundheit.”³⁸ Among the three types of sentimental poetry he describes—the elegy, the idyll and the satire—the latter is the most (justifiably) embittered regarding the distance that separates reality from such an ideal. Schiller famously writes:

Satirisch ist der Dichter, wenn er die Entfernung von der Natur und den Widerspruch der Wirklichkeit mit dem Ideal . . . zu seinem Gegenstand macht. Dies kann er aber sowohl ernsthaft und mit Affekt als scherzhaft und mit Heiterkeit ausführen, je nachdem er entweder im Gebiete des Willens oder im Gebiete des Verstandes verweilt. Jenes geschieht durch die *strafende* oder pathetische, dieses durch die *scherzhaft* Satire. (721)

For Schiller, the satirical poet exposes the contradiction between reality and the ideal; it is and remains ambiguous as to whether such an ideal is to be recovered from the past or is yet to be realized in the future. Schiller incorporates the very distinction between the poetic disposition of the ancients and the moderns into his definition of satire, which he sees as necessarily deriving from a fractured modernity that longs to be whole again. Arntzen thus rightfully argues that the problem “des satirischen Dichters wird als das des sentimentalischen, also des modernen Dichters in einem Postulat deutlich und darin tendenziell lösbar gemacht, und zwar indem die

³⁷ *Ästhetische Grundbegriffe*, 354.

³⁸ See Schiller, *Sämtliche Werke: Band V* (Munich and Vienna: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2004), 711.

traditionellen Weisen des Satirischen als Extreme des ganzen Problems eingesetzt worden.”³⁹ In other words, Schiller shows that the problem of the modern satirist is the problem of the modern poet and cannot be addressed as a separate aesthetic category. More broadly, one could say that Schiller shows how satire reveals as much about itself as it does about practices or dispositions that are not properly satirical. Satire may be autonomous, but only insofar as this autonomy reflects a more structural predicament of modernity.

Alluding to the forefathers of satire, Schiller makes the further distinction between the “punitive” (Juvenal) and the “playful” (Horace) variant—it is more the repercussions of the former that I will be analyzing in this study—making room for both within the spectrum of sentimental poetry, so long as the stated goal is achieved. Punitive satire can be redeemed only through its “sublime” freedom of form, while playful satire elevates itself through what Schiller calls the “beautiful” treatment of its theme. Bracketing out a discussion of the categories of the sublime or the beautiful, what is crucial to note is that despite Schiller’s endorsement, he exposes his normativity by placing conditions on these two types of satire: punitive satire fails if it injures “poetic form” (being *too* obsessed with the content that drives its punishment), while playful satire fails if it lacks “poetic content” (floating away into abstraction if not tied down to some content or object). In other words, the satire that aims to punish traverses a fine line insofar as the *form* of the punishment it exacts must fit the *content* of the crime that elicits it—otherwise, the punishment could be said to be incommensurate with the crime it seeks to punish. Benjamin, as I will later show, foregrounds the dialectic between crime and punishment in his attempt to grasp the core of Krausian satire. But Schiller also exposes his normativity through his repeated insistence on the ideal:

³⁹ Arntzen, *ÄG*, 355.

In der Satire wird die Wirklichkeit, als Mangel, dem Ideal, als der höchsten Realität, gegenübergestellt. Es ist übrigens gar nicht nötig, dass das Letztere ausgesprochen werde, wenn der Dichter es nur im Gemüt zu erwecken weiß; dies muss er aber schlechterdings, oder er wird gar nicht poetisch wirken. Die Wirklichkeit ist also hier ein notwendiges Objekt der Abneigung; aber, worauf hier alles ankommt, diese Abneigung selbst muss wieder notwendig aus dem entgegenstehenden Ideal entspringen.⁴⁰

Without discussing any particular historical content, Schiller draws attention to the constitutive *lack* that defines historical reality vis-à-vis its relationship to the ideal, the expression of which, however, is not a necessary component of the satirical: the satirist can simply awaken the ideal in the “Gemüt” of its reader—thus raising the issue of satire’s relationship to its readership or its audience—so long as his “aversion” (*Abneigung*) to reality is a direct product of his desire for this ideal. But again, Schiller is ambiguous about this ideal. As one critic writes, “Schiller’s sentimental poet is... a study in contradiction: at once a satirist, an elegist, and a creator of idylls; at once enraged and disappointed by the present and unable to regain the past; at once hopeful for, and fearful of, a future which could only be guaranteed by a return to an original, idealized childhood.”⁴¹

Thus while Schiller has emancipated satire from its theological fetters and its subsequent marriage with enlightened reason, his poetics are still informed by a normativity that goes by the name of the ideal, whose approximation through allusion determines the success or failure of the satirical poet. Ignoring the particularities of the historical moment (to be expected from a late eighteenth-century treatise on aesthetics), Schiller is primarily concerned with describing how the satirist conjures up the ideal in his poetry. Thus while the question of the satirist’s (moral) authority is left untouched—satire is understood to be a necessary product of modernity—a new set of issues is raised that have more to do with the formal qualities of satire. And though Schiller’s treatise addresses the particular *Empfindungsweise* of the reader or audience, this

⁴⁰ Schiller, 722.

⁴¹ See Stephanie Barbé Hammer, “Schiller, Time and Again,” *The German Quarterly*, Vol. 67, No. 2, Knitting the Connections: Comparative Approaches in/to German Literature (Spring, 1994), 153-172.

reader has no explicit relationship to the object of the satirist's ridicule; it is not a *complicit* reader in any sense, a phenomenon that only emerges in the twentieth century.

In his *Vorschule der Ästhetik* (1804), Jean Paul shifts the coordinates of the discourse by discussing satire in its predominantly subordinate relation to the category that will increasingly dominate throughout the course of the nineteenth century: *humor*. He famously defines the latter as “das umgekehrte Erhabene,” contending that humor, unlike satire,

vernichtet nicht das Einzelne, sondern das Endliche durch den Kontrast mit der Idee. Es gibt für ihn keine einzelne Torheit, keine Toren, sondern nur Torheit und eine tolle Welt; er hebt – ungleich dem gemeinen Spaßmacher mit seinen Seitenhieben – keine einzelne Narrheit heraus, sondern er erniedrigt das Große, aber – ungleich der Parodie – um ihm das Kleine, und erhöht das Kleine, aber – ungleich der Ironie – um ihm das Große an die Seite zu setzen und so beide zu vernichten, weil vor der Unendlichkeit alles gleich ist und nichts.⁴²

For Jean Paul's humorist, everything finite has always been and will always be “nothing” before the infinite. Yet while not (yet) mentioning the satirist by name, he is clearly making a polemical case against what he considers to be the problem of the satirist (the “Späßmacher”), who draws attention to the particular (“mit seinen Seitenhieben”) rather than the universal, and thus whose horizon of critique is necessarily limited by caprice. Because humor reveals the contrast between the finite and the infinite—and the unbridgeable distance between the two—Jean Paul renders it a superior aesthetic form, needing neither temporal nor spatial coordinates to anchor it, since it applies to anything connected to the finite, human world. As an essentially timeless category, humor annihilates things both great and small, showing the former to be no different from the latter; therein lies humor's superiority to parody and irony as well. In a more explicit reference to the aesthetic deficiency of the satirist, Jean Paul continues:

Der gemeine Satiriker mag auf seinen Reisen oder in seinen Rezensionen ein paar wahre Geschmacklosigkeiten und sonstige Verstöße aufgreifen . . . aber der Humorist nimmt fast lieber die einzelne Torheit in Schutz, den Schergen des Prangers aber samt allen Zuschauern in Haft, weil nicht die bürgerliche Torheit, sondern menschliche, d.h. das Allgemeine sein Inneres bewegt.⁴³

⁴² See Jean Paul, *Werke: Fünfter Band* (Munich: Carl Hanser, 1963), 125.

⁴³ Jean Paul, 125.

It makes no difference if the satirist is accurate in pointing out certain blemishes in the social order, for his criticisms of “bourgeois folly” pale in comparison to the more comprehensive gesture of the humorist, for whom timeless *human* folly is always and forever at fault. The “gemeine Satiriker” directs his attacks at the finite particular, the humorist, at the gap separating the finite from the infinite; the former has no relation to the “vernichtende Idee,” before which the humorist piously bows. What will later become clear is how twentieth-century absolute satire combines, to a certain extent, these two dispositions as Jean Paul understands them, but only by foregrounding the historically contingent moment and suggesting that the contingent has been masquerading as a false totality. For Jean Paul, the actual object of ridicule bears no weight on the aesthetic claims of satire, whose arbitrariness and aggressiveness essentially disqualify it from being considered a worthy aesthetic category. Such aggression has no place in a work of art, a position that will be canonized in the work of Hegel.

On the whole, Hegel had the most decisively negative effect on the nineteenth-century reception of satire.⁴⁴ In his lectures on aesthetics, Hegel identifies satire as a quintessentially Roman genre, and like Jean Paul, albeit through the lens of dialectics, he ultimately dismisses it as incapable of achieving true aesthetic form—of moving beyond the prosaic and into the realm of the poetic.⁴⁵ Known more for his dismissal of Romantic (or what he calls “divine”) irony and its “absolute infinite negativity,” Hegel is equally suspicious of the satirist’s “bloß abstrakte, endliche, unbefriedigte Subjektivität.”⁴⁶ To the satirical subject, finite reality can only appear “als

⁴⁴ Conversely, Arntzen argues that Schiller’s contribution remained “trotz mancher einzelner Übernahmen im 19. Jh. wenig wirkungsvoll.” See *ÄG*, 358.

⁴⁵ See G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik II, Werke 14* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1986), 122.

⁴⁶ Discussing Hegel’s views on irony, and particularly the type of irony found in the works of Friedrich Schlegel and the German Romantics, would require another study altogether. For the purposes of this project, it should suffice to quote an excerpt from the first edition of his lectures on aesthetics that appears under the section on “irony.” Hegel writes of the ironist: “Und nun erfasst sich diese Virtuosität eines ironisch-künstlerischen Lebens als seine *göttliche Genialität*, für welche alles und jedes nur ein wesenloses Geschöpf ist, an das der freie Schöpfer, der von allem sich los und ledig weiß, sich nicht bindet, indem er dasselbe vernichten wie schaffen kann . . . Dies ist die allgemeine

eine götterlose Wirklichkeit und ein verdorbenes Dasein.”⁴⁷ For Hegel, the satirist negates his “godless” reality through pure contrast and opposition, and though he may be virtuous, he lacks that crucial tendency toward “reconciliation” which, for Hegel—as for much of the nineteenth-century aesthetics that follow in his wake—is a precondition for any true artwork. Because satire dwells in the negative, it cannot bring out “die echte poetische Auflösung . . . des Falschen und Widerwärtigen und die echte Versöhnung im Wahren.”⁴⁸ While it may negate that which is worthy of negation (i.e., the decadence of the Roman Empire), it remains buried in the depths of the “laughable” and never rises to the “truth” of reconciliation: there are no circumstances laughable enough to be portrayed as such, and thus Hegel’s damnation of laugh-ability as such, which will play such crucial role in twentieth-century satire.⁴⁹ Rather, Hegel privileges the comic (represented best by Aristophanes) precisely because it rises above the dourness of the satirical and into the realm of the sublime: “Zum Komischen dagegen gehört überhaupt die unendliche Wohlgenutheit und Zuversicht, durchaus erhaben *über seinen eigenen Widerspruch* und nicht etwa bitter und unglücklich darin zu sein, die Seligkeit und Wohligkeit der Subjektivität, die, ihrer selbst gewiß, die Auflösung ihrer Zwecke und Realisationen ertragen kann.”⁵⁰ Whereas

Bedeutung der genialen göttlichen Ironie, als dieser Konzentration des Ich in sich, für welches alle Bande gebrochen sind und das nur in der Seligkeit des Selbstgenusses leben mag.” The ironist, in other words, is detached from all things finite such that his negativity is of the order of pure abstraction: nothing for him contains an essence worth preserving apart from his own perspective. See Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik I, Werke 13* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1986), 95.

⁴⁷ Hegel, *Werke 14*, 122.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 125.

⁴⁹ In the third volume of Hegel’s lectures on aesthetics, Hegel makes an important distinction between the “laughable” and the “comic,” clearly privileging the latter over the former. He writes: “Lächerlich kann jeder Kontrast zwischen des Wesentlichen und seiner Erscheinung, des Zwecks und der Mittel werden, ein Widerspruch, durch den sich die Erscheinung in sich selber aufhebt und der Zweck in seiner Realisation sich selbst um sein Ziel bringt. Für das Komische aber müssen wir noch eine tiefere Forderung machen. Die Laster der Menschen z.B. sind nichts Komisches. Davon liefert uns die Satire, in je grelleren Farben sie den Widerspruch der wirklichen Welt gegen das, was der tugendhafte Mensch sein sollte, ausmalt, einen sehr trockenen Beweis. Torheiten, Unsinn, Albernheit brauchen, an und für sich genommen, ebensowenig komisch zu sein, obschon wir darüber lachen.” See Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik III, Werke 15* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1986), 527-528. The comic is, again, raised above the merely laughable or ridiculous—satire’s domain—precisely because it does not revel in merely exposing the contrast between essence and appearance.

⁵⁰ Hegel, *Werke 15*, 528. Emphasis added.

both satire and the comic address the problem of contradiction and are posited by a finite subjectivity, it is only the conciliatory comedian who is poised and blithe in the execution of his art, which is raised above the presentation of pure contradiction. Satire, by contrast, remains deeply entangled within these contradictions.

Less commented on by scholars, however, is the one crucial exception concerning satire that Hegel makes in his otherwise harsh condemnation:

Poetischer kann diese an sich selbst prosaische Kunstform nur werden, insofern sie uns die verderbte Gestalt der Wirklichkeit so vor Augen bringt, *dass dieses Verderben durch seine eigene Torheit in sich zusammenfällt*; wie Horaz z. B., der . . . ein lebendiges Bild der Sitten seiner Zeit entwirft, indem er uns Torheiten schildert, welche, in ihren Mitteln ungeschickt, *sich durch sich selber zerstören*.⁵¹ (124)

This passage is significant for two reasons. First, Hegel concedes that satire can become “poetic” when it adds *nothing* to its object’s own inner contradictions, rather letting these contradictions speak for themselves and dissolve from within and aligning itself thereby with the process of immanent critique. The satirist must make himself invisible while making the contradictions of his corrupt epoch highly visible; he must disappear, as it were, from his work, lest his own particularity interfere in the work’s universal claim. Furthermore: by invoking Horace as the paragon and pinnacle of satire, adding that today “wollen keine Satire mehr gelingen,”⁵² Hegel situates satire on the historical-aesthetic threshold between the Classical and the Romantic art forms,⁵³ hinting that it was no coincidence that Ancient Rome was on the verge of collapse when the great satires were written. Satire serves for Hegel as a transitional art form between an epoch in decline and an epoch on the rise. Hegel thus points to something between a historical moment within, and a structural component of satire, a component that not only first appeared at the origin of German satire (in its rejection of the approaching age of secularism), but will also

⁵¹ Hegel, *Werke 14*, 124. Emphasis added.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 125.

⁵³ Hegel writes that satire constitutes the “Auflösung der klassischen Kunst in ihrem eigenen Bereich.” See *Werke 14*, 117.

resurface, I argue, in the twentieth century, when the writers in question perceive of their own epochs as both in decline and in anticipation of something new.

While all three of the figures discussed above provide important insights into satire's relationship either to the comic, humor, or to modernity as more of a condition than a historical period, none of them probes the specific object of satire in its variegated historical iterations, nor to satire's particular relationship to its real or implied *audience*, a relationship, I submit, that will be foregrounded in its twentieth-century iteration.⁵⁴ Such a trend continues in the work of the important nineteenth-century aesthete, Friedrich Theodor Vischer. If Vischer is more lenient regarding the role of satire in German Realism and even more willing to concede to its necessary relationship to the more "sublime" category of the comic, he does so under the sway of Hegel. As one critic has recently argued, Vischer "wiederholt [in seiner *Ästhetik oder Wissenschaft des Schönen*] einige Gemeinplätze, angefangen bei Hegels Zerfallsthese. Und er unterscheidet, wie üblich, zwischen einer 'guten' und einer 'schlechten' Form der Satire."⁵⁵ Thus despite the proliferation of satirical journals such as *Fliegende Blätter* and *Kladderadatch*, the biting journalism of Heinrich Heine or Ludwig Börne, and the farces of Johann Nestroy, satire still remained, in the eyes of aestheticians like Vischer, subordinate to the categories of humor, the grotesque, irony and the comic. Satire ultimately remained burdened with a certain set of

⁵⁴ For Hegel, this refusal to recognize satire's relation to concrete historical moments presumably has to do with his view that satire is ultimately a form that belongs to the past, specifically to ancient Rome. For recent work on Hegel and the whole question of comedy and various subcategories of the comic, see Stephen C. Law, "Hegel and the Spirit of Comedy: *Der Geist der stets verneint*," in *Hegel and Aesthetics*, ed. William Maker (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 113-130.

⁵⁵ See Peter Stocker, "Friedrich Theodor Vischer, Gottfried Keller und die Dialektik des Satirischen," *Friedrich Theodor Vischer: Leben – Werk – Wirkung*, eds. Barbara Potthast and Alexander Reck (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag, 2011), 155. Stocker ultimately argues that Vischer was actually more generous toward satire—or at least toward the satirical—than is often conceived, raising the question "ob es für Vischer überhaupt künstlerisches Gelingen ohne Beteiligung des Satirischen geben kann." But it seems that even this relative generosity could not amount to conceiving of an artwork that was exclusively satirical. See Stocker, 157.

problems from which it could not be disentangled.⁵⁶ Its anachronism was foregrounded (Hegel); its sublimity questioned (Jean Paul); its conditions for success pre-determined (Schiller).

Finally, we must briefly consider a prominent attitude that was developing among the *Bildungsbürgertum* throughout the nineteenth century—and well into the twentieth—regarding the social and political implications of humor and satire vis-à-vis their relationship to a particular notion of ‘Germanness.’ Martina Kessel has recently argued that during

the nineteenth century, German intellectuals increasingly cast satire as ‘zersetzend’ . . . implying something that radically and completely decomposes social order and stability. In contrast, they projected a humorous narrative as a story that supposedly also pointed out a flaw in society, just like satire, but did not end on this note. Rather, German humour supposedly finished with a conciliatory smile . . .⁵⁷

Kessel further demonstrates that the notion of a “subversive” or *destructive* form of satire—in contrast with the “conciliatory” substance of humor that we saw promoted by Hegel—was increasingly associated with Jews and other ostensible ‘non-Germans’ who were denounced (almost tautologically) as non-German precisely because their satire was deemed aesthetically inferior to true German humor (Kessel, 84-85). While this discourse is not the focus of this dissertation, the figures I analyze all belong to the loosely defined category of German-Jewish modernity, the historical irony being that twentieth-century, German-Jewish writers ultimately radicalized the very form whose origins are to be found in conservative Christian theology. The stakes of this claim only come to light, however, when I discuss the troubling affinities between twentieth-century satire and totalitarian thought, an affinity that has been suggested before and that I will analyze in detail in my chapters on Kraus and Canetti.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Need to include a discussion here of those journals, plus something about how important Heine and Nestroy are to Kraus, as the quintessential antipode and predecessor.

⁵⁷ See Martina Kessel, “Talking War, Debating Unity: Order, Conflict, and Exclusion in ‘German Humour’ in the First World War,” in *The Politics of Humour: Laughter, Inclusion, and Exclusion in the Twentieth Century*, eds. Martina Kessel and Patrick Merziger (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 83. For more on the development of a notion of “Jewish humor” in the German context, see Jefferson Chase, *Inciting Laughter: The Development of ‘Jewish Humor’ in Nineteenth Century German Culture* (Berlin, New York: de Gruyter, 2000).

⁵⁸ In a work of cultural history, Patrick Merziger, for example, has recently rehashed the thesis that despite (or perhaps because of?) National Socialism’s inherent humorlessness, satire was its preferred vessel of propaganda, at

Despite this lingering and increasingly virulent German nationalism that expressed itself in its aesthetic judgments, the proliferation of satire (in many different forms) in the early part of the twentieth century substantially changed the terms of the discourse. We can see this most clearly in a didactic-reflective essay by Georg Lukács written in 1932. In “Zur Frage der Satire,” Lukács first concurs with Hegel by recognizing satire’s legitimate claim to reveal the contrast between “Wesen und Erscheinung,”⁵⁹ but he upends the latter’s negative verdict by pointing to its origins in a bourgeois aesthetic framework: art can no longer, for Lukács, culminate in a note of reconciliation. One cannot overlook the importance of the revolutionary dimension in Lukács’ assessment, given his championing of proletarian satire. But it is also necessary to consider what Lukács identifies as satire’s specific contribution as a “schöpferische Methode” (90). It is not simply the contrast between essence and appearance that satire exposes—this, after all, is the task of all literary forms insofar as literature, for Lukács, is the medium through which the contradictions of a given historical epoch ‘shine’ through. Rather, the “satirische Wirkung der Wirklichkeit,” he argues, “beruht darauf, daß wir den betreffenden Gesellschaftszustand, das betreffende System, Klasse etc. dadurch als *charakterisiert* ansehen, *daß in ihr so etwas überhaupt möglich ist*” (92-93). Satire reflects not that which is, but that which is made *possible* by the historical conditions of a given moment. Furthermore, satire does away with the stages of mediation characteristic of other art forms, producing what Lukács calls a sense of “immediacy” (90). This study is partially devoted to understanding the full implications of such immediacy,

least prior to 1933—primarily through the medium of caricature—until satire was actually rejected by popular demand, due in part to the sense of exclusion it invariably engendered. Merziger writes: “Writing satires was becoming problematic, because on the one hand, members of the Volksgemeinschaft did not want to be the aim of mockery anymore and, on the other, satires that were externally aimed seemed awkward in concentrating too much on the alleged enemies of the Volksgemeinschaft.” Instead, this community opted for the more conciliatory brand of humor they deemed more German in essence. See Merziger, “Humour in the Volksgemeinschaft: The Disappearance of Destructive Satire in National Socialist Germany,” in *The Politics of Humour*, 137.

⁵⁹ Lukács, 86.

since Lukács's assessment effectively turns what had previously been criticized in satire into a virtue.

Even more relevant to my analysis, however, is how Lukács describes the satirical process: “Die Satire ist eine ganz offen kämpferische literarische Ausdrucksweise. Es wird in ihr nicht bloß das, wofür und wogegen gekämpft wird, sowie der Kampf selbst gestaltet, sondern die *Gestaltungsform selbst* ist von vornherein unmittelbar die des *offenen Kampfes*” (87). If previous theorists had denounced the aggressive tendency in satire, for Lukács, it is precisely the “open struggle” satire wages that makes it a necessary weapon against domination in all of its forms. It is what he calls satire's “heiliger Haß” that justifies—and indeed, sanctifies—its aggressive disposition, in a sense situating it back within the realm of theology whence it emerged.⁶⁰ But what is entailed in satire's “open struggle” against a modernity defined by jingoism, capitalism, journalism, war and genocide? My contention is that such a proliferation of satire produced its underside: without the assurance of divine will or the ostensibly objective designations of aesthetic criteria, satire was forced to confront and question the very ground on which it had previously stood and the literary means that were at its disposal; it became self-reflexive, and at the same time, had a difficult time separating itself from its object of ridicule. If Schiller had once identified the problem of the satirical poet as the problem of the modern poet *par excellence* and thus looked at satire in order to look beyond it, I would argue that satire's unambiguously critical aim illustrates the hermeneutic predicament of the modern critic as such, whose critique cannot be disentangled from its conditions of possibility. Working in the mode of dialectics, the

⁶⁰ The whole passage reads as follows: “Zur Entstehung von wirklichen Satiren muß also diese Kritik noch eine besondere Nuance erhalten: die der Empörung, der Verachtung, eines Hasses, der aus Leidenschaft, Tiefe und Einsicht hellseherisch wird und hellseherisch in den geringsten Symptomen, in bloßen Möglichkeiten und Zufälligkeiten eines Gesellschaftssystems seine Krankheit, seine Todeswürdigkeit erblickt und gestaltet. Dieser *heilige Haß* der revolutionären Klasse ist stets ein wirksames Vehikel der wirklichen, der radikalen, bis zur Wurzel gehenden Revolution gewesen.” See Lukács, 100.

twentieth-century satirist does not envision a “*tolle Welt*,” hopelessly sealed off from reason, salvation, or a lost ideal, but rather a socially and historically embedded world responsible for producing unsustainable contradictions and thus charged with the task of resolving them. Yet by merely exposing and condemning these contradictions in all of their *laugh-ability*—a gesture that made Hegel suspicious a century earlier—he renders his audience complicit in this process by establishing an equivalence between their laughter and the object they are laughing at. When does satire merely replicate the discourse it opposes? And when can the satirist no longer exempt even himself from his sweeping critique?

Chapter One, “*Vernichtende Kritik: Walter Benjamin Reads Karl Kraus*,” explores in greater detail the theoretical foundations of this study by turning first to the Frankfurt School and then to some of Walter Benjamin’s writings on satire, culminating in his seminal essay of 1931, “Karl Kraus.” Whereas Adorno and Horkheimer are more concerned with Kraus’s contribution to the sociology of language and with his anticipation of critical theory, it is only Benjamin who engages in a sustained encounter with the properly satirical dimension of Kraus’s work. Essentially situating Kraus between the domains of theology and critique, Benjamin sees the satirist as a product of secularization whose theological traces manifest themselves primarily in rhetorical gestures, since they presuppose a *deus absconditus*. Benjamin thus contends with the problem of the satirist’s authority in modernity. He furthermore analyzes Kraus’s notorious practice of quotation, which “creeps” inside the corrupt and indeed corrupting language of the press—Kraus’s lifelong *bête noire*—in order to undermine it from within. He thereby points to the radical potential of the satirist while further substantiating the notion of “annihilation” that Broch invokes. Building on as well critiquing scholarship on this essay, I take up Benjamin’s argument that satirical quotation is more than a mere “method” of immanent critique; it is its

very apotheosis. Benjamin's essay, interpreted more often by Benjamin scholars as a way to understand his own project, opens up new possibilities for understanding the larger significance of Kraus's work and the role of satire within German and Austrian modernity at large. Benjamin, but also Adorno (and to a lesser extent, Horkheimer) serve as implicit and explicit interlocutors throughout the dissertation, especially with regard to Kraus, whose work they valued highly and in which they identified affinities to critical theory.

In Chapter Two, "*Die Abschrift der Zeit: Repetition and Posterity in Die letzten Tage der Menschheit*," I first analyze the import of two of Kraus's literary-theoretical essays, *Heine und die Folgen* (1910)—both a satire of Heine as well as a reflection on satire—and *Nestroy und die Nachwelt* (1912) in conjunction with recent theories of satire, since it is in these two essays that Kraus is most explicit about the conditions informing satire's true (Nestroy) and false (Heine) variants. In the second part of the chapter, I turn to the distinct mode of ventriloquism enacted in Kraus's dramatic lampoon of the First World War, for only in *Die letzten Tage der Menschheit: Eine Tragödie in fünf Akten* (1915-1922) does Kraus move beyond the formal constraints of the journal, which confines him to monological discourse (since it is always his unmasked voice behind his essays and glosses), and raise satire to the status of an aesthetic form—implicitly responding to the questions raised in the nineteenth century regarding satire's categorization. Rather than reading the drama as a mere commentary on the Great War or as a symptom of modernity's fallen-ness, I emphasize how it opposes the iterative language of journalism with what Gilles Deleuze and Roberto Calasso have called (in different contexts) a "theater of repetition," reproducing the formal gesture of the war but also revealing the its claim to legitimacy to be as empty as the phraseology that repeats it. The category of repetition, especially as represented by the drama's most memorable and most recurring character, the

Nörgler, is, however, precisely what evinces the hermeneutic problem I described earlier: namely, the problem of how to posit an “annihilating” critique without being implicated in it, that is, without undermining one’s own position and those that are sympathetic to it. How does the Nörgler manage to distance himself from the war he imitates so accurately? I finally show how Kraus’s magnum opus resists critiquing the present from the perspective of an idealized past or an implied norm, rather orienting itself toward a moment *beyond* repetition. This moment of “posterity” constitutes the radical difference that is Kraus’s absolute satire.

Moving forward chronologically to the rise of European fascism, Chapter Three, “*Worte im Stande der Unschuld: Elias Canetti’s Komödie der Eitelkeit*,” analyzes Canetti’s vexed relationship to Kraus before turning to the eponymous drama by this Kraus acolyte-turned-detractor. Known more for his novel *Die Blendung* (1935) and his major philosophical work *Masse und Macht* (1960) than for his dramatic oeuvre, Canetti devoted much of his life’s work to the study of power in all of its variations, including how power can manifest itself in and as literary authority.⁶¹ This ethos, represented by the dictum that the poet is the “Gegenbild des Machthabers,” led him to reject what he saw as the totalitarian gesture inherent in Kraus’s imitation of totalitarianism—precisely the feature of absolute satire that Broch (a friend and interlocutor of Canetti’s) lauded in the same figure. But without abandoning the genre of satire altogether, Canetti pursues a different type of critique than the one produced by his former idol; he finds a model in Georg Büchner, whose *Woyzeck*, he argues, entails a world in which the characters are not as unequivocally guilty and “wegräumbar” as they are in Kraus. In examining *Komödie der Eitelkeit* (1934), an allegorical satire of totalitarian society—a representation of the “possible,” to invoke Lukács—in which mirrors and images have been banned and declared

⁶¹ For a recent study of the aforementioned novel, see William Donahue, *The End of Modernism: Elias Canetti’s Auto-da-Fé* (North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000); for a recent biography of Canetti, see Sven Hanschek, *Elias Canetti* (Munich: Hanser Verlag, 2005).

illegal, I argue that the drama is more than a political allegory. It evinces, rather, a struggle with the transition from Krausian to Büchnerian satire, but in so doing, rehearses the predicament Kraus inaugurated. For how does one delegitimize totalitarian regimes in an allegorical drama without, as author, imitating its practices, and in so doing, rendering not only oneself complicit in the process or production of power, but the cast of characters and the audience as well? Canetti's drama plays out this conflict in various ways, including through its engagement with the problem of laughter. In the end, its characters stage a dramatic *self-reflection* of the very problem of satirical critique.

The question of laugh-ability extends into my last chapter, "Satire Undone: Else Lasker-Schüler's *IchundIch*" (1940/41), which introduces the notion of an end of satire—and its rebirth in the form of parody—as it is forced to confront World War II, genocide, and the radical evil represented by National Socialism. Lasker-Schüler wrote this experimental play while living in exile in Jerusalem, and its status as an *Exildrama* plays a crucial role in my analysis of its use of parody, a category not often invoked in conjunction with this poet.⁶² Staging a play-within-a-play featuring the Nazis, Goethe's *Faust*, the Old Testament, and several literary and historical personalities that comprised the contemporary cultural and political landscape of Germany, America and Jerusalem (including Hitler, Goebbels, the Ritz Brothers and Max Reinhardt), *IchundIch* presents characters, scenes and quotations that are all, I will argue, *exiled* from themselves. It is through the particular notion of exile that I develop that *IchundIch* posits a structural critique of National Socialism, which the drama understands as a form of politics generated by exclusivity and containing no distance to itself, humorous, ironic or otherwise. As a grotesque *parody*, this drama furthermore performs a meta-critique of satire by pitting two

⁶² For a recent comprehensive biography of Lasker-Schüler, see Sigrid Bauschinger, *Else Lasker-Schüler: Biographie* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2004).

distinct forms of laughter against each other, providing a culmination of sorts to one of the central problematics of this dissertation. I thus devote the last part of my analysis to considering the status of the “poet’s” laughter, juxtaposing it against the more threatening laughter of the Nazis, and likewise, the satirist. What thus begins with the apex and attendant dissolution of satire in Kraus—it is important to recall that Kraus remained firmly rooted in Vienna all his life—ends with the emergence of exilic parody in Lasker-Schüler.

Hans-Georg Gadamer identifies as the quintessential hermeneutic problem of all post-Enlightenment thought the structural inability to rid critique of the prejudices that constitute its condition of possibility, or as Gadamer phrases it, “[t]he recognition that all understanding inevitably involves some prejudice.”⁶³ In these plays and for these authors the issue, however, is less prejudice than what I would call entanglement and contamination. The risks involved in rendering laughable the limit-events of the twentieth century are that one may, in the end, have nothing else to laugh at, and one’s laughter may appear indistinguishable from the laugh-ability of its object of ridicule. The dramas in question make this predicament visible (and audible) by creating worlds in which the characters are not as much bodies as voices that reproduce the contradictions lying at the core of these dramatists’ critique. Kraus was primarily the author of essays, glosses and aphorisms, but his World War I magnum opus bespeaks his greatest aesthetic innovations; Canetti is less known for his dramatic work, yet the two plays he wrote in the early 1930s show him at his most distinctly and viciously satirical; Lasker-Schüler was primarily a poet and is still considered relatively apolitical vis-à-vis her more engaged contemporaries, yet *IchundIch* arrests as its object of critique not only National Socialism, but the entirety of the German literary tradition. How does their laughter break down the barriers between author,

⁶³ See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York and London: Continuum, 2006), 272ff.

audience and object of ridicule, and in what way is this laughter problematic? What constitutes satire's potential and limits as a form of critique and as an aesthetic disposition, and when is it forced to become something else? These are some of the fundamental questions that this dissertation poses.

CHAPTER 1

Vernichtende Kritik: Walter Benjamin Reads Karl Kraus

Die vernichtende Kritik muß sich ihr gutes Gewissen wieder erobern. Dazu muß die Funktion der Kritik überhaupt wieder ganz neu ins Bewußtsein gerückt werden. Es ist allmählich dahin gekommen, daß sie die Erschlaffung und Harmlosigkeit selber geworden ist. Unter diesen Umständen hat selbst die Korruption noch ihr Gutes: nämlich überhaupt ein Gesicht, eine deutliche Physiognomie.⁶⁴

I. Kraus and the Frankfurt School

In “Sittlichkeit und Kriminalität,” Theodor Adorno’s most sustained critical engagement with Kraus, Adorno suggests that the collection of essays bearing the same title is the most relevant of Kraus’s works to the post-WWII era, when Adorno composed the essay, given that its insights into the moral hypocrisies and contradictions that allow the bourgeois sphere to function have only become more exaggerated.⁶⁵ Adorno identifies in Kraus’s work the embodiment of dialectics: “Zur Dialektik wird Kraus allmählich von der Gewalt der Sache gedrängt, und ihr Fortgang schafft die innere Form des Buches. Sittlichkeit, die herrschende, jetzt und hier geltende, produziere Kriminalität, werde kriminell.”⁶⁶ For Adorno, Kraus was able to arrive at the most penetrating social analysis of his time not by imposing an external framework on the existing set of conditions, nor by isolating one particular cultural sphere (science or psychology) and looking through its lens to draw larger conclusions, but by unmasking the contradictions immanent to the social order itself—anything else would amount to a reflection of, or an acquiescence to the ideological premises preserving the false totality. “Kraus hütet sich,” he continues, “gegen das herrschende Unwesen Freiheit frisch-fröhlich zu entwerfen. [Er] . . . hat auf eigene Faust das Prinzip der immanenten Kritik entdeckt, Hegel zufolge der allein

⁶⁴ Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften, Band VI* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1991), 161.

⁶⁵ The late Irina Djassemly has published two important studies about the relationship between Kraus and Adorno (and the Frankfurt School more broadly conceived) over the last decade: *Der “Produktivgehalt der Kritischer Zerstörerarbeit”: Kulturkritik Bei Karl Kraus und Theodor W. Adorno* (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 2002) and *Die verfolgende Unschuld: zur Geschichte des autoritären Charakters in der Darstellung von Karl Kraus* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2011).

⁶⁶ Theodor Adorno, “Sittlichkeit und Kriminalität,” *Gesammelte Schriften II* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2003), 368.

fruchtbaren” (369-370). Certainly seeing in Kraus a precursor, Adorno suggests that Kraus came to immanent critique by his own volition, by renouncing the *arbitrary* freedom of the social critic in order to expose the un-freedom of ideology. Almost paradoxically, Kraus had no choice but to think dialectically.

Further seeing in Kraus the “advokatorische[n] Gestus, der den Advokaten das Wort in der Kehle erstickt” (371), Adorno argues that Kraus bears the imprint of a Kantian and a Socratic legacy:

Er hält der Gesellschaft nicht die Moral entgegen; bloß ihre eigene. Das Medium, aber, in dem sie sich überführt, ist die Dummheit. Zu deren empirischem Nachweis wird bei Kraus Kants reine praktische Vernunft, jener Sokratischen Lehre gemäß, welche Tugend und Einsicht als identisch ansieht und kulminiert im Theorem, das Sittengesetz, der kategorische Imperativ sei nichts anderes als die ihrer heteronomen Schranken ledige Vernunft an sich. (378)

In identifying Kraus as the foremost exponent of unadulterated, un-instrumental reason, Adorno makes clear where Kraus fits in among the pantheon of philosophers, adding that Kierkegaard was Kraus’s true “Schutzpatron” (380). That is: in order to justify Kraus’s work, Adorno deems it necessary to place Kraus within a more canonical tradition of thinkers, in a sense exonerating Kraus by drawing from this tradition and by pointing to the misguidedness and hypocrisy of Kraus’s detractors: “Was das ethische Mittelmaß ihm als Mitleidslosigkeit vorwirft, ist die Mitleidslosigkeit der Gesellschaft, die heute wie damals auf menschliches Verständnis dort sich herausredet, wo Menschlichkeit gebietet, daß das Verständnis aufhört” (381). With this, Adorno both defends Kraus and aligns himself unequivocally with the latter’s cause.

Indeed, the only real moment of critical *distance* in this essay is when Adorno addresses the role that repetition and jokes play in the essays found in *Sittlichkeit und Kriminalität*: “Wiederholungen beeinträchtigen ‘Sittlichkeit und Kriminalität.’ Mythos und Wiederholung stehen in Konstellation, der des Zwangs vom Immergleichen im Naturzusammenhang, aus dem nichts herausführt” (382). That is, Kraus’s “mythical” quality betrays itself most obviously when

he repeats himself and uncritically mirrors the repetitive nature of society, one of the primary targets of Kraus's critique. Especially when repeated, jokes and puns (*Wortwitze*), for Adorno, contain a conservative element insofar as they reflect that part of language that is given and finite, in contradistinction to its inexhaustible potential to arrive at something new, or what occurs to Kraus in between the repetitions. As a result, Adorno suggests that Kraus's best jokes are contained in his silences, in his transitions that occur without commentary, and that this type of joking reveals the similarity of his prose to the gestures of the actor or the comedian: "in [der Kraus'schen Witze] macht die Sprache die Gesten von Sprache nach wie die Grimassen des Komikers das Gesicht des Parodierten. Die konstruktive Durchbildung der Sprache von Kraus ist, bei all ihrer Rationalität und Kraft, ihre Rückübersetzung in Gestik, in ein Medium, das älter ist als das des Urteils" (385). The gestural quality in Kraus's prose and in his humor is a singular mark of Kraus's critique; it reveals, as Adorno implies but does not expatiate upon, an *earlier* inheritance in Kraus. Once again implying something both archaic and utopian in Kraus's disposition, Adorno concludes: "Immanente Kritik ist bei ihm stets die Rache des Alten an dem, was daraus wurde, stellvertretend für ein Besseres, das *noch nicht ist*" (386).⁶⁷ This is Adorno's utopianism *in nuce*, which he also reads into the work of the satirist.

Just as Adorno uses his essay on Kraus as a way to critique the contemporary German juridical system and the post-war bourgeois sphere it serves by showing how Kraus's insights have revealed themselves to be premonitions, so does Max Horkheimer criticize the contemporary domain of linguistic sociology to show how many of its conclusions had not only been anticipated, but also far surpassed by Kraus several decades earlier. Horkheimer writes:

⁶⁷ Emphasis added.

Wenn aber die allem soziologischen Denken immanente Notwendigkeit...sich darin manifestiert, dass die Konzeption der Sprachsoziologie nicht von der Gesellschaftswissenschaft, sondern von der Sprache selbst her erfolgte, so hat sie im deutschen Bereich ihren entscheidenden Impuls einem Manne zu verdanken.⁶⁸

For Horkheimer, too, Kraus's method was "streng immanent," which is why his critique of language had to be carried out in the medium of language itself. Refuting those who conflated Kraus's intervention in the realm of language with the more dubious camp of language mythologizers, Horkheimer points out that Kraus "hat . . . niemals wie die modernen Sprachmythologen eine Art absolute Sprache des Ursprungs, ein Lautwerden des Seins, dem konkreten historischen Sprechen entgegengestellt . . ." (22). This would again speak to Kraus's credentials as a dialectical thinker who could never be duped by the temptation to revert back to a pristine and pre-lapsarian origin in his cultural critique. Rather, "die Sprache wird ihm . . . zum Beweisstück der Verrohung, die den Sprachleib ergreift, ehe sie in Kriegen, Diktaturen und Konzentrationslagern sich austobt" (23). For Horkheimer, Kraus approaches linguistic infractions in the sphere of culture not as transgressions against an imagined pure language, but as evidence in the juridical sense, as warnings or premonitions of the actual transgressions yet to come, and this alone safeguards the force of his critique. Linguistic sociology has much to learn from Kraus, Horkheimer concludes, and yet it is incapable of doing so because the two domains are of qualitatively different orders.

What Adorno and Horkheimer share in their respective readings of Kraus is the tendency to graft his work onto their conception of cultural critique, to situate him in a dialectical tradition that began well before Kraus and that has been taken up and modified by the members of the Frankfurt School, especially the part of the tradition concerned with the relationship between language and society. In provocative and revealing ways, they recognize the work of mimesis in

⁶⁸ Max Horkheimer, "Karl Kraus und die Sprachsoziologie," *Gesammelte Schriften, Band 13*, eds. Alfred Schmidt and Gunzelin Schmid Noerr (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1985), 21.

Kraus's linguistic practice, identify his relentless quest to pursue and realize freedom in a thoroughly administered society, equate his disputatiousness with that of the lawyer's, and highlight the superiority of his critique of language over the conclusions drawn by sociologists and psychologists. But what is conspicuously absent from their readings of Kraus is any significant engagement with the question of how *satire* functions in his work. Adorno briefly touches on Kraus's jokes, toward which he assumes an ambivalent and at times negative attitude, but rarely speaks of Kraus's satire as such; Horkheimer writes that Kraus's "Aktionsradius" reaches "weit über den des Polemikers und Satirikers," and he leaves it at that.⁶⁹

Thus while they succeed in pointing to the tradition of which Kraus is a part and to which he contributes, they limit this tradition to a narrowly constructed canon, largely ignoring the discourses of satire, humor and laughter as they pertain to Kraus's work. This omission raises the pressing question of whether there are other sources, other canons with which Kraus can productively be brought into dialogue. It also renders the relationship between satire and the concept of immanent critique *too* self-evident, casting what I believe to be an uncritical glance at the very notion of immanent critique. Only in the work of the peripheral member of the Frankfurt School, Walter Benjamin, I argue, is a concerted effort made to address these remainders.

II. Benjamin and Kraus: An "Elective Affinity"

Based on various correspondences, a number of minor sketches and glosses, references scattered throughout an entire oeuvre, and the publication of an essay-length study, we know that the Viennese satirist Karl Kraus was an important figure for the critic Walter Benjamin, one who exerted a noticeable influence on the latter's intellectual development from the early 1920s

⁶⁹ See Horkheimer, 21.

onward.⁷⁰ Both Benjamin and Kraus belonged, in the widest sense of the term, to the German-speaking Jewish intelligentsia that formed a substantial part of the cultural and intellectual life of *fin-de-siècle* Vienna and Weimar Germany.⁷¹ And as was the case for many German intellectuals during the first third of the twentieth century, the question of language (and indeed, of a “crisis” thereof) played a prominent role in shaping both Kraus’s and Benjamin’s political, philosophical, aesthetic and theological dispositions in distinct but overlapping ways. Briefly summarized, Kraus championed the notion that language was the fountain of thought, and that it was to be served and not mastered; he once called it “die einzige Chimäre, deren Trugkraft ohne Ende ist, die Unerschöpflichkeit, an der das Leben nicht verarmt.”⁷² Language, for Kraus, existed outside of any economy of exchange and was “inexhaustible” in its potential—one can find such expressions of devotion to the word littered throughout *Die Fackel*. The most profound expression of Kraus’s valorization of an uncorrupted language, however, can be found in the majority of his satires, which frequently target what he often called the “journalized,” debased language of his contemporaries. These satires were the carefully crafted product of his

⁷⁰ Benjamin’s short writings on Kraus consist of a fragment entitled “Karl Kraus” (GS II, 624-625); an entry on Kraus with the superscription “Kriegerdenkmal” in *Einbahnstraße* (GS IV, 121), published in 1928; a review entitled “Karl Kraus liest Offenbach” (GS IV, 515-517); and a shorter review of a little-known play by Kraus, entitled *Karl Kraus: Die Unüberwindlichen* (GS IV, 552-554). He and Gershom Scholem had a substantive epistolary exchange concerning their respective attitudes vis-à-vis Kraus, much of which made it into Benjamin’s sustained critique of the satirist. Indeed, most of what Benjamin wrote in these shorter texts and letters was ultimately integrated, in one way or another, into the labyrinthine essay he published in 1931 as four sequential installments in the *Frankfurter Zeitung*: “Karl Kraus” (GS II, 334-367). Kraus’s uncharacteristically confused response to this essay reveals, however, little if any acquaintance with Benjamin: “Ich hatte diese Arbeit, die sicherlich gut gemeint war und wohl auch gut gedacht ist, im wesentlichen nur entnehmen können, daß sie von mir handelt, daß der Autor manches von mir zu wissen scheint, was mir bisher unbekannt war, obschon ich es auch jetzt noch nicht klar erkenne, und ich kann bloß der Hoffnung Ausdruck geben, daß sie die andern Leser besser verstanden haben als ich. (Vielleicht ist es Psychoanalyse).” See Kraus, *Die Fackel* 852, 27, 1931.

⁷¹ For a thorough analysis on the extent to which Benjamin and Kraus fit in to the constellation of German-Jewish modernity, see Paul Reitter, *The Anti-Journalist: Karl Kraus and Jewish Self-Fashioning in Fin-de-Siècle Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

⁷² See Kraus, *Die Fackel* 885, 4, 1932.

impassioned and lifelong hatred of the Viennese press.⁷³ With *Die Fackel*, Kraus's ultimate aim, one could say, was to create a journal to end all journals.

Broadly conceived, the theory of language upon which Benjamin expounds in many of his early works—and one which he never fully renounces, even in the more explicitly political phase of his literary career—is that every instantiation of language falls somewhere between the poles a non-referential, “pure language” of names, and an instrumental vessel of communication.⁷⁴ Benjamin describes the former as a language toward which all empirical languages gesture though none can express, the latter as any given language expressed in its everyday, communicative form, in which the word has been stripped of its erstwhile designative power. In its ineffability, the former is a divine language, while the latter is the profane, prosaic language of modernity that has been forced to express something other than its own linguisticity and that has thus fallen under the sovereignty of subjective authorial intention.⁷⁵ This was once the language of the *Trauerspiel*; in its more contemporary iteration, it is also the language of the press, the most prominent medium of communication during the first part of the twentieth century. Similar to Kraus, but informed by more philosophical speculation, Benjamin sees communicative language having found in the phenomenon of journalism one of its more concrete articulations. And consistent with his theologically inflected theory of language, Benjamin believes that the newspaper, “der Schauplatz der hemmungslosen Erniedrigung des Wortes,” awaits its dialectical redemption: “Darin verbirgt sich ein dialektisches Moment: der

⁷³ For more thorough accounts of Kraus's notorious relationship to the press, see Dietmar Goltschnigg, *Die Fackel ins wunde Herz: Kraus über Heine: eine “Erledigung”?: Texte, Analysen, Kommentar* (Vienna: Passagen, 2000); Edward Timms, *Karl Kraus, Apocalyptic Satirist: Culture and Catastrophe in Habsburg Vienna* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986); Friedrich Pfäfflin, *Aus großer Nähe: Karl Kraus in Berichten von Weggefährten und Widersachern* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2008).

⁷⁴ See Benjamin, GS II, 148.

⁷⁵ In a slightly different context, Benjamin calls the true language of the artwork the “Ausdruckslose.” See Benjamin, GS I, 181.

Untergang des Schrifttums in dieser Presse erweist sich als die Formel seiner Wiederherstellung in einer veränderten.“⁷⁶

Above Benjamin seems to combine the two most salient dimensions of this thought: dialectics, the more explicit one, and theology, which expresses itself in the allusive reference to a “Wiederherstellung.” It would thus be logical to deduce that for Benjamin, Kraus’s *Fackel* served as precisely this anticipated forum for the redemption of the debased language of the press.⁷⁷ And yet, Benjamin also once compared Kraus to an ancient Chinese warrior, who, sword in hand, performs, in vain, a “Kriegstanz vor dem Grabgewölbe der deutschen Sprache.”⁷⁸ In the same fragment, Benjamin continues: “In Tag- und Nachtwachen harrt er aus. Kein Posten ist je treuer gehalten worden und *keiner war je verlorener* Was hoffnungsloser als sein Kampf mit der Presse?”⁷⁹ Benjamin’s major essay devoted to Kraus, I argue, is to be understood as a critical-philosophical exposition of this curious *ambivalence*. My aim will be to understand how Benjamin, unlike many of his peers, was able to read Kraus’s *satirical* physiognomy as the embodiment of a much larger historical process, a process in which the dialectic of secularization assumed a concrete form. What Benjamin achieves in this essay is showing how it is in the figure of the twentieth-century satirist that the older domain of theology and the modern domain of immanent critique wage a battle against one another.

Benjamin does not treat Kraus as an undifferentiated, ahistorical individual, but rather, like many of the allegorical works of art he treats critically, including Goethe’s

⁷⁶ This is taken from a short gloss written by Benjamin during the 1930s entitled “Die Zeitung.” See Benjamin, GS II, 629.

⁷⁷ Kraus made a habit of turning former friends into enemies once he deemed them betrayers of the word. One example of this was the journalist Maximilian Harden, against whom Kraus wrote a satirical piece called “Desperanto,” a translation of Harden’s ostensibly illegible and misleading language: “Der Übersetzer hat es sich zur Pflicht gemacht,” Kraus writes, “nicht zu erlahmen, sondern die Deutschen durchaus zu jenem Genuß zu erziehen, auf den sie einen Anspruch haben: daß sie nämlich verstehen, was sie seit achtzehn Jahrgängen mit lebhaftem Interesse lesen.” See Kraus, F 307, 42, 1910.

⁷⁸ See Benjamin, GS IV, 121.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* Emphasis added.

Wahlverwandschaften, he divides Kraus into his constituent parts, each of which he evaluates both separately and in relation to one another. Benjamin identifies deeply problematic elements in Kraus (and in satire as such), but what distinguishes his critique of Kraus from both contemporaneous as well as present-day scholarship on the latter, is that it avoids three distinct pitfalls against which he warns: that of unreserved praise, resolute dismissal, and ostensible impartiality.⁸⁰ The first two are the mere obverse of one another and fall into the category of taste, a byproduct of Kantian aesthetics that, for Benjamin, has devolved into a “harmless” criticism consisting of overly subjective judgments (see the chapter’s opening epigraph). The third denies or ignores the extra-literary or historical meaning of Kraus’s work, which constitutes the core of Benjamin’s concern, rendering questionable any claim to a position of neutrality on behalf of the critic, especially vis-à-vis a polarizing figure like Kraus.⁸¹ Unlike both Adorno and Horkheimer, Benjamin foregrounds the satirical in Kraus as well as its relationship to the historical process of secularization—he is also the first to hint at why Kraus, and by extension, twentieth-century satire, is by no means an innocuous phenomenon.

III. Allmensch, Dämon, Unmensch: The Physiognomy of Satire

⁸⁰ There have been several important studies on the Benjamin/Kraus relationship, some of which I wish to build upon, and others from which my reading departs. See David Ferris, *The Cambridge Introduction to Walter Benjamin* (Cambridge: The University of Cambridge Press, 2003), 88-90; Sigrid Weigel, *Walter Benjamin: Die Kreatur, das Heilige, die Bilder* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 2008), 27-56; Beatrice Hanssen, *Walter Benjamin’s Other History: Of Stones, Animals, Human Beings, and Angels* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Josef Fürnkäs, “Zitat und Zerstörung. Karl Kraus und Walter Benjamin,” in *Verabschiedung der (Post-)Moderne?*, eds. Jacques LeRider and Gérard Raulet (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1987); Bettina Menke, “Das Nach-Leben im Zitat. Benjamins Gedächtnis der Texte,” in *Gedächtniskunst: Raum – Bild – Schrift Studien zur Mnemotechnik*, eds. Anselm Haverkamp and Renate Lachmann (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1991), 74-110; Manfred Voigt, “‘Die Mater der Gerechtigkeit.’ Zur Kritik des Zitat-Begriffs bei Walter Benjamin,” in *Antike und Moderne: Zu Walter Benjamins ‘Passagen,’* eds. Norbert Bolz and Richard Faber (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 1986), 97-115; Christian Schulte, *Ursprung ist das Ziel: Walter Benjamin über Karl Kraus* (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 2003); Christopher Thornhill, *Walter Benjamin and Karl Kraus: Problems of a ‘Wahlverwandschaft’* (Stuttgart: H-D. Heinz, 1996).

⁸¹ Benjamin once wrote to Scholem, “In der gleichen (letzten) Nummer der *Fackel* hat [Kraus] eine Nationalhymne für Österreich veröffentlicht, die ihn mir, ebenso wie ‘Brot und Lüge’ ganz auf dem Wege zum *großen* Politiker zeigt.” Here Benjamin identifies Kraus more as a politician, and a great one at that, than as a satirist or another type of literary figure. See Benjamin, *Briefe: Band I* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1966), 251.

The title “Allmensch,” or “Cosmic Man,” as it has been rendered in the English translation,⁸² inaugurates the literary triptych, followed by the epigram, “Wie laut wird alles,” an excerpt from Kraus’s poem, “Alle Vögel sind schon da,” whose line in its entirety reads: “Wie laut wird alles, was da schweigt.”⁸³ Fittingly, it is in this section that Benjamin introduces us to Kraus’s relentless struggle against journalists, a relationship he compares to that of an “Urahn auf ein Geschlecht entarteter Zwergenschlingel” (II, 335). Kraus is, for Benjamin, implicated in that which he rejects, which is why his hatred for this “Preßgeschlecht” is grounded in the very being of the journalists: their newspapers are a far cry from what Benjamin calls Kraus’s more “Shakespearian” news, which is “voll von Krieg und Pestilenz, von Mordgeschrei und Weh, von Feuer- und Wassersnot” (334).⁸⁴ For Kraus, journalists as such are figures for whom “things” only obtain their significance when they are placed in relation to one another and when they have been chained together to form a sensationalized “event.” Conversely, Kraus is interested exclusively in the *mere* existence of things (335).

Kraus’s achievement lies in his unmasking, at every juncture, what Benjamin calls “*Unechtheit*,” the mystifying language of the press that places a shroud over the essence of things, objects, news (336). More concretely, Benjamin states that under the conditions of capitalist modernity, the unscrupulous journalist exercises “Herrschaft über die Dinge” by endlessly repeating the ornamental, empty “phrase” (335). Kraus’s rebuttal is crystallized, for

⁸² See “Karl Kraus,” trans. Edmond Jephcott, in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Vol. 2. Part II: 1931-1934*, eds. Michael Jennings, Gary Smith, Howard Eiland (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2005), 433.

⁸³ See Kraus, F 443, 9, 1916. Also: the precise origin of the moniker “Allmensch” is unknown; Benjamin may have taken it from an essay by Dostoyevsky entitled *Die Judenfrage*, which Kraus reprinted in an edition of *Die Fackel* published in 1915. For more on this, see Schulte, 56.

⁸⁴ Alexander Gelley offers an interesting reading of this allusion to Shakespeare: “In the next sentence, *Die Fackel* is identified as a newspaper (*Zeitung*) ‘in the sense that the word has in Shakespeare.’ This may be an allusion to ‘The time is out of joint,’ whereby *Zeitung* is turned back to its semantic core, *Zeit*, and *Die Fackel* is figured in terms of a primordial breach, a dis-jointing of time that radically undermines the warrant of actuality and factuality implicit in the usual sense of *Zeitung*. Benjamin thus introduces, by way of a muted allusion, a semantic genealogy that situates ‘the news’ (*Zeitung*) in a historical temporality.” See Gelley, “Epigones in the House of Language: Benjamin on Kraus.” *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas* 5.1 (Jan. 2007): 29.

Benjamin, in his famous wartime oration, “In dieser großen Zeit,” which combines biblical pathos with “gewendete[m] Schweigen, ein Schweigen, dem der Sturm der Ereignisse in seinen schwarzen Umhang fährt” (338).⁸⁵ This is a key moment, for the image of Kraus as orator, gathering the day’s bloody events and responding to them with a silence “turned inside out,” resonates with the image of a medieval priest at his pulpit, lashing out against a fallen humanity. And indeed Benjamin presents Kraus’s polemical pathos as having derived from a religious past, a connection discussed more explicitly in the next section of the essay when Benjamin compares Kraus to the images of saints in baroque altar paintings and his orations to the sermons of Abraham a Sancta Clara, the eccentric seventeenth-century Augustinian monk known for his grotesque humor and religious fervor. Kraus thus has forebears, none of whom, however, can be considered satirists in any strict sense of the word.

Benjamin’s concern is thus the genealogy of Kraus’s “cosmic” persona and the significance of this genealogy for the current historical moment. This is why he further situates Kraus within a literary tradition that includes Johann Peter Hebel and Adalbert Stifter. Hebel’s “tact,” defined as “die Fähigkeit, gesellschaftliche Verhältnisse...als Naturverhältnisse, ja selbst als paradiesische zu behandeln” (339), provides the ethical foundation of Kraus’s polemical disposition, albeit in a socially inverted form: “Diese Noblesse hat Hebel in seiner Priesterhaltung besessen, Kraus besitzt sie im Harnisch” (Ibid.). The priest has in Kraus thus become the warrior, though he has not lost his priestliness. Far from being compliant with bourgeois norms, tact is here conceived of as a theological category, “eine Weise des Umgangs

⁸⁵ The English renders this passage by Benjamin as “. . . a silence turned inside out, a silence that *catches* the storm of events in its black folds and billows . . .” (Jephcott, 436), yet the verb Benjamin uses is “fährt,” which suggests that Kraus’s silence does not so much catch these events as that they gravitate toward his silence, and thus that a language most suited to express the events of the day would be a language of silence. This makes more sense in this particular context, in which Benjamin is referring to Kraus’s notorious wartime oration, “In dieser großen Zeit” (F 404, 1914), which ends with the injunction that anyone who has anything to say, “trete vor und schweige!” This is reproduced in GS II, 338.

mit der Kreatur als einem göttlichen Geschöpf.”⁸⁶ Here, however, we can begin to discern Benjamin’s criticism of Kraus, and specifically of his concept of the mere existence of the “creature” prior to its fall, as it were, into history. It is the product of a theologically anachronistic inheritance that links him to Stifter, the writer who, for Benjamin, combined religious piety with Austrian worldliness to form the bedrock of the Viennese bourgeois tradition. By propagating these values, the *Allmensch* remains an “ideal humanist.” But as was the case in Kraus’s appropriation of Hebel, Stifter’s “credo” also assumes in Kraus a wholly new, and rather apocalyptic form. After quoting from the famous opening prologue to Stifter’s *Bunte Steine* that ascribes the origins of natural wonders to “higher laws,” Benjamin writes:

Stillschweigend ist in diesen berühmten Sätzen das Heilige dem bescheidenen, doch bedenklichen Begriff des Gesetzes gewichen. Aber transparent genug ist diese Natur Stifters und seine Sittenwelt, um mit der kantischen ganz unverwechselbar und ihn ihrem Kern als Kreatur erkennbar zu bleiben. Und jene schnöde säkularisierten Gewitter und Blitze, Stürme, Brandungen und Erdbeben—der Allmensch hat sie der Schöpfung wieder zurückgewonnen, indem er sie zu deren weltgerichtlicher Antwort auf das frevelhafte Dasein der Menschen gemacht hat. Nur daß die Spanne zwischen Schöpfung und Weltgericht hier keine heilsgeschichtliche Erfüllung, geschweige denn geschichtliche Überwindung findet. (340)

Weigel has argued that Benjamin “kritisiert [den Gesetzbegriff] als einen Deckbegriff für eine verschwiegene Vorstellung vom Heiligen” (30). Despite the shift in language, that is, Stifter, the *Allmensch*, remains ultimately bound to a “creaturely” conception of humanity, in which history has yet to interfere with a sanctified, unhistorical nature. This is why Benjamin next refers to the natural wonders and disasters in Stifter (and, by implication, in Kraus)—storms, lightning, earthquakes, etc.—as “schnöde,” for they betray an unreflected notion of secularization at work rather than a true dialectic. Weigel thus concludes: “Säkularisierung, die nicht schnöde verfährt, ist damit als eine *reflexive* Haltung bestimmt.”⁸⁷ In this unreflective mode, everything is tainted in its relation to *Schöpfung*, and the human fares the worst from this perspective. When Benjamin inserts the deictic reference “hier” in the last sentence, he returns to the primary object

⁸⁶ See Sigrid Weigel, *Walter Benjamin*, 31.

⁸⁷ Weigel, *Benjamin*, 30.

of his study, Kraus, suggesting that for the satirist who sees the world caught between creation and judgment day, there is no hope, neither within nor outside of history. Benjamin is thus being critical when he writes, “[d]ie Kreatur ist es, in deren Namen Kraus immer wieder dem Tier und ‘dem Herzen aller Herzen, jenem des Hundes,’ sich zuneigt, für ihn der wahre Tugendspiegel der Schöpfung, in welchem Treue, Reinheit, Dankbarkeit uns aus verlorener Zeitenferne herüberlächeln. Wie beklagenswert, daß sich Menschen an dessen Stelle setzen!” (341). With pointed irony, Benjamin accuses Kraus of inheriting an unfiltered, baroque ethos. Or as Weigel suggests, “[d]ie Rolle der Kreatur wird damit zum Symptom einer *widerhistorischen theologischen Mythisierung* der Moderne, eine Haltung, die Benjamin als Erbmasse des Barock bewertet.”⁸⁸

Hence the lasting image of the *Allmensch*: the secular priest standing at the threshold of Creation and the Last Judgment, unleashing one jeremiad after another—often targeted at the same enemy—and for whom it is not history but the vision of a pre-lapsarian nature that eternally opposes itself to a fallen and irredeemable humanity.⁸⁹ This is the part of the satirist’s physiognomy that refuses to recognize secular modernity; what Benjamin is after is how Kraus arrives at a more active, reflective participation in the “dialectic of secularization,” how this historical process truly manifests itself in Kraus’s work.⁹⁰ How does Kraus’s theological inheritance prove to be a productive and not a questionable aspect of his persona? For that the *Allmensch* sees nature but not history, let alone its materialist variant, is a crucial failing on Kraus’s part, a failing that results in the formation of an unbridgeable distance between him and

⁸⁸ Or, as Weigel suggests, “[d]ie Rolle der Kreatur wird damit zum Symptom einer *widerhistorischen theologischen Mythisierung* der Moderne, eine Haltung, die Benjamin als Erbmasse des Barock bewertet.” See Weigel, *Benjamin*, 32.

⁸⁹ Weigel thus finds an analog to Benjamin’s Kraus in the former’s reading of Kafka, as both of these literary figures stand on the threshold of what Benjamin calls *Schöpfung* and *Weltgericht*, the former a strictly theological category toward which Kraus directs his lament (*Klage*), the latter a worldly court of justice in which Kraus qua zealot holds his arraignment (*Anklage*). See Weigel, *Benjamin*, 56.

⁹⁰ Weigel, *Benjamin*, 43.

the historical, material world. The *Allmensch* is not in a true position to critique because he maintains his undifferentiated subjectivity in resolute opposition to the objective world against which he inveighs.⁹¹ Thus Benjamin's conclusion to this section: "Den immer gleichen Sensationen, mit denen die Tagespresse ihrem Publikum dient, stellt er die ewig neue 'Zeitung' gegenüber, die von der Geschichte der Schöpfung zu melden ist: die ewig neue, die unausgesetzte Klage" (345). Admittedly, with his repeated lament, Kraus points to the political-philosophical problem of the press: its repetition of the empty phrase, which turns the events of world history into a rotating carousel of the ever-same, a quasi-Nietzschean "eternal recurrence."⁹² Yet to this repetition of content Kraus merely opposes a repetition of form; by mirroring the repetitive structure of the press, he, too, cannot break out of its vicious cycle—an issue we will encounter when examining Kraus's wartime drama as an antidote to his journalistic prose. As Weigel writes, "die Klage [ist] eher ein unreflektierter Ausdruck dieser Entfernung, indem sie sich in der Geschichte unmittelbar an die Schöpfung adressiert."⁹³ As the *Allmensch*, Kraus is unable to bring "das Kontinuum der immer gleichen Sensationen zum Stillstand."⁹⁴ In either case, Kraus is here rendered powerless against the machinery of the press.

⁹¹ In this sense, the *Allmensch* shares an affinity with what Hegel calls the "law of the heart," the shape of consciousness that manifests itself in the individual who universalizes his or her own law while being blind to its inherent perversion. Hegel writes: "Das Herzklopfen für das Wohl der Menschheit geht darum in das Toben des verrückten Eigendünkels über, in die Wut des Bewußtseins, gegen seine Zerstörung sich zu erhalten, und dies dadurch, daß es die Verkehrtheit, welche es selbst ist, aus sich herauswirft und sie als ein Anderes anzusehen und auszusprechen sich anstrengt. Es spricht also die allgemeine Ordnung aus als eine von fanatischen Priestern, schwelgenden Despoten und für ihre Erniedrigung hinabwärts durch Erniedrigen und Unterdrücken sich entschädigenden Dienern derselben erfundene und zum namenlosen Elende der betrogenen Menschheit gehandhabte Verkehrung des Gesetzes des Herzens und seines Glücks." See G.W.F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1986), 280-281. Emphasis added.

⁹² For a more thorough treatment of Benjamin's relationship to the press, including his essay on Kraus, see Uwe Steiner, *Walter Benjamin: An Introduction to his Work and Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 80-104.

⁹³ Here Weigel rightly contrasts the act of translation in Benjamin to Kraus's *Klage*, by suggesting that for Benjamin, translation done properly presupposes the distance between history and creation or revelation and thus operates accordingly; it is reflected and dialectic, unlike Kraus's lament, which refuses to renounce this unbridgeable distance. See Weigel, *Benjamin*, 51.

⁹⁴ See Schulte, 84.

But in the spirit of dialectics, what Benjamin preserves in the *Allmensch* is the incipient critique of commodity capitalism that he detects in Kraus's language of "real authority," a language that categorically distinguishes the journalist Kraus from the journalists he berates. More precisely: the daily press is exclusively dependent on, and exclusively serves a public; its content and its judgments are always subject to the demands and confines of the market, leaving little room for true autonomy. And as a historically conditioned type, the journalist can only offer what Benjamin calls an "opinion," which, under the conditions of capitalist modernity, has become the expression of "falsche[r] Subjektivität, die sich von der Person abheben, dem Warenlauf einverleiben läßt" (343).⁹⁵ Opinions in this context are taglines of ideology, fixed linguistic expressions that are recycled *ad infinitum* and indiscriminately applied to all social and political affairs. When Benjamin refers to the "false subjectivity" of an opinion that can be set apart from the "person" and then "incorporated into the circulation of commodities," he points to the near impossibility of establishing any true subjectivity under the conditions of mature capitalism. Journalism, despite its pretenses, is not the place to locate authentic subjectivity in the way Benjamin conceives of it.

This more genuine subjectivity of the *Allmensch* expresses itself in the singularity of Kraus's language and convictions, which can never be reduced to opinions: "Nie hat Kraus eine Argumentation gegeben, die ihn nicht mit seiner ganzen Person engagiert hätte. So verkörpert er das Geheimnis der Autorität: nie zu enttäuschen" (343). Opinions invariably "disappoint" because, in their utter exchangeability, they can be bought as easily as they can be sold. As they

⁹⁵ "Meinung" is a crucial term for Kraus, the word itself appearing 1,674 times during the *Fackel's* 37-year lifespan. It is almost always used in a pejorative sense, and invariably associated with the press, which, for Kraus, substitutes a proliferation of opinions as a means to conceal the absence of a single real thought. For example, this aphorism: "Ich habe es so oft erlebt, daß einer, der meine Meinung teilte, die größere Hälfte für sich behielt, daß ich gewitzt bin und den Leuten nur noch Gedanken anbiete." See F 300, 17, 1919. I would assume that in the passage above, Benjamin is borrowing the term from Kraus and furnishing it with the conceptual clarity that Kraus himself never offers.

fluctuate according to supply and demand, they cannot be affixed to the individual who claims them as his or her own. By contrast, Kraus can, for Benjamin, never be separated from what he says or writes. Whether justified or unjustified—it is important to remember that we have not yet entered the realm of *Gerechtigkeit* as it pertains to Kraus’s use of language—he gains leverage over his opponents in virtually all matters. Especially, Benjamin adds, those that have to do with the mechanics and ethics of language itself, the medium in which both Kraus and his enemies operate. Weigel thus rightfully notes that for Benjamin, it is in Kraus’s *Sprachlehre*,⁹⁶ his explicit linguistic and philological critiques, that he “displays his authority, in order thus to win from the empty phrases of the newspapers the ‘news’ in the original sense of the word: as linguistic event.”⁹⁷ Kraus returns the news, as it were, to its proper origin.

I would add to her comment by suggesting that the “authority” Benjamin identifies in Kraus comes at a great cost: it precludes Kraus from partaking in, and critiquing objective, historical reality. Taken as a whole, Benjamin thus negates the *Allmensch* because its signature gesture amounts to a perpetual lament directed at humanity’s fallen-ness (represented here by the journalist), or to a metaphorical finger wagging directed at the corrupt “way of the world” that remains stuck in its oscillating movement.⁹⁸ Benjamin has conceded to Kraus’s authority as a legitimate polemicist and to the idea that he has something necessary to say. Simultaneously, however, he suggests that by lashing out at the world in the manner of the *Allmensch*, of the ideal

⁹⁶ Both Benjamin and Weigel are borrowing the term “Sprachlehre” directly from Kraus, who periodically interjected into editions of *Die Fackel* instructions on what he considered to be the proper use of language, most of which were tinged with caustic satire. For example, under the title “Sprich Deutsch,” Kraus writes: “Die Literarhistoriker, die den Deutschen ihr ‘Sprich deutsch!’ zuzurufen, haben, da sie selbst nicht imstande sind, diese Forderung zu erfüllen, auch keine Ahnung, daß sie die ändern damit nur bestärken, undeutsch zu sprechen. Denn sie wollen sie ja bloß vom wohltätigen Gebrauch der Fremdwörter abhalten, der doch allein die deutsche Sprache davor bewahren kann, verschandelt zu werden. Anstatt sich an den unendlichen Ausdrucksmöglichkeiten der deutschen Sprache zu versündigen, ist es hundertmal besser, sich der einfacheren Formen einer fremden zu bedienen. Je mehr Fremdwörter jene gebrauchen, die nie deutsch lernen werden, desto besser.” See Kraus, F 571, 2, 1921.

⁹⁷ See Weigel, “Eros and Language: Benjamin’s Kraus Essay,” in *Walter Benjamin: Language, Literature, History*, eds. Ragnhild E. Reinton & Dag T. Anderson (Oslo: Solum Forlag, 2000), 35.

⁹⁸ I am here paraphrasing Hegel’s virtuous individual, for whom the “Weltlauf” is always deemed perverted (*verkehrt*) until its “wahres Wesen” is bodied forth in the course of the dialectic. See Hegel, 285.

humanist that has renounced any relationship to material, historical reality, Kraus is going about his endeavor ineffectively—in his unreflective disposition, he has not yet fulfilled the task of the truly modern satirist. Benjamin will further challenge Kraus’s authority, or at least temporarily undermine it, when he moves to the domain of the demon.⁹⁹

The line, “Hab’ ich geschlafen? Eben schlaf’ ich ein,” taken from Kraus’s *Worte in Versen IV*, serves as the epigraph to the next section of the essay: “Dämon.” In this section Benjamin explores the more unsettling dimensions of Kraus’s physiognomy that he began to develop in “Allmensch” but which only here obtain their full articulation. The demon is a recurring figure in Benjamin’s oeuvre, and is almost invariably associated with myth, guilt, sexuality and what Benjamin calls the law of ambiguity, categories that both cannot be thought apart from one another and that play a major role in Benjamin’s characterization of Kraus *qua* demon.¹⁰⁰ Benjamin’s intention is thus to render less ambiguous the ambiguous moments that lie in the hidden recesses of Kraus’s persona. His first task is to address a fundamental misinterpretation of Kraus, warning that an eye “das sich [der Nacht] nicht akkomodieren kann, wird den Umriß dieser Gestalt nie gewahr werden” (345). As such, he debunks the notion put

⁹⁹ In a letter to Werner Kraft lamenting Kraus’s sudden support of the Austro-fascist Engelbert Dollfuß in 1934, Benjamin wrote: “Wer kann nun eigentlich noch umfallen? Ein bitterer Trost—aber auf dieser Front werden wir keinen Verlust mehr haben, der neben diesem auch nur der Erwähnung wert wäre. Der Dämon ist stärker als der Mensch bzw. der Unmensch gewesen.” Benjamin associates the demon with Kraus’s politics of resignation that forced him to choose between two political evils. See Benjamin, GS II, 1085.

¹⁰⁰ Myth is a central and itself not wholly unambiguous category in Benjamin. Though appearing in one form or another in many of his writings, it receives arguably its most sustained treatment in *Goethe’s Wahlverwandtschaften*, in which Benjamin presents Otilie as the mythical figure *par excellence* who dies for the sake of the living characters and as a result of the novel’s necessity; her character is thus subordinate to the law of art. More generally, then, Benjamin describes the mythical order as the order of law in the broadest sense of the term, whose origins have been forgotten or repressed and thus whose very perpetuation he deems a dubious enterprise. The natural world is mythical, for Benjamin, but so is capitalism when perceived as natural, that is, ahistorical. For more on the concept of myth in Benjamin, see Rudolf Gasché, “Saturnine Vision” in *Benjamin’s Ground: New Readings in Walter Benjamin* (Detroit: Wayne State Press, 1988); Winfried Menninghaus, *Schwellenkunde: Walter Benjamins Passage des Mythos* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1986); and Uwe Steiner, *Die Geburt der Kritik aus dem Geiste der Kunst: Untersuchungen zum Begriff der Kritik in den frühen Schriften Walter Benjamins* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1989). For more on the “demon” in Benjamin, see Eva Geulen, “Toward a Genealogy of Gender in Walter Benjamin’s Writing,” *The German Quarterly* (Vol. 69, No. 2, Spring, 1996), 161-180.

forth by Leopold Liegler, a contemporary of Benjamin and an admirer of Kraus, that Kraus could be characterized as an “ethical personality” (345), since such a characterization is wholly undialectical and simply ascribes a secular category to a historical figure without undergoing the necessary labor required to arrive at such a judgment. Describing Kraus as ethical both effaces what’s problematic about him and obscures a more adequate understanding of the radically positive in him. Benjamin thus avoids subjective judgments of this sort about Kraus’s character, which have no place in the type of critique he is developing. He identifies, rather, three interrelated moments in the demon Kraus that prevent him from transcending mythical collectivity: his vanity (*Eitelkeit*), his penchant for mimicry, and his problematic notion of sexuality, the implications of which transcend this particular sphere.

In bringing Kraus’s vanity together with what he calls his “self-expression,” Benjamin invokes Kraus’s tendency toward self-referentiality, suggesting here that in virtually everything Kraus writes, he cannot avoid writing about himself: “Auch in dieser Zone aber bekundet, durch Zweideutigkeit, sich der Dämon: Selbstaussdruck und Entlarvung gehen in ihr als Selbstentlarvung ineinander über Kein Preis ist ihm zu hoch, von sich reden zu machen” (346). This is, to be sure, the stamp of Kraus’s passion and his unique style—his signature. Indeed, every *Fackel* reader, Benjamin continues, is able to detect “am abgelegensten und trockensten Faktum noch ein Stück” of Kraus’s “geschundenen Fleischs” (346).¹⁰¹ Again, Benjamin is not isolating Kraus’s vanity in order to criticize it as a character flaw; against Kraus’s own suspicion, this essay is not a psychological or psychoanalytical investigation. In this way, Benjamin distances himself from the school of Kraus detractors who, too, argue that Kraus’s vanity is the source of his arrested intellectual development, but who are speaking more

¹⁰¹ This could be understood as a veiled reference to Christ.

to Kraus's inner psychology than they are to his effectiveness or his function as a satirist.¹⁰² For Benjamin, rather, Kraus's vanity is an obstruction that finds its most legitimate expression in his acts of mimicry: "Er macht den Partner nach, um in den feinsten Fugen seiner Haltung das Brecheisen des Hasses anzusetzen" (347).¹⁰³ Kraus was, to be sure, notorious for his vitriolic imitations of his enemies, which had lasting effects on his audiences, and Benjamin knew this.¹⁰⁴ By mimicking the language and gestures of his enemies, Kraus was able to get at what Benjamin calls the "creaturely" base of these voices—explicitly harking back to the first section of his essay—which were shorn of their human quality, thereby revealing the duplicity of their "Käuflichkeit und der Geschwätzigkeit, der Niedertracht und der Bonhomie, der Kinderei und der Habsucht, der Verfressenheit und der Hinterlist" (347). The very sound of these voices can only, however, appear to be infused with negativity if they are perceived from the absolute perspective of *Schöpfung*.

Yet Kraus's vanity forecloses any possible distinction between the act of unmasking another (*Entlarvung*) and the act of self-expression (*Selbstaussdruck*). And thus it seems that for Benjamin, the demon in Kraus is not able to transcend the type of solipsism that Benjamin calls "self-unmasking" (*Selbstentlarvung*). Through mimicry, Kraus may indeed "creep" inside his enemy in order to annihilate him, successfully bridging the gap that had previously separated the

¹⁰² Anton Kuh, one of Kraus's journalistic contemporaries and most bitter rivals, writes that Kraus was stuck in a stage of perpetual adolescence, "das heißt aus der Zeit, wo man noch lange nicht dazu gekommen ist...als freier Mensch sicher zu sein und etwas anderes zu tun, als zu vergewaltigen oder zu überreden oder sich zu kaufen, kurz, aus dem Genie-Nest der Eitelkeit endlich ins Freie zu kriechen." For Kuh, then, the yoke of vanity in Kraus is the product of a prolonged childhood fantasy; it is more of a psychological category aimed to defame Kraus's character. See Kuh, "Der Affa Zarathustras (Karl Kraus)," reprinted in *Von Goethe Abwärts: Essays, Aphorismen, Kleine Prosa* (Germany: Forum Verlag, 1963), 229.

¹⁰³ For recent analytic work on the function of mimicry in Kraus, see Amália Kerekes, *Schreibintensitäten: Alterationen der journalistischen Wahrnehmung im Spätwerk von Karl Kraus* (Frankfurt: Magdolna Orosz, 2006).

¹⁰⁴ The critic Willy Haas commented similarly about Kraus: "Er war eine Art Tierstimmen-Imitator der Menschenstimmen; er konnte wie kein anderer das Bestialische an einer widerwärtigen Menschenstimme erkennen und in der blossen gedruckten Phrase wiedergeben, und wenn er noch Hitler, Goebbels, Göring im Vollbesitz dieser seiner Gabe gehört hätte, so hätten wir die genialste Entlarvung der Weltgeschichte durch einfache Stimmenwiedergabe, durch Wiedergabe von charakteristischen Phrasen und Wendungen erlebt . . ." See Willy Haas, *Die Literarische Welt* (Munich: P. List, 1960), 23.

Allmensch from objective, historical reality. But in this demonic fusion with the object of his critique, Benjamin detects a trace of self-insistence, or of Kraus's own lingering subjectivity. C.J.

Thornhill interjects in this discourse:

This demonic tension in the Kraus-figure between the danger of subsidence into undifferentiation and the obsessive craving for subjective autonomy also functions as a critique of subjectivity. Both extreme forms of subjective existence – the quest for total, ahistorical interiority and autonomy, and the collapse into undifferentiated immanence – are viewed by Benjamin here implicitly as demonic myth-perpetuating forms of idealist thought. Both are ultimately seen to be incapable of genuine involvement in the objective historical reality.¹⁰⁵

I would make, however, a distinction between the two moments described above. The “quest for total, ahistorical interiority and autonomy” can be mapped onto the territory of the *Allmensch*, while the “collapse into undifferentiated immanence” is the fault of the demon. In his imitations, argues Benjamin, Kraus thus finds himself further implicated in the very language he negates:

“Seine Leidenschaft, [die Mitmenschen] zu imitieren, ist Ausdruck für und Kampf gegen diese Verstrickung zugleich” (348). Benjamin is thus willing neither to redeem Kraus nor justify this his most vindictive gesture by attributing to him purely benevolent motives, as others have done: “Nein! diese unbestechliche, eingreifende, wehrhafte Sicherheit kommt nicht aus jener edlen, dichterischen oder menschenfreundlichen Gesinnung, der die Anhänger sie gern zuschreiben” (348). This is because in maintaining a certain fidelity to his earlier work on the *Trauerspiel* (and in some ways understanding Kraus as a reincarnation of the Baroque sensibility), Benjamin adamantly refuses to try to understand or evaluate Kraus's *intentions* in the process of his critique.¹⁰⁶

If vanity qua mimicry is the first cipher of the demon, the next is the duality of mind and sexuality, pure “Geist” and pure “Sexus,” which are bound together by a notion of transcendental

¹⁰⁵ Thornhill, 25.

¹⁰⁶ I am referring to the oft-quoted passage from the “Epistemokritische Vorrede,” “Die Wahrheit ist der Tod der Intention.” See Benjamin, GS I, 216.

guilt that Benjamin attributes to the demonic disposition (353). In one of the essay's more obscure passages, Benjamin writes,

Geist und Sexus bewegen sich in dieser Sphäre in einer Solidarität, deren Gesetz Zweideutigkeit ist. Die Besessenheit des dämonischen Sexus ist das Ich . . . Und nicht anders die lieblose und selbstgenugsame besessenen Geistes: der Witz. Zu ihrer Sache kommen sie beide nicht; das Ich zum Weib so wenig wie der Witz zum Wort.¹⁰⁷ (353)

Once again Benjamin alludes to the isolated vanity of the demon, his entrapment in myth and his “Ich-Besessenheit.” The problem with “pure mind” in Kraus is that it often culminates in self-satisfaction, which manifests itself in Kraus's wordplay and his jokes—it should be noted, then, that both Adorno and Benjamin take pause at Kraus's jokes and view them as hindrances to Kraus's critique. But for Adorno it is primarily because Kraus repeats them, while for Benjamin, it has something inherent to do with the joke itself. For him, Kraus's *Wortwitze* often delight more in their own wittiness than in the intended demise of the object of their ridicule, producing a form of literary onanism.¹⁰⁸ But the joke is only one example of this self-satisfaction; the abstraction “mind” finds its most concrete and devastating historical articulation in journalism, whose “true substance,” Benjamin reminds us, is *Geschwätz*, from which the demon in Kraus cannot escape: Kraus, too, is a *Schwätzer*.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ As Schulte rightly interprets, “die gleichermaßen besessenen Figuren dieser Polarität sind ‘das Ich’ (Sexus) und ‘der Witz’ (Geist), die, wie es in einer Notiz heißt, ‘jeder am anderen ein Genüge finde[n] statt an ihren Gegenständen – am Wort und Weibe.’” See Schulte, 95.

¹⁰⁸ The subtle criticism Benjamin levels against Kraus's jokes parallels what Kraus writes about Heine's wordplay, which Kraus, too, dismisses as the product of a perverse sexuality. See Kraus, “Heine und die Folgen” (F 329, 1911). For other perspectives on the joke in Kraus, see Christian Wagenknecht, *Das Wortspiel bei Karl Kraus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997).

¹⁰⁹ With this Benjamin is probably thinking of Kierkegaard, an implicit interlocutor who crops up at different junctures in the essay. Kierkegaard, too, waged a battle against the press and wrote about its substance similarly: “What is it to chatter? It is the annulment of the passionate disjunction between being silence and speaking. Only the person who can remain essentially silent can speak essentially, can act essentially. Silence is inwardness. Chattering gets ahead of essential speaking . . . But chattering dreads the moment of silence, which would reveal the emptiness.” When Benjamin earlier called Kraus's “In dieser großen Zeit” an example of “silence turned outward,” he may have also had this passage of Kierkegaard in mind. In both references, the dialectic between silence and speech seems to be at work in Kraus. See Kierkegaard, “Two Ages: The Age of Revolution and the Present Age. A Literary Review,” in *The Essential Kierkegaard*, ed. and trans. Howard and Edna Hong (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000), 265.

At the other end of this continuum lies the notion of “Sexus,” that ambiguous territory of sexuality, symbolized here by the phenomenon of prostitution, to whose criminal status Kraus once offered a moral-juridical rebuke: “Ein Sittlichkeitsprozeß ist die zielbewußte Entwicklung einer Individuellen zur allgemeinen Unsittlichkeit, von deren düsterem Grunde sich die erwiesene Schuld des Angeklagten leuchtend abhebt.”¹¹⁰ The prostitute is only deemed corrupt by the corrupt legal order that indicts her, Kraus suggests. Benjamin takes issue, then, not necessarily with Kraus’s conclusions, but with his fundamental assumptions regarding the two phenomena that converge in Kraus’s thinking: journalism being “Dasein im Zeichen des bloßen Geistes,” and prostitution, “Dasein im Zeichen des bloßen Sexus” (353). If Kraus’s first error is his tendency to reproduce the very journalistic language he so often repudiates, namely through his employment of jokes and puerile wordplay (what one often finds in the *feuilleton*), then his second is his tendency to romanticize prostitution, which he seems to view as an iteration of medieval courtly love.¹¹¹ By insisting that prostitution and, by extrapolation, journalism, are both “natural” phenomena, Kraus glaringly ignores the fact of commodity capitalism and its ethos of exchange, in other words: the historical structures that provide the backdrop for these socially mediated relations.

Kraus’s vanity blinds him once again to historical reality. For despite the fact that his criticisms are on point, it is his blindness to the “sociological realm” that explains why Benjamin elsewhere calls Kraus’s struggle against the press a “hopeless” one, the logical obverse of which would be his problematic defense of prostitution: “Was hoffnungsloser als sein Kampf mit der

¹¹⁰ See Kraus, F 187, 12, 1905.

¹¹¹ For more on Kraus’s sexual politics and its place within Viennese modernism, see Nike Wagner, *Geist und Geschlecht: Karl Kraus und die Erotik der Wiener Moderne* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1982), as well as Weigel, “Eros and Language,” 26-45.

Presse? Was weiß er von den wahrhaft ihm verbündeten Gewalten?”¹¹² These “forces” would seem to be those of myth that Benjamin explicitly names in this part of the essay. It is the demon’s “Naturverhaftung” that binds him, vis-à-vis the inherent deficiencies of their respective dispositions, to the *Allmensch*, the latter standing too far apart from the world, the former too immersed in it—neither in a position to truly critique nor fulfill the function of the satirist as Benjamin envisions it.¹¹³ And thus Benjamin passes his most devastating judgment regarding Kraus’s dubious relationship to modernity:

Daß ihm das Menschenwürdige nicht als Bestimmung und Erfüllung der befreiten – der revolutionären veränderten – Natur, sondern als Element der Natur schlechtweg, einer archaischen und geschichtslosen in ihrem ungebrochenen Ursein sich darstellt, wirft ungewisse, unheimliche Reflexe noch auf seine Idee von Freiheit und von Menschlichkeit zurück. Sie ist nicht dem Bereich der Schuld entrückt. (353-54)

By proclaiming Kraus’s conservative perception of unchanging nature, Benjamin arrives at what he calls Kraus’s “Schuldbewußtsein” (348), a category to which I will return when I analyze Kraus’s own work, and which, for Benjamin, prevents Kraus from engaging in revolutionary critique.¹¹⁴ Kraus’s complicity in the problems of modernity has been alluded to throughout this section; what Benjamin next shows is how private and historical consciousness have coincided in the figure of the demon, both of which are embedded in the mythical landscape of modernity. Kraus’s private consciousness proves to be, for Benjamin, the truth of the historical consciousness in its guilt, only that Kraus explicitly recognizes it, and thus Benjamin quotes Kraus’s alter ego, the “Nörgler,” from *Die letzten Tage der Menschheit*, who admits to being

¹¹² Writes Benjamin in an earlier draft: “Insuffizienzen in seiner Verteidigung der Prostitution, die genau seinen Insuffizienzen in der Kritik des Journalismus entsprechen.” See GS II, 1092.

¹¹³ See Benjamin, GS IV, 121. It is interesting to note the parallel between Benjamin’s understanding of Kraus’s insufficient critical positions and what Adorno writes about the constitutive insufficiencies of what he calls “immanent” and “transcendent” contemplation. Adorno writes: “Wie aber die stur immanente Betrachtung in den Idealismus zurückzuschlagen droht, die Illusion selbstgenügsamen, über sich und die Realität gebietenden Geistes, so droht die transzendente, die Arbeit des Begriffs zu vergessen, und mit der vorschriftsmäßigen Etikettierung, dem gefrorenen Schimpfwort...dem von oben her abfertigenden Ukas sich zu begnügen.” See Adorno, “Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft,” in *Prismen* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1955), 28-29.

¹¹⁴ As one critic writes, “Doch einer derartigen Kritik, die ja gerade eine ‘Befreiung vom Mythos’ bedeuten würde, steht Kraus’ dämonische ‘Naturverhaftung’ im Wege.” See Schulte, 92.

“mitschuldig” in the “noises” of the epoch (350). Kraus’s participation in the events of his day—World War I is the specific point of reference here—is at the same time a cipher of his implication in them. Benjamin has thus presented a despairing image of Kraus, failing, through his tireless work of negation, to establish firm ground on which to stand and adequately execute his satirical judgment. But the demon’s essential accomplishment consists in having sublated his *Anklage* into a *Klage* and having subsequently entered the *worldly* court of judgment; he has thus renounced the standpoint of creation occupied by the *Allmensch*. In what follows we will see how Benjamin envisions the theological category of justice (*Gerechtigkeit*) being reinscribed into the secular work of the satirist.¹¹⁵

“Die Satire ist die einzig rechtmäßige Form der Heimatkunst” (354). With this apodictic statement sanctioning satire alone among all nationally-oriented art forms, Benjamin introduces the *Unmensch*, the figure in whom Kraus is able to dialectically conquer the first two moments of his physiognomy and fulfill the function of the satirist in modernity. As Hanssen writes, for Benjamin, “satire set an end to the subhuman powers of the demonic” (119). The *Unmensch* in Kraus sees through cosmic man’s “ideal” but ultimately failed humanism (a product of the early Marx), as well as breaks the spell of the mythical demon, who lingers idly in his own vanity: “Die Macht des Dämons endet an diesem Reiche. Sein Zwischen- oder Untermenschliches wird von einem wahrhaft Unmenschlichen überwunden” (358).¹¹⁶ It is here that Benjamin delivers his most decisive blow at Kraus in order to simultaneously identify the critic in him; he peels away until he gets to Kraus’s “inhuman” core, which ultimately culminates in the act of quotation.

¹¹⁵ In an earlier draft of the essay, Benjamin writes: “In Lessings berühmter Satz, wenn Gott in seiner einen Hand die Wahrheit, in seiner Andern das ewige Streben nach ihr mir entgegenhielte, ich würde die zweite wählen; diesem Satze könnte Kraus das Pendant stellen: wenn Gott mir in einer Hand die Aufhebung des Übels und in der Andern seine ewige Vernichtung entgegenhielte und liebe mich wählen, ich würde die zweite wählen.” See Benjamin, GS II, 1092. This aside appears to accurately describe the predicament of the demon.

¹¹⁶ Hanssen writes: “In contrast the scientific claims of the later Marx, humanist Marxism remained entrenched in the idea that human history was propelled by a creator-subject.” See Hanssen, 118. Benjamin is determined to dispel this myth by presenting the *Unmensch* Kraus as a destructively revolutionary figure.

At a crucial but often neglected moment—and one that speaks to some of the larger questions this dissertation raises—Benjamin suggests that Kraus was at odds to separate “den Satiriker echten Schlages von jenen Schreibern . . . die aus dem Hohn ein Gewerbe gemacht und nicht viel mehr bei ihren Invektiven im Sinne haben als dem Publikum etwas zu lachen zu geben” (354-55). It is interesting to note how Benjamin writes of laughter in other texts, such as *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter der technischen Reproduzierbarkeit*, when his focus is more on the side of the laugher:

Den vorzeitigen und heilsamen Ausbruch derartiger Massenpsychosen stellt das kollektive Gelächter dar. Die ungeheuren Massen grotesken Geschehens, die zur Zeit im Film konsumiert werden, sind ein drastisches Anzeichen der Gefahren, die der Menschheit aus den Verdrängungen drohen, die die Zivilisation mit sich bringt.¹¹⁷

Here, Benjamin speaks of laughter using psychoanalytic language as a collective release of repressed energy forced to expression through modern American grotesques and the like, whereas in the Kraus essay, he distinguishes between two types of laughter: the mocking kind that is a mere product of the culture industry, and, implicitly, the kind that Kraus’s satire elicits. The former could be understood, I would add, as the product of “demonic” satire because it does not transcend the mythical relation of cause and effect, the cycle of satiric barb and response—this will become one of the key discourses in the chapters that follow. By implication, real satire works toward its own dissolution, for it theoretically seeks to bring about an end to the historical conditions that perpetually demand to be satirized; it thus seeks to do away with a certain type of laughter.

The distinction between these two types of satire can be further delineated in a reading of this passage that hinges on the English translation of the word “Schreiber.” While commonly translated as “scribe” or “writer,” this word is rendered in the English version of the essay as

¹¹⁷ See Benjamin, GS I, 462.

follows: “. . . [Kraus] was at pains from the first to distinguish the genuine satirist from the *scribblers*”¹¹⁸ In contrast to the true satirist, the scribbler’s writing is unintelligible; rather, he does not yet *write* in Benjamin’s sense of the word, for his language is deployed exclusively in the service of an economic end. If the satirist writes, the charlatan scribbles, and thus a defining mark of the satirist in Kraus seems to be his ability to distinguish between the two, something he demonstrates through his own use and treatment of language—and in his own appropriation of other satirists. Benjamin thus turns to Kraus’s unique recitations of the French composer Jacques Offenbach, whose operettas counted among Kraus’s favorite satirical works of the nineteenth century.¹¹⁹ Defending Kraus’s Offenbach over that of his contemporaries, Benjamin writes: “Die Anarchie als einzig moralische, einzig menschenwürdige Weltverfassung wird zur wahren Musik dieser Operetten. Die Stimme von Kraus sagt diese innere Musik mehr, als daß sie sie singt” (356). Benjamin clearly discerns an anarchical moment in Offenbach that has been ignored by most contemporary interpreters. But more significant is how Kraus’s performances, his translations, entail not the embellishment associated with most early twentieth-century Viennese dramaturges, but a pruning of sorts, a siphoning out of this mellifluous music its discordant, critical language: Offenbach (and along with him, Johann Nestroy) “sprechen aus [Kraus] heraus” (357).¹²⁰ In a crucial passage, Benjamin continues: “Offenbachs Werk erlebt eine Todeskrise. Es zieht sich zusammen, entledigt sich alles Überflüssigen, geht durch den gefährlichen Raum dieses Daseins hindurch und kommt gerettet, wirklicher als vordem, wieder

¹¹⁸ Jephcott, 45. Emphasis added.

¹¹⁹ As Benjamin rightly points out, Kraus praised Offenbach’s conception of nonsense in art: “Zu einem Gesamtkunstwerk im harmonischsten Geiste aber vermögen Aktion und Gesang in der Operette zu verschmelzen, die eine Welt als gegeben nimmt, in der sich der Unsinn von selbst versteht und in der er nie die Reaktion der Vernunft herausfordert. Offenbach hatte in seinen Reichen phantasiebelebender Unvernunft auch für die geistvollste Parodierung des Opernwesens Raum: die souveräne Planlosigkeit der Operette kehrte sich bewußt gegen die Lächerlichkeit einer Kunstform, die im Rahmen einer planvollen Handlung den Unsinn erst zu Ehren bringt.” See Kraus, F 270, 9, 1909.

¹²⁰ Schulte adds that Offenbach’s music’s “stumme durch Kanonisierung entschärfte Klage verwandelt sich in die insistierende Stimme der Krausschen Kritik” See Schulte, 110.

zum Vorschein” (357). For Benjamin, Kraus is uniquely able to access what I would here call Offenbach’s *truth-content*, a complicated Benjaminian term defined by one critic as an objective, historical truth that “takes shape as [the work’s] thematic content dies.”¹²¹ Thus much in the same way Benjamin interprets the significance of the *Trauerspiel*, he suggests that Kraus is not interested in *returning* to Offenbach’s nineteenth-century Paris, but in producing a dialectical *Vergegenwärtigung* of the satirical composer.

But if the work of the *Unmensch* has hereby begun, Kraus’s transformation into this figure is by no means complete. For even in his stellar performances of Offenbach, Shakespeare, and Nestroy, Kraus’s own voice still persists as a remainder and reminder of his subjectivity, much like it did in the mimicry of his adversaries. It is, I believe, out of this necessity that Benjamin finally turns to his theory of Krausian quotation. To be sure: in this essay, Benjamin is not making an ontological claim about quotation as such, but a historically specific one about the modern, satirical use thereof. Josef Fürnkäs made this point explicit: “Zu fragen ist nach dem Ursprung eines Zitierens, das an die Stelle der alten, esoterischen Zitierkunst getreten ist, mehr noch, das die engen Grenzen von dessen Wirksamkeit weit hinter sich gelassen hat. In diesem Zusammenhang möchte ich...die apokryphe Zitattheorie Walter Benjamins neu entdecken” (210-211).¹²² But to fully understand the significance of quotation for Benjamin, we must first recall his juridical-theological theory of language, which begins (in this essay) with the “Dämon.” It is here where Benjamin identifies Kraus’s quotations from newspapers and his devastating philological critiques of the press as the foundational elements of what he calls his

¹²¹ See Robert Hullot-Kentor’s “Foreword,” in *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic*, Theodor Adorno, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), xv.

¹²² In this sense, Benjamin’s theory of quotation should not be conflated with, or seen as necessarily anticipating, more deconstructive approaches to the discourse. Paraphrasing Derrida, for example, Marjorie Garber writes: “In the case of quotation, the absence of the primary intending subject is itself a normative structuring element . . .” See Garber, *Quotation Marks* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 23. In Benjamin’s case, it is not a structural “absence” but an active negation of the author that becomes the defining gesture of his notion of quotation.

“Sprachprozeßordnung,” through which the mere words of another displaced into Kraus’s mouth become a *corpus delicti* (349). With this, Benjamin locates a profound interlacing of the respective spheres of language and law in Kraus, for whom any instantiation of language rests on potentially criminal foundations. These citations thus constitute “der echt jüdische Salto mortale, mit dem er den Bann des Dämons zu sprengen macht. Denn dies ist die letzte Amtshandlung dieses Eiferers: die Rechtsordnung selbst unter Anklagezustand zu versetzen” (349).¹²³ Where Kraus had once lamented, he now accuses and indicts.

The respective domains of language and law interpenetrate in Kraus, for when he cites the newspaper, Benjamin suggests, Kraus is not attacking this or that particular journalist, but the entire ideological structure that underpins its enterprise, the demonic “legal order” of which Benjamin speaks and which Kraus as prosecutor indicts as he quotes.¹²⁴ Benjamin thus writes that Kraus accuses the law not in its effect but in its substance, for it is the very language itself that Kraus finds rotten at its core. His specific charge is “Hochverrat des Rechtes an der Gerechtigkeit. Genauer, des Begriffs am Worte, aus dem er sein Dasein hat” (349). For Benjamin’s Kraus, law (*Recht*) has betrayed its origin in justice (*Gerechtigkeit*), which contains a homology in the sphere of language, wherein the concept, which we can now make apposite with the empty journalistic phrase, has betrayed (in both senses) its origin in the word, which we will soon be able to link to what Benjamin calls the “name.”¹²⁵

¹²³ The question of Benjamin’s reading of Judaism in Kraus—here as elsewhere spliced with Kierkegaardian inflections—is, indeed, a complicated one, and one that I take up in greater detail later on. For more thorough accounts of this question, see Edward Timms, *Karl Kraus, Apocalyptic Satirist: The Post-War Crisis and the Rise of the Swastika* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 223-226; Reitter, 137-174; and Manfred Voigts, “‘Die Mater der Gerechtigkeit’. Zur Kritik des Zitat-Begriffes bei Walter Benjamin,” in *Antike und Moderne. Zu Walter Benjamins “Passagen”* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1986).

¹²⁴ Referring to the demonic realm of law, Christina Menke astutely points out that “Historisch war Zitation zuerst allein eine solche vors Gericht.” See Menke, *Sprachfiguren: Name – Allegorie – Bild nach Walter Benjamin* (Munich: Fink Verlag, 1991), 373.

¹²⁵ There is also a salient connection to be drawn here to Benjamin’s “Kritik der Gewalt,” in which Benjamin initially posits a distinction between “lawmaking” and “law-preserving” violence, only to subordinate the entire

Weigel has written, “Kraus’s language here becomes the scene of a ‘sanctification of the name,’ whereby this poetic practice is, in order to avoid misunderstandings, clearly distinguished from the hymnic and conciliatory variant of a Stefan George.”¹²⁶ Benjamin makes a crucial distinction between the poet George’s “hieratic” language, in which the poetic word in its primary instantiation is elevated to divine status, and Kraus’s practice of quotation (359).¹²⁷ The former amounts to a false understanding of poetry as a divine act of creation, rendering the poet a godlike figure, while the latter reveals a truth about language by remaining within the immanent plane of language itself. Weigel thus also draws attention to Benjamin’s recovering of the word “Heilige,” which, as opposed to its pejorative connotation in the earlier comparison to Stifter, now comes to stand for the adequate dialectical appropriation of this theological category. We can thus now turn to the quoting “Unmensch,” and specifically to a key passage from this section of the essay: “Aus dem Sprachkreis des Namens, und nur aus ihm, erschließt sich das polemische Grundverfahren von Kraus: das Zitieren. Ein Wort zitieren heißt es beim Namen rufen. So erschöpft sich auf ihrer höchsten Stufe die Leistung von Kraus darin, selbst die Zeitung zitierbar zu machen” (362-63). The interpretation of this passage hinges on the question of what it means

legal order to a mythical, originary act of violence. In language very similar to that of the Kraus essay, Benjamin writes: “Völlig ohnmächtig aber, wenn sie nicht die Rechtsordnung selbst an Haupt und Glieder anfißt, sondern einzelne Gesetze oder Rechtsbräuche, welche denn freilich das Recht in den Schutz seiner Macht nimmt, die darin besteht, dass es nur ein einziges Schicksal gibt und gerade das Bestehende und zumal das Drohende unverbrüchlich seiner Ordnung angehört.” To “put a halt” to this mythical legal order, Benjamin calls for the intervention of “divine violence.” Within the context of the Kraus essay, quotation could be seen to serve as an instantiation of divine violence that transcends the mythical sphere of language. See Benjamin, GS II, 187-88.

¹²⁶ See Weigel, “Eros and Language,” 38.

¹²⁷ Kraus’s own relationship to George was a complicated one marked by both suspicion and respect, the latter being one of Germany’s foremost lyric poets, the former Austria’s leading satirist. Kraus, like Benjamin, was certainly wary of the quasi-religious cult that had developed around the poet, whose most conspicuous member was the literary critic Friedrich Gundolf, against whom Benjamin explicitly polemicized in his essay on Goethe’s *Wahlverwandtschaften*. Benjamin’s thinking on the distinction between the Krausian and the Georgian approaches to language might have been inspired by a poem Kraus composed, “Nach dreißig Jahren,” in which Kraus attempts to similarly undermine the cultish celebration of George: “Und der das Ziel noch vor dem Weg gefunden, / er kam vom Ursprung nicht. Stefan George. . . Daß ich dagegen aus dem Teufelswerk / des Tags den Geist beschwor, daß ich den Sprachgeist antworten hieß dem Widerpart, ist nichts / dagegen (F 810, 10-11). For more on this relationship, see Timms, 179, and George Kranner, *Kraus contra George: Kommentare zu den Übertragungen der Sonette Shakespeares* (Vienna: WUV Universitätsverlag, 1994).

to equate quoting a word with naming it. David Ferris has suggested that in “the structure of a new work, quotation calls words back to their origin in language, their origin in the name, and that “the name marks the difference between language and things,” and he is right to point out that in naming, language is recognized as being distinct from a mere thing.¹²⁸ A more detailed exegesis of the passage above, however, requires a brief digression into the prologue of Benjamin’s work on the German *Trauerspiel*.

It is here that Benjamin identifies the name-giving biblical Adam—not Plato—as the true progenitor of the type of linguistically oriented philosophy Benjamin propagates, which consists of postulates, pauses and digressions and is engaged with the problem of how it is to represent truth.¹²⁹ It is Adam who named things prior to language’s “fall” into mediated communication: “Das adamitische Namengeben ist so weit entfernt Spiel und Willkür zu sein, daß vielmehr gerade in ihm der paradiesische Stand sich als solcher bestätigt, der mit der mitteilenden Bedeutung der Worte noch nicht zu ringen hatte” (217). Only as a vessel of communication does the word, in modern philosophy, congeal into the concept; in commodity capitalism, it yields to the empty phrase: in either case, the word has assumed a thing-like character and has become a mere means to express a subjective end. The primacy of naming is anterior to the reification of language, which has been calcified in the language of the press and thus anticipates, for Benjamin, its dialectical redemption. Deriving, then, from theological origins, naming gets *translated* in the Kraus essay as quotation and has become a juridical-political act in the pen of the “anti-journalist” Kraus.¹³⁰ As such, Benjamin calls Kraus’s highest achievement his having made the newspaper “quotable,” which means placing in relief its use as an instrument of political power, its commodity status under capitalism, its role in the perpetuation of war, and,

¹²⁸ See Ferris, 89.

¹²⁹ Benjamin, GS I, 208.

¹³⁰ I borrow this term from the title of Paul Reitter’s book.

most important for Kraus, because at the foundation of the crimes just listed, its misuse of language.¹³¹ In the case of quotation, Kraus *names* the language of the press by foregrounding its reified character and thereby turns it into a historical object of critique, even a ruin.

To illustrate this process, Benjamin recalls a gloss from *Die Fackel*, in which Kraus quotes a war correspondent reporting on the Battle of Arras. The correspondent describes how one Belgian soldier, long after the battle ended, stood on the battlefield enchanted by the song of a nightingale that appeared unfazed by the din and activity of war. By first reproducing the reporter's quotation Kraus reveals a sort of linguistic aestheticization of war.¹³² Benjamin then reprints Kraus's response: "Es war die Nachtigall und nicht die Lerche, die dort auf dem Granatbaum saß und sang," which alludes to a line from *Romeo and Juliet* (II, 363).¹³³ In this second quotation, Kraus effectively reactivates Shakespeare for the present historical situation under scrutiny: "Wunderbar, wenn [diese Stimme] nicht strafend, sondern rettend naht, wie, auf den Schwingen des Shakespearschen, jener Zeile, in welcher einer vor Arras nach Haus berichtet . . ." (363). In this *Vergegenwärtigung* of language, Kraus retrieves new meaning from Shakespeare's line: if any bird were left singing after a bloody battle, it would have to be the bird most known for singing dirges.¹³⁴ And by adding "eine einzige Sperrung" between the letters of the partial word "Granat"—which closely resembles the German word for "grenade" (*Granate*)—Kraus implies that the nightingale was not perched on the branch of a pomegranate

¹³¹ For more on the suffix '-barkeit' in Benjamin and the wider implications it has on Benjamin's critical outlook, see Sam Weber, *Benjamins –abilities* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008).

¹³² The original quote from the war reporter reads as follows: "Dieser ohrenzerreißende Kriegslärm, der den in einsamer Wacht stehenden Soldaten bis ins Mark erschütterte, schien dem gefiederten Sänger keinerlei Beängstigung zu bereiten. Der kleine Waldvogel kümmerte sich um den gewaltigen Völkerkrieg nicht im mindesten und ließ seine Arien los, als herrschte tiefster Friede im Walde in dieser herrlichen, vom Monde beschienenen Frühlingsnacht." See F 431, 24, 1916.

¹³³ The original line of the play, spoken by Juliet, reads, "It was the nightingale, and not the lark, / that pierced the fearful hollow of thine ear." See Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 3:5.

¹³⁴ This citation may have had special significance for the melancholic in Benjamin, for whom nature, if given a voice, would mourn. See Benjamin GS II, 155.

tree, but rather on exploded terrain that this journalist had, through his language, rendered a natural landscape. Unlike Benjamin's critique of the truly demonic in Kraus, here the latter is not engaging in puerile wordplay for its own sake; the most minute of linguistic alterations to a quote, alongside the full reproduction of another, amounts to the most politically charged of gestures.

This notion leads into the passage that arguably serves as the insignia of the entire essay, deserving to be reproduced in full:

Im rettenden und strafenden Zitat erweist die Sprache sich als die Mater der Gerechtigkeit. Es ruft das Wort beim Namen auf, bricht es zerstörend aus dem Zusammenhang, eben damit aber ruft es dasselbe auch zurück an seinen Ursprung. Nicht ungereimt erscheint es, klingend, stimmig, in dem Gefüge eines neuen Textes. Als Reim versammelt es in seiner Aura das Ähnliche; als Name steht es einsam und ausdruckslos. Vor der Sprache weisen sich beide Reiche—Ursprung so wie Zerstörung—im Zitat aus. Und umgekehrt: nur wo sie sich durchdringen—im Zitat—ist sie vollendet. (363)

In revealing the dialectical relationship between *Recht* and *Gerechtigkeit*, Benjamin suggests that in Kraus's use of quotation, language, called by its name, definitively enters the "matrix of justice." In a quotation that has been rented "destructively" out of its historically original (and thus mythical) context, quoted language returns to what Benjamin calls its "origin," for only in the citation does the truth-content in language, as an index of the objective, historical reality of the world, emerge as the quoted language gets inscribed into history. In the case of the war reporter from above, Kraus's citation is punitive (*strafend*), for it places the quote under a linguistic tribunal; in the case of the Shakespeare quote, Kraus's method is redemptive (*rettend*). In either case, the repetition of language produced by its quotation bestows upon this first instantiation of language what Bettina Menke has called a "Nachleben," or an afterlife, which necessarily implies that quotation brings about a form of death.¹³⁵

¹³⁵ Menke further writes, "*Vergegenwärtigung* ist ein Modus 'wiederholenden' 'Nachlebens', das erst nachträglich konstituiert und lesbar macht, 'was war'. Es ist genauer gelesen: ein *Nach-Leben* des Toten . . . das Zitat ist Schema dieses Nachlebens, und dieser Aspekt der Zitation kann ihr allegorischer heißen . . ." I would, however, separate these particular moments. *Vergegenwärtigung* and *Nach-Leben* can, indeed, be seen as

But Benjamin also introduces another dialectic into the exegesis of quotation, namely that between “Reim” and “Name,” which can be mapped on to the familiar Benjaminian categories of “Nähe” and “Ferne,” as well as “Ursprung” and “Zerstörung” in the quote above, all of which converge in the quotation. Rhyme and name constitute the two properties of language, convincingly elucidated by Thornhill: “‘Nähe,’ in ‘Reim,’ can here be construed as the self-referential immanence of language itself. ‘Ferne,’ here manifest in the ‘Name,’ carries the implication of the outgoing, nominative moment in language, in which the immanence of language is drawn erotically to the construction of a particular object” (117). At the basic unit of rhyme, which finds its greatest expression in lyric poetry (and Benjamin was fond of many of Kraus’s poems),¹³⁶ two words, drawn only to each other, disappear into each other through the phonetic similarity evoked in their enunciation; in name, language is drawn outward to a material object. Krausian quotation brings these two moments together in a peculiar but profound way: it rhymes in the sense that in reproducing an instantiation of language, it empties it of its erstwhile meaning by reducing it to pure sound, evincing what Benjamin sees as language’s “original” poetic element. Quotation then names by turning that particular instance of language into a historical, material object, and thereby “constructing” the object by paradoxically “destroying” it. Quotation negates the primary intention of the passage quoted, evidenced above by what Kraus does to the passage describing a nightingale singing amidst a battlefield of human corpses. Emphasizing the quasi-messianic potential of quotation while borrowing a phrase from Benjamin’s *Habilitation*, Fürnkäs concludes:

products of Krausian quotation, but the former revitalizes a historical moment in the present, while the latter brings about its death. Even if they happen simultaneously, they are not to be conflated. I do agree, however, that in their “Nach-leben des Toten,” quotation and allegory (as explicated in *Ursprung*) need to be thought together. See Menke, 75.

¹³⁶ Specifically, Benjamin names “Die Verlassenen” as one of Kraus’s finest, and most erotic, poems. See Benjamin, GS II, 362.

Im Zitat ereignet sich der Tod der Intention... Einerseits wird es aus seinem instrumentellen Zusammenhang gerissen, damit dessen Wirken, dessen Intention unterbrochen, zum Stillstand gebracht; andererseits wird auch die Intention des Zitierenden unterbrochen, tritt hinter die Autorität des Zitats zurück. Das Zitat spricht für sich, läßt Wahrheit bruckstückhaft aufblitzen, verweisend auf den Endzustand einer erlösten Sprache. (217)

Only in the political struggle against exploitation and poverty is the realization forced on the satirist “daß es keine idealistische, sondern nur eine materialistische Befreiung vom Mythos gibt und nicht Reinheit im Ursprung der Kreatur steht, sondern die Reinigung” (365). The images of destruction continue to accumulate as Benjamin attributes to Kraus’s satirical method of quotation the quality not of “purity” (read: *Allmensch*) but of “purification.” Benjamin upholds Kraus’s destructive tendencies over and against all false notions of positivity or productivity that he ascribes to the modern, “cultured” European ethos: the myth of artistic creation (which Benjamin dispels with the George comparison), the lie of historical progress, and the problematic abstraction of “ideal” humanism. In one more revealing image meant to set Kraus apart from many of his contemporaries, Benjamin thus chooses to align Kraus not with a mode of cultural production, but rather with culture’s more shunned underside, nature, and indeed, with its more *destructive* impulses. Kraus, Benjamin writes, “ist der Überwinder der Phrase. Er solidarisiert sich nicht mit der schlanken Tanne, sondern mit dem Hobel, der sie verzehrt, nicht mit dem edlen Erz, sondern mit dem Schmelzofen, der es läutert” (367). Uwe Steiner precisely summarizes this moment of the critique: “In contrast to classical humanism and its apotheosis of creativity, the destructive aspect of nature is the vital element of ‘real humanism,’ as represented besides Scheerbart and Kraus’s friend Adolf Loos by Karl Marx.”¹³⁷ Nature’s destruction, which, for Benjamin, finds its mimetic counterpart in the Krausian quotation, proves, in the end, to be emancipatory. Hence the comparison to the painter Klee, the architect Loos, and the science

¹³⁷ See Steiner, 101. Which I would make more precise by specifying the late Marx in contrast to the more “ideal” early Marx, at least according to Benjamin.

fiction writer Paul Scheerbart, all of whom would rather liberate humanity through deprivation than gratify it through indulgence.

IV. Conclusion

Kraus, too, takes away; indeed, as I have already established, he consumes the empty phrases of his adversaries. In order to then fully comprehend the *Unmensch* as the culminating shape of Benjamin's critique of Kraus's dialectical satire, it is necessary to combine Benjamin's theory of language with one last figure Benjamin invokes in this context: the cannibal, whose "Verspeisen des Gegners" Benjamin equates with the act of the satirist. "Der Satiriker ist die Figur, unter welcher der Menschenfresser von der Zivilisation rezipiert wurde" (355).¹³⁸ Part baroque priest, part ur-Jewish advocate, part cannibal and part angel: these are the figures that have congealed in the modern satirist. "[M]itten in einem Geschlecht, das sich anschiekt, Tanks zu besteigen und Gasmasken überzuziehen," Kraus has found the "firm ground" that had hitherto eluded him (355). If earlier Benjamin located in Kraus's demonic mimicry the blind spot of his critique, namely his vanity, and if we can still identify in Kraus's public readings a trace of this vanity in his voice, then it is Kraus's cannibalism that effects his ultimate transformation into the destructive *Unmensch*. The signs of the cannibal in Kraus are, indeed, observable in the histrionic talents for which he was notorious: "Es ist das Unmenschliche des Schauspielers . . . das Menschenfresserische. Denn mit jeder Rolle verleibt sich der Schauspieler einen Menschen ein . . ." (358). Crucial to note here is Benjamin's use of the verb "sich einverleiben" to describe the relationship between the actor and the role he assumes. Kraus does not *identify* with these roles, nor does he "assimilate" his enemies into himself, as the English translation of this word

¹³⁸ The first instance of this comparison arises toward the beginning of this section, when Benjamin alludes to the anti-humanism of a satirical genealogy that includes Jonathan Swift and Léon Bloy. With this Benjamin underscores Kraus's anti-humanism vis-à-vis the Enlightenment-inspired "Humanitätsideal" that received its fullest articulation in Marx. For more on this, see Hanssen, 118.

would have it; rather, he *incorporates* them into his very being.¹³⁹ What are the implications of *Einverleibung* in relation to twentieth-century satire, especially in its dramatic form?

In the *Passagen-Werk*, Benjamin makes explicit what was only implicit in the Kraus essay by writing that the work of materialist historiography “muß die Kunst, ohne Anführungszeichen zu zitieren, zur höchsten Höhe entwickeln.”¹⁴⁰ This, I would argue, is to be read as a prescription more than a description of the critic’s role in modernity, and it doesn’t even characterize Benjamin’s unfinished modernist treatise, which is littered with proper quotations, all clearly marked off from his own contributions.¹⁴¹ Perhaps this is why he turns to Kraus, in whom he sees this demand at least partially fulfilled. In the next chapter, I turn my attention to the actual object of Benjamin’s critique in order to draw attention to the structure of Krausian satire, and to determine how Kraus converts this method of immanent historical critique “into an artwork” befitting the violence of the twentieth century—and to how this satirical artwork comes dangerously close to reproducing the violence it aims to negate.

¹³⁹ The English version reads as follows: “It is the inhuman quality of the actor...the cannibal quality. For in each of his roles the actor assimilates bodily a human being.” See Jephcott, 450. Hanssen has translated *Einverleibung* as “interiorization,” although she derives its origin from another context: “The topic of cannibalism resonates with the motive of eating and voracious devouring that one finds in some of Benjamin’s other writings, where it is linked to the act of a reading and a hermeneutics of interiorization (*Einverleibung*). Its appearance in the Kraus essay, however, seems to have been motivated primarily by the tradition of satire.” See Hanssen, 118.

¹⁴⁰ Benjamin, GS V, 572.

¹⁴¹ I would thus disagree with Garber’s reading that Benjamin is, with this utterance, “defining modernity as a theory of montage.” See Garber, 6. “To quote without quotation marks” is less a definition than it is a call to action on the part of the critic.

CHAPTER 2

Repetition and Posterity in Kraus's *Die letzten Tage der Menschheit*¹⁴²

I. Introduction

In a lecture given in Berlin in 1974, Elias Canetti spoke on the significance of what he called Kraus's quasi-legal "Prozess der Satire."¹⁴³ A former acolyte-turned-detractor, Canetti nonetheless always considered the Viennese satirist a master of the form, placing him in the rare company of such luminaries as Aristophanes, Juvenal, Quevedo, Swift and Gogol (337). Canetti proceeds to say that what these figures all have in common "ist eine ganz bestimmte Art von Substanz, die ich eben als mörderische bezeichnen würde," and next shifting his attention to Kraus alone, he elaborates: "Was heute den Leser der 'Fackel' oft verdrießt . . . ist das Gleichmaß der Attacke. Alles geschieht mit derselben Kraft, alles wird als gleich wichtig in ein und dieselbe Sprache einbezogen . . . unter den unaufhörlichen Schlägen verschwindet das Opfer, es ist längst nicht mehr da, und der Kampf geht weiter" (338).¹⁴⁴ In criticizing the way that Kraus categorically dismissed each one of his "victims" without calibrating the severity of his attacks, Canetti raises relevant questions regarding the very "substance" of satire and its place among other twentieth-century forms of cultural critique. Is there a point at which Kraus's ridicule goes considerably *too* far, thus threatening to dissolve into an undifferentiated critique of

¹⁴² An abridged and modified version of this chapter—entitled "Beyond Repetition: Karl Kraus's 'Absolute Satire'" (Copyright © 2013 The German Studies Association)—will appear in *GERMAN STUDIES REVIEW*, Volume 36, Number 3, October 2013, 39 pages.

¹⁴³ See Canetti, "Der neue Karl Kraus," reproduced in *Das Gewissen der Worte: Essays* (Munich: Hanser Verlag, 1995), 338.

¹⁴⁴ He further claims to have known many of the historical personalities that Kraus sentenced in his satirical-judicial way of passing judgment, and admits that after they had been subjected to Kraus's satire, he could no longer see them as he once had: "Was er . . . satirisch verkürzte, war gut verkürzt, was er übertrieb, so präzis übertrieben, daß es eben in dieser Übertreibung erst Bestand hatte und unvergesslich wurde." See Canetti, 339.

any conceivable position, much like the Mephistophelian spirit “who always negates”?¹⁴⁵ Must the satirist therefore confine his invective to this or that historical particularity? Or is there a way for satire—which, in contrast to other forms of critique, “uses laughter as a weapon, and against a butt that exists outside the work”¹⁴⁶—to be both limited and yet seemingly endless in scope? What historical conditions would produce such a satire, and what form would it take?

More recent theorists have, too, identified immanent problems threatening satire’s self-understanding, or what one critic calls satire’s “discontents.”¹⁴⁷ Fredric Bogel, for example, writes that while satirists “often seem to be devoted to a lucid and purely oppositional single-mindedness, the shadow of connection is always there.”¹⁴⁸ What is to prevent, Bogel continues, a “satiric mimicry” from being received as an “unwitting tribute,” or a “poorly managed imitation intended to ridicule a bad poem” from becoming “simply another bad poem”? “Inoculation may produce the disease itself” (74). That is, contrary to its own intentions, satire cannot avoid a certain degree of collusion, complicity, or continuity with the object it ridicules and from which it claims to be wholly distinct. There is, for Bogel, no such a thing as a non-contaminated satire.¹⁴⁹ Referring to a different form of complicity, Bogel also argues that “the satirist’s alleged distinctness from those he satirizes models our own safe distance from them, and we seek to preserve that distance” (25). By virtue of the fact that the satirist claims to be wholly distinct from the object of his satire, “we,” the readers or the audience, can, too, take comfort in our identification with the satirist and rarely have to fear being maligned along with the satirized.

¹⁴⁵ In the paralympomena to Walter Benjamin’s essay “Karl Kraus,” Benjamin compares the eponymous satirist to the ever-ironic Mephistopheles in Goethe’s *Faust*: “Ich bin der Geist, der stets verneint.” See Walter Benjamin, GS II, 1091.

¹⁴⁶ M. H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *A Glossary of Literary Terms: Eighth Edition* (Boston: Thomson Wadsworth, 2005), 284-285.

¹⁴⁷ See Jonathan Greenberg, *Modernism, Satire and the Novel* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 1.

¹⁴⁸ See Bogel, *The Difference Satire Makes*, 68.

¹⁴⁹ Italo Calvino describes this sense of implication as “the mixture of attraction and repulsion that animates the feelings of every true satirist toward the object of his satire.” Quoted in Greenberg, 6.

This type of complicity renders visible satire's potentially most conservative element: a satirist and an audience who perceive themselves to be of the same mind vis-à-vis the object of ridicule together produce and receive a satire whose effectiveness relies on the recognition of this "safe distance." The moralizing satirist would then be linked to the morally sensitive audience, both of whom remain ostensibly free of contact from the object of ridicule.

The critic Kai Evers levels precisely this critique at Kraus in his comparative essay on Kraus and Canetti. Referring to the numerous public readings Kraus gave throughout Central Europe, Evers has recently argued:

On this [firm] ground¹⁵⁰ the audience might join the author in much the same way that Kraus's audience joined him with murderous laughter when he exposed and disposed of another of his victims during his public readings. Because it is invited to identify with the power of his judgment, the Krausian audience and readership seemed to constitute a community safely grounded on shared values.¹⁵¹

Evers ultimately rejects Kraus's "deeply disturbing" satire because it derives its authority from the acquiescence and agreement of his audience; it is destructive in its intentions and conservative in its reducibility to a value system. Thus to suggest that what bound Kraus to his audience was a "community safely grounded on shared values" is to assume that Kraus was adhering to such recognizable and established values in the first place. According to this logic, and recalling my opening question, Kraus's satire fails because it hardly transcends what the scholar Reinhard Merkel has called "Tendenzsatire . . . die an partikuläre Zwecke, Loyalitäten und Beschränktheiten gebunden ist," since the limitations or loyalties to which Merkel refers could be interpreted as the system of values that, for Evers, binds Kraus to his audience,

¹⁵⁰ Evers is here borrowing a phrase from Benjamin, who insists that World War I gave Kraus the "firm ground" he needed to exercise his full satirical powers. See Benjamin, *Selected Writings Volume II: 1927-1934*, eds. Michael Jennings, Howard Eiland, Gary Smith (Harvard: Belknap Press, 1999), 448.

¹⁵¹ Kai Evers, "Destructive Satires: Canetti and Benjamin's Search for the Murderous Substance of Satire," in *The Worlds of Elias Canetti: Centenary Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 208.

regardless of whether the values in question are ever made explicit, and regardless of what actually comprises them.¹⁵²

None of these positions or arguments, however, adequately grasps the “substance” of Krausian satire, though each illuminates one of its liminal points. To arrive at its function and its structure, the first part of this chapter will be devoted to unpacking some of Kraus’s own (oft-neglected) speculations on satire as they emerge primarily in his seminal essays, *Heine und die Folgen* (1910) and *Nestroy und die Nachwelt* (1912), in which Kraus addresses his distance from the former and his indebtedness to the latter.¹⁵³ While these essays have often been treated in terms of their historical importance, or criticized for their lack of impartiality with respect to their objects of study (especially *Heine*), my concern is in determining to what extent they contribute to an understanding of Kraus’s place in this larger discourse. *Heine* is certainly a *Literatursatire* and *Nestroy* is an homage, but read together they also offer clues as to how to read Kraus’s satire. I will thus use these texts as a point of departure to next analyze selected scenes from Kraus’s dramatic lampoon of the First World War, which he began to compose three years after *Nestroy: Die letzten Tage der Menschheit: Tragödie in fünf Akten mit Vorspiel und Epilog* (1915-1922).¹⁵⁴ It is only in dramatic form that Kraus’s satire comes to its most robust articulation. By bringing together a theory of immanent critique with a theory of satirical temporality and repetition, I intend to further show how Kraus’s absolute satire responds (or fails to respond) to the tensions that inhere in the satirical form as well as to the various accusations

¹⁵² See Reinhard Merkel, *Strafrecht und Satire im Werk von Karl Kraus* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1998), 130.

¹⁵³ These are the essays, as one critic writes, “in dem [Kraus] sich von einem Ähnlichen distanziert,” and “in dem er sich zu einem Ähnlichen bekennt.” See Hans Weigel, *Karl Kraus: Der Macht der Ohnmacht* (Wien: Molden, 1968), 98.

¹⁵⁴ To be sure: Kraus is not known to be a theorist, and so the term “speculation” needs to be further qualified. For as a satirist fully submerged in his historical moment, namely the period extending from *Fin-de-siècle* Vienna through the rise of Hitler, Kraus, as the author/critic Roberto Calasso has pointed out, “never theorized about the [First World War] or, strictly speaking, about anything else . . . he completely lacked speculative detachment.” This immersion does not imply, however, that theoretical content cannot be siphoned out of Kraus’s work. See Calasso, *The Forty-Nine Steps*, trans. John Shepley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 97.

leveled against him: that his proverbial night is one in which all cows are black (Canetti);¹⁵⁵ that the satirist cannot but identify with his object of ridicule (Bogel and Greenberg); and that Kraus's anachronistic and conservative satire relies on the shared values that bind him to his audience or readership—that he even relies on any recognizable system of values at all (Evers).

II. Heine and Nestroy

Kraus is no more explicit about whom he considered a true satirist and whom an impostor than in his essays on two major German-language authors of the nineteenth century: Heinrich Heine and Johann Nestroy. Published in 1910, *Heine und die Folgen* had a damaging effect on Heine's reception among a certain stratum of German intellectuals during the first half of the twentieth century.¹⁵⁶ Contemporary critics have tended to attack the essay on two significant fronts: first, for its alleged employment of anti-Semitic rhetoric (and its attendant Francophobia), which some have interpreted as an expression of Kraus's latent "Jewish self-hatred"; and second, for its failure to transcend the very mode of journalism it critiques. In a recent incarnation of this two-pronged rebuke, Bernd Witte has written:

Mit seiner grobschlächtigen, auf antisemitische Vorurteile spekulierenden Literatursatire versucht Kraus sich von seinem literarischen Übervater zu lösen und seiner Wut gegen das sentimentale Heine-Epigonentum im zeitgenössischen Feuilleton Ausdruck zu verleihen. Dabei verfällt er in die gleichen Fehler wie die von ihm attackierten Journalisten.¹⁵⁷

The second of these objections will be addressed later on in the chapter; it is the first that warrants immediate attention, especially given the ominous threat and historical significance of anti-Semitism both during and after the fall of the Habsburg Monarchy.

¹⁵⁵ I am referring here to Hegel's dismissal of certain contemporaries for whom "im Absoluten alles gleich ist," and whose undifferentiated philosophy is an expression of a profound "Leere an Erkenntnis." See G.W.F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1986), 22.

¹⁵⁶ See, for example, Adorno's short essay "Die Wunde Heine," which is, in many respects, hardly more than an abridged version of Kraus's earlier essay, if indeed it foregrounds more explicitly the relationship between Heine's assimilatory strivings and the conciliatory tone of his language. Adorno, *Noten zur Literatur* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2003), 95-100.

¹⁵⁷ See Bernd Witte, "Feuilletonismus. Benjamin, Kraus, Heine," in *Walter Benjamin und das Wiener Judentum zwischen 1900 und 1938*, Sascha Kirchner, Vivian Liska, Karl Solibakke, und Bernd Witte, eds. (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2009), 31.

Kraus had a notoriously problematic relationship to the assimilated Jewish community in Vienna (and German-speaking Europe more broadly conceived), making it difficult to determine the extent to which Kraus's negative remarks vis-à-vis German-Jewry are the product of his era's ubiquitous prejudices.¹⁵⁸ Turning to the specific case at hand, one is then forced to ask whether Kraus's crude references to Heine's Jewishness must be read as representative of the larger discourse of anti-Semitism that permeated Habsburg Vienna, or whether they—while unpardonable on any grounds—can be seen ultimately as immaterial to his critique of Heine. If one takes Kraus at his word, his aims are to be seen as categorically distinct from those of the *völkisch*, anti-Semitic cultural critics à la Adolf Bartels, from, that is, “diese[m] engstirnige[n] Heinehaß, der den Juden meint, läßt [aber] den Dichter gelten”¹⁵⁹ But while one cannot simply rely on Kraus's self-vindication as conclusive evidence of his prejudice-free aesthetic judgments, what I would point out in his defense is that one of the presumptions of Habsburg anti-Semitism (as of essentially all modern forms of anti-Semitism) was that so-called Jewish influence on contemporary culture—above all, on the press—was liberal in nature, modern in the bad sense of the word, and destructive of core German values. As I will show, however, Kraus's critique of Heine is precisely that the latter's explicit liberalism masked a more fundamental conservatism, that his aesthetic modernism was qualitatively less innovative than Goethe's and Nestroy's, and that, most importantly, his satire was *not destructive enough*. Kraus can thus rightfully distinguish his position from that of the Heine admirers as well as the detractors because both camps either celebrate or denigrate the very features of Heine's writing that Kraus

¹⁵⁸ For a thorough engagement with the question of anti-Semitism in *Heine*, see Paul Peters, “Barbarei in der Kultur: Karl Kraus und die Folgen,” in *Die Wunde Heine* (Bodenheim: Philo, 1997), and Dietmar Goltschnigg, in *Die Fackel ins Wunde Herz: Kraus über Heine. Eine ‘Erledigung’? Texte, Analysen, Kommentar* (Vienna: Passagen Verlag, 2000). Peters is very explicit in arguing that Kraus's attacks on Heine's are only thinly veiled expressions of his Jewish self-hatred: “Kraus greift nun selber den ‘Erzjuden’ Heine an, um sich selbst vom Verdacht und Makel des ‘Jüdischen’ zu befreien. Das ist die Arbeit seiner Heine-Schriften, ihr gesellschafts-politisches Substrat.” See Peters, 124.

¹⁵⁹ Kraus, F 329, 19, 1911.

denies are there in the first place; his process can be described therefore as one of *unmasking*. If it appears that he at times echoes the discourse of the cultural anti-Semites, it is only, I would argue, in order to provide the necessary corrective to their “narrow-minded” dispositions, and to suggest that the salvageable kernel in their otherwise reprehensible opprobria—the notion that there is an intimate relationship between language and ideology or *Gesinnung*, expressed in its most basic formula—is hidden even from them. One does not need to endorse all of Kraus’s conclusions about Heine (and I do not) in order to understand the structural implications of his critique. Since the charge of anti-Semitism or Jewish self-hatred offers little insight into Kraus’s contributions to satirical theory, my focus from this point forward will be on those features of *Heine* that pertain to this particular question.¹⁶⁰

Rooted in a comprehensive critique of the press, Kraus’s essential criticism of Heine is that he is responsible for inaugurating what Edward Timms calls a “journalistic civilization,” in which the distinction between literature and reportage had all but disappeared, resulting in a hybrid form of language—the *feuilleton*—shorn of both the imaginative quality of the former as well as the sober objectivity of the latter.¹⁶¹ “Ohne Heine, kein Feuilleton,” Kraus laments.¹⁶² Kraus suggests that the journalist is one of the more salient representatives of the aspect of (capitalist) modernity under scrutiny: namely, the tendency to collapse all distinctions into the identical and to reduce all substantial thought down to the commodified and exchangeable “opinion.” In the pen of the journalist, “[i]mmer paßt alles zu allem, und die Unfähigkeit, alte Worte zu finden, ist eine Subtilität, wenn schon die neuen zu allem passen” (12). The zeal for the new and the inability for the journalist-writer to resist new literary trends betray his or her more

¹⁶⁰ For the most recent and thorough engagement with the question of Kraus’s relationship to German-Jewish modernity, see Paul Reitter.

¹⁶¹ See Edward Timms, *Karl Kraus, Apocalyptic Satirist: The Post-War Crisis and the Rise of the Swastika*, 349.

¹⁶² F 329, 7, 1911.

general inability. For Kraus, then, a direct line of influence can be drawn from Heine's language to the empty phrase of the early twentieth century feuilleton, that dreadful language of the press made exclusively for the day: "Mit leichter Hand hat Heine das Tor dieser furchtbaren Entwicklung aufgestoßen, und der Zauberer, der der Unbegabung zum Talent verhalf, steht nicht allzuhoch über der Entwicklung" (12).

Of particular concern for Kraus are Heine's humorous and polemical writings, which, he argues, cannot claim the status of true satire because they are not capable of transcending their journalistic core. Kraus writes: "Feuilletonistisch ist Heines Polemik durch die Unverbundenheit, mit der Meinung und Witz nebeneinander laufen. Die Gesinnung kann nicht weiter greifen als der Humor" (26).¹⁶³ In other words, Heine's polemics rely too much on the transparent political agendas (their *Gesinnung*) or subjective opinions that underpin them; their humor presupposes the consent of the reader, which, Kraus implies, is tantamount to an act of coercion. Furthermore, Heine's polemics may speak to this or that particularity (such as his feud with August von Platen, alluded to in the quote above), but once this moment has passed, the relevance of the polemic expires and the critique expressed betrays its prejudice. To illustrate, Kraus quotes Heine's famous quip about his foe von Platen's homosexuality: "Und wer die Armut seines Gegners verhöhnt, kann keinen bessern Witz machen, als den: der Ödipus von Platen wäre 'nicht so bissig geworden, wenn der Verfasser mehr zu beißen gehabt hätte'. Schlechte Gesinnung kann nur schlechte Witze machen" (26).¹⁶⁴ Kraus's point is that real satire is not reducible to petty

¹⁶³ Irina Djassemey has, too, made a distinction between polemic and satire, defining the former as a critique of a text or an individual, the latter as a critique against a general condition. See Djassemey, *Der "Productivgehalt Kritischer Zerstörerarbeit"*, 135.

¹⁶⁴ Leo Lensing argues that the subtext in the Heine essay, especially with regard to Kraus's reception of Heine's jokes, may be directed against Freud, who valorized Heine and his wit in his famous treatise, *Der Witz und seine Beziehung zum Unbewussten*. Referring to Heine's "familionär" joke from *Die Bäder von Lucca*, Lensing writes: "For the psychoanalyst and amateur theorist of wit, 'familionär' is not only an excellent pun for explaining the technique of jokes . . . it also suggests the psychological connections between the poet's work and his difficult family life . . . For Kraus, on the other hand, 'familionär' is but one example of the 'schlechte Witze' that issue

character defamation, and its object of ridicule can never be something as insignificant as one's sexual preference. In a different though related critique, Kraus writes that Heine "war nie imstande, seinen Humor auf die Höhe eines Pathos zu treiben, und von dort hinunter zu jagen" (23). Unlike the philosopher Henri Bergson, who famously argues that humor appeals to pure intellectuality without recourse to affect, Kraus sees this lack of "pathos" as one of Heine's defects insofar as it reveals something specific about the very relationship between him and his object of ridicule, namely the purported distance the former assumes vis-à-vis the latter.¹⁶⁵ What pathos actually means and the form it assumes in both Kraus's theory and practice of satire will become more transparent in Kraus's essay on Nestroy, and it will be especially foregrounded in *Die letzten Tage*.

"Lyrik und Satire—das Phänomen ihres Verbundenseins wird fäblich—sie sind beide nicht da" (23). Heine is not, for Kraus, a true satirist (or lyric poet) because his journalism has infused his satirical sensibility; by so concluding, Kraus introduces a categorical distinction between satire's authentic and inauthentic iterations. The problem is thus not so much Heine, but rather that the phenomenon of "Heinism" has influenced a generation of "consequences" who repeat Heine's language and have thereby turned what Kraus believes should have been Heine's exception into the rule: mechanically *repeatable*, journalistic language that responds to, and in turn creates historical events that appear to mechanically repeat themselves.¹⁶⁶ Satire, for Kraus,

from 'schlechte Gesinnung.' He, in fact, interprets these puns as examples of bad Jewish jokes, which belie Heine's boast of wielding a good Protestant ax" See Lensing, "Karl Kraus's Literary Polemics Against H. Heine," in *The Jewish Reception of Heinrich Heine*, ed. Marc Gelber (Tübingen: M. Niemeyer, 1992), 107-108.

¹⁶⁵ In his famous treatise, "Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic," Bergson writes "Here I would point out, as a symptom equally worthy of notice, the ABSENCE OF FEELING which usually accompanies laughter. It seems as though the comic could not produce its disturbing effect unless it fell, so to say, on the surface of a soul that is thoroughly calm and unruffled. Indifference is its natural environment, for laughter has no greater foe than emotion." See Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, eds. Cloudesley Brereton and Fred Rothwell (New York: Macmillan, 1911).

¹⁶⁶ Here Kraus is more aligned with Bergson, who famously argues that the "mechanical inelasticity" in humans—their repetitive behavior in spite of external difference that would demand adaptation—produces the comic effect

must aim at something more noble than its own reproduction; it must have radical intentions. Anticipating Adorno's explicit ideology critique of Heine's poetry,¹⁶⁷ Kraus writes: "Die Dichter der Menschheit stellen immer wieder das Chaos her, die Dichter der Gesellschaft singen und klagen, segnen und fluchen innerhalb der Weltordnung" (19).¹⁶⁸ The producers of chaos for Kraus are Goethe, Nestroy and Offenbach; the charlatan is, of course, Heine, whose "klagen" and "fluchen"—code words for his satirical writing—lack radical potential; they do not in any way threaten what Kraus calls the "world order," and rather only play with it. In response to the discussions circulating in Vienna about erecting a monument in Heine's honor, Kraus thus delivers one of his more devastating verdicts:

Heines aufklärende Leistung in Ehren — ein so großer Satiriker, daß man ihm die Denkmalswürdigkeit absprechen müßte, war er nicht. Ja, er war ein so kleiner Satiriker, daß die Dummheit seiner Zeit auf die Nachwelt gekommen ist. Gewiß, sie setzt sich jenes Denkmal, das sie ihm verweigert. Aber sie setzt sich wahrlich auch jenes, das sie für ihn begehrt. (31)

By supporting the building of this monument, Kraus's contemporaries, he suggests, are unwittingly commemorating exactly what Heine, the "enlightened" though "minor satirist," symbolizes for Kraus: namely, a pseudo-satirist who helped produce the very generation that now intends to immortalize him. A monument in Heine's honor is a tacit admission that Kraus's day is merely an extension or a *repetition* of Heine's own, and not a qualitative improvement on it; Kraus has, rather, inherited Heine's consequences. It is also here that Kraus introduces the crucial term "Nachwelt," a word commonly translated as "posterity." In an underhanded compliment to Heine, Kraus argues that what has outlived Heine's time and become his posterity is precisely the object of Heine's satire, the *Dummheit*, evidenced by the fact that this erstwhile

known as laughter. But for the less optimistic Kraus, it seems, this repetition is a crucial and highly condemnable feature of modernity, most salient in the language of the press, which adheres to the law of sameness despite the necessary variation in the historical world it describes. For Kraus, this language threatens to turn the world into its mirror image.

¹⁶⁷ See Adorno, "Die Wunde Heine," 95-100.

¹⁶⁸ One might say that for Kraus, it is not the poets that should be banned from the republic, but the *bad* poets.

Dummheit has revealed itself to be, willy-nilly, Kraus's contemporary audience. This is an audience that identifies with Heine rather than seeing itself reflected in the object of his satire.

But perhaps this audience (the Heine admirers), Kraus suggests, is right: for such a monument also confirms the problem immanent to any inauthentic iteration of satire, namely that it is wedded to the contingent historical moment that occasioned its production. He thus writes, "Was vom Stoff lebt, stirbt vor dem Stoff. Was in der Sprache lebt, lebt mit der Sprache" (14).¹⁶⁹ By *Stoff* I understand Kraus to mean the material, historical reality to which all satire invariably responds. The satire entangled in the inessential details of a particular moment expires, while the satire that has found the proper *language* with which to address—and condemn—the entirety of the historical moment abides through time. Because Heine's satire is bound to a limited object (and celebrated by Heine's "consequences"), it is, for Kraus, mere *Tendenzsatire*, to employ Merkel's terminology. Under this optic, Heine's polemical attempts to negate this or that phenomenon only serve to reinforce the more structural conditions that have given rise to their existence, and which are not confined to his day alone. But what Kraus does not yet fully establish in his scathing critique of Heine is what a satire that lives "in" and "with" language is supposed to look like, and what it accomplishes. What he cryptically claims at the end of the essay is that Heine "hat das höchste geschaffen, was mit der Sprache zu schaffen ist," while "höher steht, was aus der Sprache geschaffen wird" (33).

Two years later Kraus turned to the figure he believed had been unjustly denied the recognition that Heine had been unjustly granted: the Viennese dramatist Johann Nestroy (1801-1862). *Nestroy und die Nachwelt*, the scholar Kurt Krolop writes, is both an homage to Nestroy as well as a treatise on the very problem of the satirist, "dessen Leiden an der Zeit eine

¹⁶⁹ Kraus, it should be noted, is primarily concerned with the Heine of *Das Buch der Lieder*; he actually praises Heine's *Romanzero*, adding rather snidely, however, "Heine hat das Erlebnis des Sterbens gebraucht, um ein Dichter zu sein." See F 329, 28, 1911.

permanente Agonie ist.”¹⁷⁰ Indeed, one of Kraus’s theoretical concerns in his *Gedenkrede* on Nestroy seems to be in showing how the satirist’s allegedly *permanent* agony responds to the contingencies of his or her *particular* time, opening up the question of satire’s temporal dimension. The historical context for this commemorative essay also provides helpful clues for interpreting it. Kraus laments the fact that the language of Nestroy’s plays and *Possen* had been manipulated to suit more contemporary ears, and that performances of his plays had become decidedly more driven by accessories such as plot development, set design and transparent political agendas, all of which came at the expense of what Kraus calls Nestroy’s *Sprachkunst*.¹⁷¹ As with his own dramatic opus, Kraus rejected these crude stagings of Nestroy, for he felt that the various levels of the satire produced by Nestroy’s artfully constructed dialogues were quelled the moment they were staged. Kraus ultimately rejected the attempt to disingenuously modernize a figure that had always been misunderstood by his audience: “Der Satiriker könnte die große Gelegenheit erfassen, aber sie erfasst ihn nicht mehr. Was fortlebt, ist das Mißverständnis.”¹⁷² Nestroy was not *ahead* of his time, but his time had not caught up to him—and it still has not.

Implicitly harking back to his essay on Heine, Kraus rhetorically wonders:

Wie es kam, daß solch ein Geist begraben wurde: es müßte der große Inhalt seines satirischen Denkens sein, und ich glaube, er dichtet weiter. Er, Johann Nestroy, kann es sich nicht gefallen lassen, daß alles blieb, wie es ihm mißfallen hat. Die Nachwelt wiederholt seinen Text und kennt ihn nicht...sie widerlegt und bestätigt die Satire durch die Unvergänglichkeit dessen, was Stoff ist. (3)

In contrast to Heine, whose posterity, for Kraus, wishes to honor him with a monument because it sees itself as both inheriting Heine’s talent (as journalists) as well as having transcended his

¹⁷⁰ See Kurt Krolp, *Sprachsatire als Zeitsatire bei Karl Kraus* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1987), 37.

¹⁷¹ For a comprehensive overview of Kraus’s appropriation of Nestroy in *Die Fackel*, of the latter’s reception in early twentieth century Vienna, and of the theoretical relationship between Kraus’s and Nestroy’s satirical *Sprachkunst*, see Helmut Rössler, *Karl Kraus und Nestroy: Kritik und Verarbeitung* (Stuttgart: Akademischer Verlag Hans-Dieter Heinz, 1981). For a more recent piece on Kraus’s idiosyncratic reading of Nestroy, which nonetheless spurred a Nestroy revival, see Paul North, “Der Zerrissene”: Nestroy at the Rip,” in *MLN*, Vol. 119, No. 3, German Issue (Apr., 2004), pp. 451-473.

¹⁷² Kraus, F 349, 22, 1912.

time, Kraus insists that posterity repeats Nestroy's "text" by proving, even fifty years later, to *still* be the object of its ridicule. Speaking of his predecessor in the present tense, Kraus thus asserts that Nestroy "keeps on writing," for as long as the seemingly intransigent *Stoff* of his satire persists—petite bourgeois morality, the decaying aristocracy, false conceptions of freedom, to name a few of Nestroy's frequent targets—his satires remain topical:¹⁷³ "So sieht Wien im Jahre 1912 aus," Kraus declares, referring to his own day, "Die Realität ist eine sinnlose Übertreibung aller Details, welche die Satire vor fünfzig Jahren hinterlassen hat" (20). Exaggeration implies some form of repetition, and one that is, indeed, anticipated by the satirist himself. Attributing to Nestroy a degree of clairvoyance, Kraus continues: "[W]as hat Nestroy gegen seine Zeitgenossen? Wahrlich, er übereilt sich. Er geht seine kleine Umwelt mit einer Schärfe an, die einer späteren Sache würdig ist" (20-21). Nestroy's satire, though addressing primarily the world of mid-nineteenth century Austro-Hungary, reproduces and satirizes more accurately the world that Kraus inhabits. Kraus thus points to a type of satire that theoretically sees *beyond* the moment of its conception, and one that is not in ultimate accord with its audience, neither then nor now.

To recall: for Kraus, false satire negates only the inessential aspects of the historical moment in which it is conceived, which is why it loses its relevance once the moment has passed. Its ineffectiveness, however, is often only determined in retrospect, when the satire (or satirist) in question is received as something of the past. The distinguishing feature of Nestroy's

¹⁷³ An example of the precise Nestroyan wit and "verflossene Pathos" that Kraus underscores can be found in a scene from *Der Talisman*, in which the aristocrat Frau von Cypressenburg asks the opportunist Titus about his father's profession. Here is the scene, reproduced in *Nestroy*: "Frau von Cypressenburg: Ist sein Vater auch Jäger? Titus: Nein, er betreibt ein stilles, abgeschiedenes Geschäft, bei dem die Ruhe seine einzige Arbeit ist; er liegt von höherer Macht gefesselt, und doch ist er frei und unabhängig, denn er ist Verweser seiner selbst — er ist tot. — Frau von Cypressenburg (für sich): Wie verschwenderisch er mit zwanzig erhabenen Worten das sagt, was man mit einer Silbe sagen kann. Der Mensch hat offenbare Anlagen zum Literaten." See F 349, 12. The double meaning of "Verweser" (administrator, but also an older word for that which decays), the relationship expressed between death and the life of the petite bourgeois, and the portrayal of the aristocrat as blind to Titus's satirical language all combine to form a flawless Nestroyan dialogue for Kraus.

satire, by contrast, is that it is paradoxically “voller Inaktualität, ein fortwirkender Einspruch gegen die Zeitgemäßen” (16). Its critical force remains active through the passage of time, while it stays nonetheless attuned to the material reality that provided its immediate occasion: “Aber noch jenseits solcher Anwendbarkeit will Nestroy nicht veralten” (18).¹⁷⁴ No stranger to narcissism, Kraus writes similiary of his own work, “Meine Leser glauben, daß ich für den Tag schreibe, weil ich aus dem Tag schreibe. So muß ich warten, bis meine Sachen veraltet sind. Dann werden sie möglicherweise Aktualität Erlangen.”¹⁷⁵ What Kraus wants is not to be perceived as a journalist, whose work becomes invariably dated, but as a satirist whose work will only come to itself over time, when it is falsely perceived to be no longer relevant—just as Broch suggested. True satire thus stands in opposition not only to its time, but also to the future it projects, bound by no visible horizon. For this reason, it aims to write the object of its ridicule to its *temporal end*, be it a literary genre, a political movement, or an entire historical epoch. In its grasp, “die Gegenwart schwindet und [ist] nichts als Maske, historische Zeit,”¹⁷⁶ resembling the destructive gaze of Benjamin’s critic-allegorist, who turns the work of art into a historical “ruin” by elevating the work’s finitude over and against its claim to eternity.¹⁷⁷ In this sense, Krausian satire aligns with Benjaminian critique, as Kraus claims to see the ruin before it actually exists: “Es ist gespenstisch, wie die Realität meiner Satire folgt. Schatten werfen Körper,” he writes

¹⁷⁴ Alfred Pfabigan writes that Kraus “hat wiederholt darauf insistiert, dass man den wahren Wert seines Werkes erst erkennen könnte, wenn die lächerlichen Anlaßfälle aus dem kollektiven Gedächtnis verschwunden sein würden.” See Pfabigan, “‘Orgien im Gemeindebau’: Der Herr Karl als Zeitgenossen,” in *Österreich (1945-2000): Das Land der Satire*, eds. Jeanne Benay and Gerald Stieg (Bern, New York: Peter Lang, 2002), 59.

¹⁷⁵ See Kraus, F 256, 15, 1908.

¹⁷⁶ Wilhelm Hindemith, *Die Tragödie Des Nörglers: Studien Zu Karl Kraus' Moderner Tragödie "Die Letzten Tage Der Menschheit"* (Frankfurt, New York: P. Lang, 1985), 62.

¹⁷⁷ I am referring here to the way Benjamin conceives of the German Trauerspiel in his *Habilitation*: “Auf dem Antlitz der Natur steht ‘Geschichte’ in der Zeichenschrift der Vergängnis. Die allegorische Physiognomie der Natur-Geschichte, die auf der Bühne durch das Trauerspiel gestellt wird, ist wirklich gegenwärtig als Ruine.” This raises the interesting question of whether *Die letzten Tage*, Kraus’s “tragedy,” can be read as a Trauerspiel. See Benjamin, *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1978), 155-160.

elsewhere, suggesting that the satirist's language never ridicules the moment as it is, but always in its state of becoming or of having become.¹⁷⁸

Connecting this essay back to Heine, Kraus implies that Nestroy's audience is always *implicated* in his satire: "Die Satire lebt zwischen den Irrtümern, zwischen einem, der ihr zu nahe, und einem, dem sie zu fern steht. Kunst ist, was den Stoff überdauert" (349, 22). While Nestroy's *Mitwelt* stood too far from his own satire (and allegedly thought of him as a mere *Spaßmacher*), Kraus's stands dangerously close to it—but both camps, to be sure, constitute its object. Inserting his way into the contemporary discourse on satire discussed earlier, Kraus essentially undermines the notion of an audience that claims to identify with the satirist, demonstrated either by self-congratulatory commemoration (in the case of Heine), or crude misinterpretation (in the case of Nestroy) of the satire; he scorns such allegiance of cynicism. If there is, indeed, an *ideal* audience for authentic satire, it would have to reside qualitatively beyond the range of the satire's implication, an audience for whom it is actual *history* and not a mere extension of the past that is being condemned. Belying thus even its own claim to timelessness, authentic satire, in truth, contains a self-destructive telos. This notion will be made explicit in *Die letzten Tage*.

But the question still left unaddressed is how the satirist is to produce what Kraus at one point refers to as an "Abschrift der Zeit,"¹⁷⁹ without thereby becoming indistinguishable from that very mode of journalistic repetition that Kraus had earlier denounced. What he suggests is that if Heine's *Tendenzsatire* bound him to the *Stoff* of his time, it is Nestroy's *Sprachkunst*, the way that he gives artistic shape to the panoply of voices, inflections and dialects that together comprised the *language* of mid-nineteenth century Austria, that serves as the model. It is a

¹⁷⁸ See Kraus, F 363, 26, 1912. In a similar vein, Roberto Calasso writes that Kraus is able to express "that coming-to-itself [of society]" better than any of his peers, including Brecht. See Calasso, 228.

¹⁷⁹ See Kraus, F 800, 2, 1929.

language, Kraus laments, that his contemporaries, bred on journalese and desensitized to the difference that constitutes an aesthetic object, cannot comprehend: “Denn eine Zeit, die die Sprache nicht hört, kann nur den Wert der Information beurteilen” (349, 22). If its utility is not immediately accessible (and thus dispensable the next day), it is useless; Kraus demands something of greater permanence. “Was Kraus an Nestroys geschriebener Schauspielkunst besonders schätzte, war die Versprachlichung des Tonfalls. Nur der Tonfall konnte über die ephemere Aufführung eines Nestroyschen Werkes hinaus wirken.”¹⁸⁰ It was not a political position, identifiable content or a particular standpoint in Nestroy that Kraus believed explained its ability to withstand the passage of time—indeed, Kraus berated his contemporaries for identifying in Nestroy the incipient spirit of liberalism for which they stood and of which Kraus was highly suspicious (349, 19)¹⁸¹—but rather Nestroy’s ability to ventriloquize the voices of his epoch in such a way that their ostensible distinctions revealed themselves to be merely variants of the one-sided, single *tone* of social and political decay under ridicule, a tone that had only grown louder (repeated, exaggerated) in Kraus’s day: “Es gibt nur einen Ton,” Kraus writes in a short essay composed in the same year.¹⁸² Nestroy thus functions, for Kraus, as seer and dialectician at once.

The object of Kraus’s satire is, too, the language that mediates the event, and most often, the language of the press: “Das Blatt spricht wie die Welt,” Kraus writes, “weil die Welt wie das Blatt spricht” (357, 1). The press is, for Kraus, not an isolated modern phenomenon, but rather

¹⁸⁰ See Rössler, 157.

¹⁸¹ For Kraus, it seems that Nestroy’s politics were almost content-less, that it was the “Lächerlichkeit der Politik” that served as the fundament of his political critiques. On this discourse, Ruth Estherhammer writes: “Im Gegensatz zu Heine sei Nestroy nach Kraus nämlich ein Denker gewesen, der gerade aufgrund seiner Denkerexistenz weder antiliberal noch liberal habe sein können und einzig dem ‘Widerspruch des Satirikers gegen die Okkupation der Menschlichkeit mit intellektuellen Scheinwerten’ Ausdruck zu verleihen gedacht habe.” See Estherhammer, *Kraus über Heine: Mechanismen des literaturkritischen Diskurses im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2005), 290.

¹⁸² See Kraus, F 357, 1, 1912.

the linguistic forum in which the public and private spheres of modernity converge and collide. It is where “Weltgeschichte erscheint uns zweimal,” once in the *Morgen-* and once in the *Abendblatt*.¹⁸³ If, for Marx, history happens first as tragedy and then as farce, for Kraus, history has been reduced to a series of eternally recurring events, which journalists produce and reproduce *ad infinitum*. What this means is that in the “papiernen Zeitalter,” the moniker Kraus assigned to the world created after the journalist’s image, the journalist’s language infuses all levels of society.¹⁸⁴ And because the press feeds off the calamities of the world while distorting them with its language and anesthetizing one’s response to them, it is, for Kraus, a site of criminality. To satirize its language is not a matter of choice; he conceives of it as a historical necessity and as the only recourse left for a satire that wants to be free of any particular *Gesinnung*, that uses the medium to critique the medium, a critique, however, that extends well beyond the medium. Nestroy’s method of negatively charged repetition (in the form of mimicry and ventriloquism) serves, then, as the guiding principle of Kraus’s satirical practice, which Kraus elevates to a new level: “Ich verhindere die zehnmahlige Wiederholung des Frevels, wenn ich ihn einmal selbst wiederhole.”¹⁸⁵

Through his employment of repetition—soon to be properly unfolded—Kraus claims to put a definitive end to the “crime,” to render it, in the words from earlier, dead, historical time, emptied of all legitimacy. “As if adopting Kierkegaard’s redefinition of repetition as a forward-looking counterpart to remembrance, and therefore as something new,” Kraus’s intent, writes Gilbert Carr, is to “interrupt a numerical series of abuses with their qualitatively new, chastening

¹⁸³ Kraus, *Die letzten Tage*, 195.

¹⁸⁴ Here Kraus invokes the strange paradox between the dominance of the press and its tenuous material foundations. See Kraus, *Pro Domo Et Mundo* (Leipzig: Kurt Wolff Verlag, 1919).

¹⁸⁵ See Kraus, F 164, 19, 1904.

reprise.”¹⁸⁶ Kraus is not concerned with upholding or recovering a system of values from a bygone era, and in this sense, his satire does not contain what Linda Hutcheon has called a “corrective aim.”¹⁸⁷ Repetition, rather, informs the way that Kraus immanently critiques the material of his time, which, after the outbreak of the First World War, became nearly impenetrable: “Kein Gedanke, gedacht, gesagt, geschrieen, wäre stark genug, kein Gebet insbrünstig genug, diese Materie zu durchbohren.”¹⁸⁸ No statement, that is, but a re-statement. But how does Kraus ensure that what he called his satirical “transcription” is not subsumed back into the endless series of repetitions that preceded it? How does his satire negate the material it repeats without identifying too closely with it (à la Heine), ultimately producing an “unwitting tribute” to it (Bogel)? And if Kraus’s satire accomplishes what it claims to accomplish, how does it counter Canetti’s charge that it reduces everything to one and the same language, “und der Kampf geht weiter”? These are the questions Kraus implicitly addresses in his magnum opus, *Die letzten Tage der Menschheit*, when he finally transcends the medium of journalism to which his satire had previously been confined.

III. On the Prologue, Genre and Structure of *Die letzten Tage*¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁶ See Gilbert Carr, “Figures of Repetition: Continuity and Discontinuity in Karl Kraus’s Satire,” in *The Modern Language Review* (Vol. 102, No. 3, 2007), 773. Carr’s choice to include Kierkegaard in this formulation is not a coincidence; the two figures have frequently been spoken of together. Adorno, for example, writes, “Seit Kierkegaards Kampf gegen die Christenheit hat kein Einzelner so eingreifend das Interesse des Ganzen gegen das Ganze wahrgenommen,” See Adorno, “Sittlichkeit und Kriminalität,” 372.

¹⁸⁷ Hutcheon sees the “corrective aim of satire’s scornful ridicule” as “central to its identity.” See Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 56.

¹⁸⁸ Quoted in Canetti’s “Der neue Karl Kraus,” who is citing from Kraus’s diary entry. See Canetti, 356.

¹⁸⁹ Kraus began in a fury to work on LTM in the summer of 1915 at the Schloß Janowitz of his intimate friend, the Baroness Sidonie Nádherny. As Kraus explains, “Teile des Werkes, dessen Wesentliches in den Sommern 1915 bis 1917 entstanden ist, sind erst im Jahre 1919, in das auch die Arbeit am Ganzen und am Druck fällt, niedergeschrieben worden.” Beginning a year after the war itself began, Kraus essentially followed the war through to its end, adding and revising along the way, and the *Gesamtwerk* was first published in 1920 and 1921 (the first book edition appeared in 1922). For a while, the play bore the subtitle, “Ein Angsttraum”—it was not until the play’s first draft was completed, in May 1918, that he officially called his semi-finished work a “Tragödie.” For a thorough recapitulation of the work’s *Entstehungsgeschichte*, see Christian Wagenknecht’s appendix to LTM, 775-789.

By 1914, it was no longer fools who rushed in to Kraus's head, but veritable madmen. The phenomenon of war brought with it a new challenge, and Kraus had to find the proper medium with which to engage it, as well as "einen Hass, der selbst dem Weltkrieg gewachsen war."¹⁹⁰ A total war demanded a total work of satire. He thus responded to the theater of war with what Roberto Calasso has called a "theater of repetition and aimless chatter, in which atrocities go forever hand in hand" (106). In the prologue to this colossal work—the only moment in which Kraus appears, as it were, unmasked—Kraus denies the necessity of an actual theater to perform his drama and speaks directly to the ethical stakes of the work and the real matter at hand:

Die Aufführung des Dramas, dessen Umfang nach irdischem Zeitmaß etwa zehn Abende umfassen würde, ist einem Marstheater zugehört. Theatergänger dieser Welt vermöchten ihm nicht standzuhalten. Denn es ist Blut von ihrem Blute und der Inhalt ist von dem Inhalt der unwirklichen, undenkbaren, keinem wachen Sinn erreichbaren, keiner Erinnerung zugänglichen und nur in blutigem Traum verwahrten Jahre, da Operettenfiguren die Tragödie der Menschheit spielten. Die Handlung, in hundert Szenen und Höllen führend, ist unmöglich, zerklüftet, heldenlos wie jene. Der Humor ist nur der Selbstvorwurf eines, der nicht wahnsinnig wurde bei dem Gedanken, mit heilem Hirn die Zeugenschaft dieser Zeitdinge bestanden zu haben. Außer ihm, der die Schmach solchen Anteils einer Nachwelt preisgibt, hat kein anderer ein Recht auf diesen Humor. Die Mitwelt, die geduldet hat, daß die Dinge geschehen, die hier aufgeschrieben sind, stelle das Recht, zu lachen, hinter die Pflicht, zu weinen. (9)

For Kraus, a satirical portrait of the war can only legitimately be performed on the planet named after the Roman god of war, and thus for a Martian audience.¹⁹¹ But this reference is not a mere rhetorical flourish, for the drama's putative un-stageability appears to be the first way Kraus disavows an audience that is somehow distinct from the characters in the play, which he declares to be all of humanity. What was implicit in the Nestroy essay is thus made explicit in the drama's prologue, which is that any actual audience or reader of the play is implicated in its critique, a condition of absolute satire.

¹⁹⁰ Canetti, 339.

¹⁹¹ In reference to the drama's theatrical inconceivability, Calasso writes, "perhaps only Ernst Lubitsch could have filmed it properly." See Calasso, 107.

Kraus suggests that the characters of his “tragedy”—like the characters of the “tragedy of humanity” that he takes for his model—are figures from an operetta. Assuming that an operetta is to be understood as a parody of the opera (as an opera written to its end), then Kraus envisions the figures in his drama as caricatures emptied of subjectivity.¹⁹² It thus makes sense that Kraus subsequently denies his drama a hero, situating it at one further remove from the traditional tragedy, but thereby problematizing its formal classification.¹⁹³ It seems that the first tragedy for Kraus is the actual war, but to make a mere tragedy out of this tragedy would be aesthetically and ethically irresponsible. The drama’s first instance of repetition is thus the repetition of tragedy in the form of satire. Alenka Zupančič accordingly provides one possible hermeneutic framework for interpreting the genre of this work: “A thing can be terrible and devastating in its repetition,” she writes, “but it is no longer tragic, and this, we could say, constitutes a supreme tragedy of modernity.”¹⁹⁴ Nonetheless, whether we understand *Die letzten Tage* as “tragedy’s comedy,” as a reincarnation of the hero-less Baroque *Trauerspiel* described in Benjamin’s *Habilitation*, as what Franz Mautner calls a “satiric tragedy,” or as the tragedy of satire, some formal elements of Attic tragedy do remain intact: “die Einteilung in fünf Akte, die Zwangsläufigkeit des verhängnisvollen Geschehens, die Vielzahl der Todesopfer und der Zusammenbruch als Schluss.”¹⁹⁵ Indeed, there is a certain necessity to the unfolding of his

¹⁹² Kraus is probably thinking here of another one of his cultural icons, Jacques Offenbach, whose operettas Kraus often performed during his public readings.

¹⁹³ Djassemly thus writes, “Karl Kraus legt seinen Bemerkungen einen alltagssprachlichen Begriff des Tragischen zugrunde, während im präzisen dramentheoretischen Sinn weder der Nörgler noch die Menschheit als Tragödienhelden infrage kommen: der Nörgler nicht, weil er nur als Kommentator, aber nicht als Handelnder eine Rolle spielt, und die Menschheit nicht, weil sie sich in der bisherigen Geschichte noch gar nicht zum Subjekt konstituiert hat, sondern so ‘zerklüftet’, so antagonistisch ist wie ihre Handlungen.” See Djassemly, *Die verfolgende Unschuld*, 115.

¹⁹⁴ See Zupančič, *The Odd One In: On Comedy* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), 175. I would thus disagree with Charles Knight, who writes that this drama is only the “host form for the satiric parasite,” and would propose a more necessary relationship between satire and the form it assumes in *Die letzten Tage*. See Knight, 255.

¹⁹⁵ See Djassemly, *Die verfolgende Unschuld*, 15. Wilhelm Hindemith has identified in the play a “nach-christliche Dimension,” which resonates with Benjamin’s conception of the *Trauerspiel* as a product of the process of secularization. See Hindemith, 103.

drama, albeit not of the Hegelian sort, which entails a bitter conflict between two orders of right. Again, the subjectivity necessary to constitute an ethical position has been denied in this drama; what we are left with are “Larven und Lemuren, Masken des tragischen Karnevals,” who have “lebende Namen, weil dies so sein muß und weil eben in dieser vom Zufall bedingten Zeitlichkeit nichts zufällig ist” (LTM, 10). The necessity of this tragedy is that of having to compose it.

In a sense, Kraus’s monologue picks up where his essay on Nestroy from three years earlier left off. Yet while at the end of that essay Kraus describes the satirist as one that “lacht metaphysisch” at the earthly laughter of those he satirizes (F 349, 23), the question of laughter in *Die letzten Tage* is more complicated. For what Kraus suggests above is that the humor of this text is a “self-reproach,” but it is also that which stands at the threshold of the satirist’s sanity, a satirist who claims to have otherwise broken down at the mere thought of having been nothing more than a witness to the madness and carnage of war. Humor paradoxically allows Kraus to produce the drama about to unfold, to serve as witness, even while it implicates him in the “Zeitdinge” on display.¹⁹⁶ But then Kraus denies his *audience* the “right” to the drama’s humor, and demands, at the very least, that laughing come at the price of crying. Kraus hints at a pathos of laughter in the context of satire, in which laughter is inextricably bound to guilt: this is perhaps what Kraus means when he accuses Heine’s satire of lacking pathos, implying that it is underpinned only by the cynical laughter which Kraus opposes.¹⁹⁷ Most importantly, laughter is determined to be the byproduct of the drama and not its end goal, decidedly marking it off from those inauthentic satires, which, to recall Benjamin, “aus dem Hohn ein Gewerbe gemacht und

¹⁹⁶ Words like “Zeitdinge” recall one of Benjamin’s insights regarding the aesthetics of the Baroque Trauerspiel, which allowed for odd neologisms to develop.

¹⁹⁷ For a recent analysis of “pathos” in modernist literature, including its function in Kraus, see Rainer Dachsel, *Pathos: Tradition und Aktualität einer vergessenen Kategorie der Poetik* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2003), 245-298.

nicht viel mehr bei ihren Invektiven im Sinne haben als dem Publikum etwas zu lachen zu geben.”¹⁹⁸ Kraus’s meditation on laughter is crucial if we are to understand the stakes of this text.

Attempts to either summarize the content or encapsulate the narrative structure of the play, consisting of 213 scenes and approximately 500 characters, are bound to fall short—so will this one. Franz Mautner, for example, writes that *Die letzten Tage*

begins with the voice of a newsboy and ends with that of God. The cry of the newsboy resounds in Vienna in June, 1914; the voice of God rings out over a battlefield at the end of World War I, at which point the drama transforms into a modern Walpurgis Night. From Vienna the drama spreads out over the territory of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, the occupied territories and war zones, and, from the third act on, into Germany, and onward, everywhere, wherever the armies and merchants of the Central Powers had penetrated.¹⁹⁹

Wilhelm Hindemith has further undertaken the task of grouping the various types of characters into six neatly defined categories, which I have translated and reproduced below:

1. Socialites or famous figures, e.g., Kaiser Wilhelm II
2. Anonymous figures, e.g., “a psychiatrist”
3. Recognizable types, e.g., “a cab-driver,” “a prostitute”
4. Constant, recurring figures that may be prominent, e.g., the journalist Alice Schalek (known as “Die Schalek” in the drama), or that may be “Volksfiguren,” e.g., Poldi Fesch, or that may be invented, e.g., “The Grumbler” or the married couple “Schwarz-Gelber”
5. Mythological-allegorical figures, e.g., “Dwarf and Giant” or “Gog and Magog”
6. Representative-symbolic figures, e.g., “the poet,” “a cynic,” “a newspaper boy.”²⁰⁰

Arguably the drama’s most conspicuous structural element is its use of quotations,²⁰¹ which constitute approximately half of its lines, most of which are culled directly from newspapers and conversations Kraus overheard on the streets of Vienna, in cafes, and elsewhere.²⁰² Indeed, much

¹⁹⁸ Anne Peitter writes: “Kraus ist auf Komik und Gewalt gleichermaßen angewiesen, weil er nur durch ihre Verschränkung die von den Mächtigen verdrängten Kontraste wieder sichtbar machen kann. Der Verschränkung der beiden kommt mithin eine gesellschafts- und kulturkritische Bedeutung ersten Ranges zu. Zwar deutet die Dominanz der Gewalt innerhalb der Komik eine Krise der letzteren an, doch setzt Kraus bei der Veröffentlichung seines Dramas direkt nach Kriegsende noch ein gewisses Vertrauen in die befreiende und erkenntnisstiftende Wirkung eines Lachens, das ex negativo im pervertierten den authentischen Karneval freilegen soll.” See Peitter, *Komik und Gewalt: Zur literarischen Verarbeitung der beiden Weltkriege und der Shoah* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2007), 13.

¹⁹⁹ See Franz Mautner’s “Critical Analysis” at the end of *The Last Days of Mankind*, abridged and edited by Frederick Ungar (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1974), 239.

²⁰⁰ See Hindemith, 53.

²⁰¹ Canetti writes: “Die schwarzen, gedruckten, toten Worte waren für [Kraus] laute Worte. Wenn er sie dann zitierte, war es, wie wenn er Stimmen sprechen ließe: akustische Zitate.” See Canetti, 133.

²⁰² Eckart Früh has shown, for example, that at least forty scenes in the drama “are based wholly or in part on

of the drama's horror derives from the fact that, as Kraus writes in the prologue, "die unwahrscheinlichsten Gespräche, die hier geführt werden, sind wörtlich gesprochen worden; die grellsten Erfindungen sind Zitate" (9).

Because of this montage technique, some critics have labeled the drama a "documentary play," suggesting that along with its use of quotations, its rapid transitions from scene to scene and conversation to conversation anticipate the filmed documentary.²⁰³ On account of the biblical and apocalyptic allusions that abound throughout the text (evidenced even in the drama's title), Hindemith has called the play a "post-Christian tragedy" (103); along similar lines, Edward Timms has argued that the "Judaean-Christian promise of redemption – of messianic expectation fulfilled through the life of the saviour – is retracted in the face of man's revolt against God" (69).²⁰⁴ And Kurt Krolop has called the drama a "Warnstück" (65). And yet while each one of these descriptions sheds important light on at least one aspect of the drama, their collective focus on its content or its meaning obscures its formal and even philosophical structure. *Die letzten Tage* contains neither images of battle, nor a cohesive narrative structure that accords with the timeline of the war, nor an uncomplicated use of eschatological language (God's cry at the very end, "Ich habe es nicht gewollt," is a direct quote from Kaiser Wilhelm II). Speaking with Calasso, it cannot be reduced to an "example of 'documentary theater' or 'epic theater' or 'political theater' or 'theater of the absurd,'" to cite the paltry labels that people

material from the Arbeiter-Zeitung," the organ of the Austrian Social Democratic Party, which, until 1917, reflected the nationalistic views of the party's right-wing faction. See Früh, "Die 'Arbeiter-Zeitung' als Quelle für 'Die letzten Tage der Menschheit,'" in *Karl Kraus in neuer Sicht*, eds. Sigurd Paul Scheichl and Edward Timms (Munich: Edition Text + Kritik, 1986), 209-234.

²⁰³ See, for example, Timothy Youker on the theme of the "documentary play," in "'The Sound of Deeds': Karl Kraus and Acoustic Quotation," in *Theatre Journal* (Vol. 63, No. 1, March 2011), 86.

²⁰⁴ For more on the theme of the apocalyptic in Kraus and its relationship to communicative language, see Jakob Norberg, "The Black Book: Karl Kraus's Etiquette," in *Modern Austrian Literature* 40.2 (Summer: 2007), 45-64.

have sought to apply to this work” (99).²⁰⁵ It is, to be sure, a drama that indicts, with equal fervor, militarism, nationalism and journalism, for to make qualitative distinctions in its critique would be, for Kraus, to ignore the deeply entrenched complicity of each and every participant involved in the war’s proliferation: journalists, politicians, bureaucrats, patriots, doctors, scientists, priests, poets, financiers, optimists, and even, as we will see, grumblers. *Die letzten Tage* is, I argue, not only a satire of the First World War, but a critical engagement with the very tensions immanent in satire I have described earlier.

My intervention therefore seeks to shift the attention away from some of the more historicized and content-based readings of the drama and toward a more structural analysis. It would be a nearly impossible task to offer a reading of this play in its entirety, since there are simply too many facets: the historical context that informed its genesis; the various theatrical techniques and movements it either anticipates or incorporates (montage, film, Expressionism, etc.); the major and minor political figures within the Central Powers to which it responds, many of whom have been lost to the annals of history; the parody of minor war-enthused poets whom Kraus held to be undeserving of the name. I will thus proceed by first analyzing selected scenes that are representative of the various ways in which *repetition* functions in the drama: as quotation, as scenic reprisal, and in some of the circular or cyclical dialogues between various characters. I will finally turn to the figure of the Nörgler—the drama’s resident satirist—in order to more precisely explain what constitutes the work’s “absolute satire,” and thus how it contributes as much to an understanding of its historical moment as it does to the discourse on

²⁰⁵ Calasso makes the suggestion that Büchner’s *Dantons Tod*, about a sixth of which consists of actual quotations, could be considered “political” in the same sense as *Die letzten Tage*. See Calasso, 99. Reiner Niehoff has also made this connection in *Die Herrschaft des Textes: Zitattechnik als Sprachkritik in Georg Büchners Drama Dantons Tod unter Berücksichtigung der Letzten Tage der Menschheit von Karl Kraus* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1991).

modern satire. In so doing, I hope to challenge the image of Kraus as a misanthrope, a reactionary or an eternal naysayer.

IV. The Linguistic Ruins of War: Quotation, Scenic Reprise, Tautology

On his own method of poaching the language of others and inserting them into his own texts, Kraus once wrote:

So wurde ich der Schöpfer des Zitats, im Wesentlichen nicht mehr als das, wenn gleich ich den Anteil der Sprachgestaltung auch an der Abschrift der Zeit nicht verkleinert sehen möchte. Der künstlerische Wert dieser Einfügung besteht . . . in der *Weglassung der Anführungszeichen*. Das Leben, in das die Worte eingesetzt sind, ist von dem Leben, dem sie entnommen sind, so verschieden, daß auch nicht die Spur einer inner Identität mehr vorhanden ist, und die äußere, also das Plagiat, ist nichts anderes als die Leistung, die es bewirkt hat.²⁰⁶

For Kraus, once one instantiation of language has been fully incorporated into his text, a transformation is effected, in the sense that these words now assume a wholly different meaning in their new context; the plagiarism committed is merely the byproduct of this gesture, censured only by those who fail to register its justification.²⁰⁷ Yet what makes this truly an aesthetic act for Kraus is when the quotation marks—the material signs that signify the separation from the main body of the text—fall away completely and the quotation is wholly subsumed by the new text: *Einverleibung*. The transition from quotation to quotation without quotation marks is fully consummated in Kraus's move from his essays and glosses in *Die Fackel* to *Die letzten Tage*. Lacking their mark of distinction, these quotations have now been incorporated into dialogue and returned, as it were, to their source.²⁰⁸ In the words of Timothy Youker, they are now “performed quotations” (96). The formal distinction between the monologic essay form and the drama is

²⁰⁶ This is taken from the gloss “Das Plagiat,” in which Kraus responds to the accusation that he had lifted lines from the Gospel of John and from Hamlet and inserted them into various satirical poems without properly citing them. See Kraus, F 572, 61-62, 1921. Emphasis added.

²⁰⁷ Predictably, Kraus always confers this authority on himself, since for him it is always “das Plagiat an der tauglichen Sache.” See F 800, 2, 1929.

²⁰⁸ Adorno also writes about the improper use of the quotation mark: “Als Mittel der Ironie sind sie zu verschmähen. Denn sie dispensieren den Schriftsteller von jenem Geist, dessen Anspruch der Ironie unabdingbar innewohnt, und freveln an deren eigenem Begriff, indem sie sie von der Sache trennen und das Urteil über diese als vorentschieden hinstellen.” See Adorno, “Satzzeichen,” in *Noten zur Literatur*, 110.

crucial because it grants Kraus the leverage to counter the charge that his language rarely transcends the language of journalism that he denounces, a common criticism of Kraus vis-à-vis his essay on Heine. When Bernd Witte writes, “[i]m Grunde ist es die mangelnde Sachlichkeit, der Zierat der ‘Stimmung’ und des Wortwitzes, den Kraus als das ‘Geistige’ an den feuilletonistischen Texten in der Heine-Nachfolge bemängelt, die gleichermaßen seine eigene Satiren . . . charakterisieren” (31), I would point to *Die letzten Tage* as Kraus’s implicit rejoinder. In dramatic form, Kraus can still immanently critique this feuilletonistic language, since it is not journalism *as such*, absent of historical considerations, but concrete journalists that are the target of his satire. Removing this language from its originary medium proves to be the critical gesture.

As a thousand-headed monster, the journalist appears in many different guises and under many different names: sometimes simply referred to simply as “Journalist,” sometimes given a fictional name, such as “Feigl” or “Halberstam,” and sometimes appearing as the historical journalist Alice Schalek, a frequent target of Kraus’s critique of celebratory war reportage. In a *Fackel* gloss entitled, “Die Schalek dringt weiter vor,” Kraus reproduces, in the form of a list, a collection of actual quotations from Schalek; in *LTM*, they have been reworked and shaped into a dialogue between “Die Schalek” and an unnamed officer on the southwest front.²⁰⁹

DIE SCHALEK. . . also sagen Sie mir Herr Leutnant, ob eines Künstlers Kunst spannender, leidenschaftlicher dieses Schauspiel gestalten könnte. Jene, die daheim bleiben, mögen unentwegt den Krieg die Schmach des Jahrhunderts nennen—hab’ ich’s doch getan, solange ich im Hinterlande saß—jene, die dabei sind, werden aber vom Fieber des Erlebens gepackt. Nicht wahr Herr Leutnant, Sie stehen doch mitten im Krieg, geben Sie zu, manch einer von Ihnen will gar nicht, daß er ende!

DIE OFFIZIER. Nein, das will keiner. Darum will jeder, daß er ende.
(*Man hört das Sausen von Geschossen: Ssss - - -*)

DIE SCHALEK. Sss --! Das war eine Granate.

DER OFFIZIER. Nein, das war ein Schrapnell. Das wissen Sie nicht?

DIE SCHALEK. Es fällt Ihnen offenbar schwer, zu begreifen, daß für mich die Tonfarben noch nicht auseinanderstreben. Aber ich habe in der Zeit, die ich draußen bin, schon viel gelernt, ich werde auch das noch lernen.—Mir scheint, die Vorstellung ist zu Ende. Wie schade! Es war erstklassig.

DER OFFIZIER. Sind Sie zufrieden?

²⁰⁹ Timothy Youker writes: “The play’s treatment of one particular journalist, Alice Schalek, Austria’s first female professional war correspondent, who appears in a total of seven scenes, provides a useful example of Kraus’s contempt for war journalism.” See Youker, 86.

DIE SCHALEK. Wieso zufrieden? zufrieden ist gar kein Wort! Nennt es Vaterlandsliebe, ihr Idealisten; Feindeshaß, ihr Nationalen; nennt es Sport, ihr Modernen; Abenteuer, ihr Romantiker; nennt es Wonne der Kraft, ihr Seelenkenner—ich nenne es frei gewordenes Menschentum. (189)

The satirical apogee of the exchange emerges in Schalek's admission that she has difficulty distinguishing between the various timbres of battle (*Tonfarben*), thereby alluding to the perilous path that leads from mis-hearing to mis-writing. To recall, agents of the press were, for Kraus, as much to be blamed for the war as were the corrupt generals and militant bureaucrats working for the Central Powers, and Kraus saw the press's language as, in certain ways, a direct extension of the sounds of battle. Indeed, Schalek's imitation of the shrapnel alludes to the way she almost reproduces or repeats the sounds of the war herself—how her own language dissolves into hollow sounds—but in such a way that her imitation appears as a form of tribute. The word *Tonfarbe* further points to the problem of a type of language that merely *describes* the activity of battle: “wie [Schalek] die Leichen beschreibt, Kleinigkeit der Verwesungsgeruch!” (156), a fellow reporter exclaims during an earlier scene. This line has prompted Youker to comment that “beschreiben” can mean “to describe” or “to write upon.” “This particular verb choice appears more than once in reference to Schalek's descriptions of the dead and wounded, and it seems quite likely that Kraus . . . saw the connotations of describing a war correspondent like Schalek as writing upon corpses” (89). Following this logic, to reproduce Schalek's own statements in this way could be seen as an attempt to revoke the act of “writing upon” corpses and to turn this language itself into a corpse, or into dead, historical time. The way Schalek then proceeds to list off the various modes of interpreting the war, followed immediately by her own ideal of humanity, speaks less to the specificity of each of these dispositions than to their fundamental un-differentiation vis-à-vis their more essential relationship to the war—a key insight in terms of understanding the conceit of the drama: together they constitute a false whole. Schalek's own glib attempt to capture the sentiment of all of them in one phrase becomes yet another empty

phrase. In this way, the sheer listing of the different types of war supporters—idealists, romantics, athletes, moderns—constitutes another form of repetition within the actual quotation.

Another recurring figure is Moriz Benedikt, the press mogul and editor-in-chief of the *Neue Freie Presse* from 1908 until his death in 1920, often referred to in the drama as the “Herr der Hyänen.”²¹⁰ In two consecutive scenes we are taken to the Vatican and then to the editorial office of the *NFP*. From the Vatican intones the voice of the “betenden Benedikt,” in the office, that of the “diktierenden Benedikt.” What these figures share is a position of influence, a voice heard by all, and a namesake. The Pope first pleads,

-- -- Im heiligen Namen Gottes, unseres himmlischen Vaters und Herrn, um des gesegneten Blutes Jesu willen, welches der Preis der menschlichen Erlösung gewesen, beschwören wir Euch, die Ihr von der göttlichen Vorsehung zur Regierung der kriegführenden Nationen bestellt seid, diesem fürchterlichen Morden, das nunmehr seit einem Jahre Europa entehrt, endlich ein Ziel zu setzen. Es ist Bruderblut, das zu Lande und zur See vergossen wird

The editor then “dictates,” the semantic ambiguity of the word deliberate:²¹¹

-- -- Und die Fische, Hummern und Seespinnen der Adria haben lange keine so guten Zeiten gehabt wie jetzt. In der südlichen Adria speisten sie fast die ganze Bemannung des “Leon Gambetta.” Die Bewohner der mittleren Adria fanden Lebensunterhalt an jenen Italienern, die wir von dem Fahrzeug “Turbine” nicht mehr retten konnten, und in der nördlichen Adria wird den Meeresbewohnern der Tisch immer reichlicher gedeckt²¹² (190-191)

Between the Pope’s desperate plea for peace (announced during the first months of the war) and the callous dismissal of the lives of Italian soldiers by the press mogul—presented here as a secularized pope—there could not be a starker contrast, and the satire only intensifies when we realize that the press’s influence in this regard was visible earlier on in the play, during a conversation between the “Patriot” and the newspaper “Subscriber” (to the *NFP*) about the moral

²¹⁰ The editor-proprietor Benedikt appears in *Die Fackel* as early as 1899, the journal’s founding year. For more on Kraus’s notorious relationship to the editor-proprietor Moriz Benedikt, see Timms, *Apocalyptic Satirist*, 87-89, or Paul Reitter, *The Anti-Journalist*, 86-88.

²¹¹ Erich Heller interestingly writes that Kraus’s “single word” is “precise through its infinite ambiguity.” See Heller, “Karl Kraus: Satirist in the Modern World,” in *The Disinherited Mind: Essays on Modern German Literature and Thought* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1971), 239.

²¹² Kraus lifted this scene almost entirely from an edition of *Die Fackel*, the only minor difference being that in the journal, Kraus places them next to one another in two adjacent columns, the first under the title “Benedikts Gebet,” the second, “Benedikts Diktat.” See F 406, 1, 1919.

superiority of the Austrians over the other warring nations. As the mouthpiece of ideology, the subscriber interjects:

Und vor allem sind wir im Gegensatz zu ihnen immer human! Die Presse zum Beispiel hat im Leitartikel sogar an die Fische und Seetiere in der Adria gedacht, daß sie jetzt gute Zeiten haben wern, weil sie so viel italienische Leichen zu fressen bekommen. Das ist doch schon wirklich die Humanität auf die Spitze getrieben, in diesen verhärteteten Zeiten noch an die Fische und an die Seetiere in der Adria zu denken, wo doch sogar Menschen Hunger leiden müssen! (119).

To recall: Benjamin writes that quotation, through which an instantiation of language is emptied of its subjective intention (“destroyed” or “punished” in his terminology) once it is placed into a new context (“saved” or returned to its “origin”), is Kraus’s singular critical procedure.²¹³ Reinstating his theological conception of language from his earlier writings, Benjamin argues that Krausian quotation unites what he sees as the fundamental polarities immanent in all “fallen” language, which he calls “rhyme” and “name.” When recognized as such, quotation “rhymes” insofar as it produces an exact repetition of the quoted language; it rhymes with itself and is therefore to be understood as the poetic, self-referential dimension of language, that which draws language inward. In its naming function, by contrast, quotation taps into the potential in language to reach beyond its linguistic constitution and establish a relation to the non-linguistic world. The quotation *names* the instantiation of language being quoted by turning it into a thing of the past, a “ruin” emptied of its erstwhile significance.²¹⁴ If, as Werner Hamacher suggests, all language in Benjamin’s schema is affected by an “ironic-allegorical” character, in that it never means (objectively) what it says (subjectively), then Krausian quotation divests it of this character by bringing both of these semantic components to the fore and revealing nothing but

²¹³ See Benjamin, GS II, 334-367. Alexander Gelley has written that in this essay, Benjamin is concerned with identifying the “potential of citation to pierce through layers of intention, deception, and ambiguity and draw out of the fabric of language a power of judgment.” See Gelley, “Epigones in the House of Language,” in *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas*, Vol. 5.1 (2007), 29.

²¹⁴ In the introduction to his translation of Adorno’s dissertation on Kierkegaard, Robert Hullot-Kentor lucidly explains the significance of the allegorical artwork-qua-ruin: “works are not studied in the interest in returning them to their own time and period, documents of ‘how it really was,’ but rather according to the truth they release in their own process of disintegration.” See Hullot-Kentor, “Forward” to *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic*, xv.

their disjunction.²¹⁵ In this way, the dramatic use of quotation could be read as the apotheosis of immanent critique in Kraus. By tracing its object completely, it leaves no remainder unaccounted by doing away with the external interpretation that normally has to mediate the relationship between an object of criticism and the critique itself, an interpretation that necessarily relies on a fixed position from which it derives its authority (recall: *Tendenzsatire*). In *Die letzten Tage*, the only external move vis-à-vis quotation is the dialogic, performative element that summons the quotation to life in each character in order to immediately render it “nichts als Maske, historische Zeit.” Schalek’s statements, which she herself has repeated several times before, are no longer embedded in her narrative of the war, nor even in the fabric of Kraus’s *Fackel* essays; Moriz Benedikt’s words are brought to bear against the Pope’s alone. These quotations can be read as what I would call the linguistic ruins of war, insofar as their very quotability renders visible their historicity, their once having been spoken and thus their function as testimonies that speak unwittingly against their time.

Quotation, however, can be subsumed under the larger category of repetition at work in *Die letzten Tage*. There are plenty of conversations in which the interlocutors repeat themselves and engage in Beckettian exchanges of non-dialogic dialogue, in which the fact that neither partner registers the repetition of the other is what forces the conversation to remain at a standstill, immune to progression. The “Subscriber” and the “Patriot,” both mouthpieces for the official war propaganda, engage in conversations with one another throughout the text (forming a parallel to the Optimist-Nörgler dyad). In one particularly humorous dialogue between the two in the middle of the fifth act, they speak cryptically about the “rumors” circulating in Austria:

DER ABONNENT. Was sagen Sie zu den Gerüchten?
DER PATRIOT. Ich bin besorgt.

²¹⁵ See Hamacher, “The Word Wolke,” in *Benjamin’s Ground: New Readings of Walter Benjamin*, ed. Rainer Nägele (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988), 163.

DER ABONNENT. In Wien sind Gerüchte verbreitet, daß in Österreich Gerüchte verbreitet sind. Sie gehen sogar von Mund zu Mund, aber niemand kann einem sagen –
 DER PATRIOT. Man weiß nichts Bestimmtes, es sind nur Gerüchte, aber es muß etwas dran sein, wenn sogar die Regierung verlautbart hat, daß Gerüchte verbreitet sind.
 DER ABONNENT. Die Regierung warnt ausdrücklich, die Gerüchte zu glauben oder zu verbreiten, und fordert jeden auf, sich an der Unterdrückung der Gerüchte tunlichst auf das energischste zu beteiligen. No ich tu was ich kann, wo ich hinkomm sag ich, wer gibt auf Gerüchte?
 DER PATRIOT. No die ungarische Regierung sagt auch, daß in Budapest Gerüchte verbreitet sind, daß nämlich in Ungarn Gerüchte verbreitet sind, und warnt auch.
 DER ABONNENT. Mit einem Wort, es hat stark den Anschein, daß die Gerüchte in der ganzen Monarchie verbreitet sind. (588)

Between the subscriber and the patriot, essentially no content is exchanged, apart from the fact that within the Monarchy there have been rumors circulating about rumors circulating about rumors circulating. But it is precisely the dissemination of this substance-less knowledge about the goings-on of the war that is enough to keep the interested parties interested, the readers reading, and, by implication, the politicians politicking. On display is the structure of repetition as a form of appeasement: that one knows that rumors are being spread about rumors being spread is enough to satisfy the imagination, meanwhile serving the more ideological purpose of preventing the affected parties from becoming too interested in what is going on around them.

The post-apocalyptic conversation between the “zwei riesenhafte Fettkugeln,” Gog and Magog, two grotesquely portrayed German war racketeers, provides a second example of how the repetition of certain phrases within the same conversation directs attention toward its problematic structure. As they converse in an unmistakably thick Berlin dialect, this scene also points to the unsettling proximity between humor and violence and thus between the laughter and guilt that Kraus warns about earlier in the prologue. Below is a truncated reproduction of the scene:

MAGOG (*nach einer Pause*). Wer in diesem Krieg nicht reich wird, verdient nicht, ihn zu erleben.
 GOG. Jewiß doch
 MAGOG. Ja, da koof'n wa alles zusammen, was es jetzt an nummerierten Ausjaben auf Bütten jibt. Wird bald nischt mehr da sein. Eh ich von Berlin abreiste, habe ich um 60.000 Emmchen Bücher jekauft, Aufmachung in Leder
 GOG (*blickt in die Zeitung*). Na wat sagen Se, WTB – “In 24 Studen 60.000 Kilogramm Bomben! –Ganz Dünkirchen steht in Flammen! Unsre Bombengeschwader haben Außerordentliches geleistet. Auch über der Festung London wurde die Wirkung einwandfrei festjestellt.”
 MAGOG. Die Sache im Westen wird jemacht.

GOG. 's muß doch 'n Hochjefühl sein, so'n Kampfflieja! Vasteht man erst, wenn man das Ullsteinbuch von unserm Richthofen jelesen hat! Wie er den Rußkis die Bahnhöfe einjetöppert hat

MAGOG. U-Boot is ooch nich von Papp.

GOG. Jewiß doch. (*Blickt in die Zeitung.*) Na wat sagen Se, WTB

MAGOG. In spätestens zwei Monaten ist England auf die Knie gezwungen. Eeventuell in drei. Machen wa. Die Pleitestimmung ist da. Das sieht man doch an den Humanitätszicken, wat se jetzt wieda aufmachen.

GOG. Kokolores. Wat sagen Se zum Aufruf gegen den Gaskampf?

MAGOG. Sollte das nicht ein Zeichen für die überlegene Wirkung unsrer Gase sein?

GOG. Nu eben. Wie Deutsche begrüßen alle Versuche, dem Völkerrecht und der Menschlichkeit zum Siege zu vahelfen, mit Freude, lehnen es aber ab, uns übertölpeln zu lassen. (660-662)

The dialogue continues. It should first be pointed out that Gog's last line is an abridged version of a line from the infamous Wolffbüro that Kraus often cited during the war, thus providing an example of an actual quotation seamlessly making its way into a dialogue, its source, however, remaining unnamed. But it is Gog's almost unconscious repetition of the phrases "jewiß doch" and "Na wat sagen Se" that deserve the most critical attention. Taken out of context, they are seemingly innocuous phrases, yet the way they serve as either an expression of affirmation or a nonchalant way of reading the latest headlines (the repetition of the stage direction should also not be overlooked) suggests that such verbal responses or forms of reading are mere *Schein*-acts. Nothing is able to disrupt the automatism informing Gog's speech patters. Their dialogue conceals, rather, the underlying monologue—hinted at by the *Berliner* that they both speak—that is transpiring. What they actually say with regard to their plundering, the sensations of a bomber pilot and the superiority of German gas is shocking enough, but that the interlocutors do not register the significance of their own words because it is obscured by repetitive phraseology is what constitutes the satirical gesture.

Lastly, there is the repetition of scenes themselves. Scenes are reprised almost verbatim throughout the entire text, which I would connect to the way the drama attempts to negotiate the temporality of the First World War. The sequence of events in the drama maintains only a loose correspondence to the actual historical progression of the war. Kurt Krolop has thus rightly characterized the internal temporal structure of the play "nicht als Zeitentwicklung, sondern als

Zeitraum, der ohne ‘Ursprung’ und ohne Zukunft ist” (66), implying that the reprisal of scenes mimes one of the war’s most brutalizing features: its mechanical repetitiveness, or at least the representation of such repetitiveness. Each act of the play commences, for example, with a newspaper boy shouting out the latest headline, followed by a conversation between various passers-by. The opening scenes of Acts III, IV and V demonstrate this pattern clearly:

EIN ZEITUNGSAUSRUFER. Extraausgabe--! Venedig bombardiert! Schwere Niederlage der Italiana!

.....

EIN OFFIZIER (*zu drei anderen*). Grüß dich Nowotny, grüß dich Pokorny, grüß dich Powolny, also du—du bist ja politisch gebildet, was sagst zu Rumanien? (323).

EIN ZEITUNGSAUSRUFER. Extraausgabe--! Varnichtete Niedalage der Italiana!

EIN OFFIZIER. Grüß dich Nowotny, grüß dich Pokorny, grüß dich Powolny, also du—du bist ja politisch gebildet, was sagst zu Amerika? (425).

STIMME EINES ZEITUNGSAUSRUFERS. Der Aabeend, Achtuhrblaad!

EIN OFFIZIER (*zu drei anderen*): Grüß dich Nowotny, grüß dich Pokorny, grüß dich Powolny, also du—du bist ja politisch gebildet, was sagst zu Bulgarien? (553).

Operating within an ever-expanding “time-space” in which each military defeat is more consequential than the one prior to it, the drama’s characters nonetheless register these headlines as the same event having repeated itself. The dialogue that evolves out of the newspaper headline is inextricably bound to it, prompting Arntzen to conclude that unlike the traditional dramatic dialogue, “wird nicht thetisch und antithetisch der Handlungskonflikt weitergetrieben, sondern die Kulissenhaftigkeit des realen Geschehens entdeckt, und zwar nicht durch die überlegene Reflexion der Dialogpartner als vielmehr durch im redensartlichen Parlando sich sozusagen zufällig ergebende Wahrheiten.”²¹⁶ The headline becomes the single determining factor for the discourse that ensues, producing the impression that the events being reported are isolated, contingent events that have nothing to do with one another. Together these scenes constitute a dramatic repetition of repetition whose underlying tone makes identical the non-identical.

²¹⁶ See Arntzen, “Einige Dialogstrukturen in Karl Kraus’ Drama ‘Die letzten Tage der Menschheit,’” in *Sprachspiel und Bedeutung: Festschrift für Franz Hundsnurscher zum 65. Geburtstag* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2000), 434.

Scenic repetition serves other ends as well, as evidenced in two phone conversations between a general and a journalist, first appearing in Act II, Scene 16, and then rehearsed in Act III, Scene 22. The conversation revolves around the historic fortress of Przemsyl, which had belonged to the Austrians since the eighteenth century, was then besieged by the Russians during the first few months of the war, and finally recaptured by the Central Powers in June 1915.

Below is an abridged version of the first conversation in Act II. We are privy only to the general's part of the dialogue:

--Servus, also hast den Bericht über Przemsyl fertig? --Noch nicht? . . . Wie? man kann nicht? --Was? Man kann nicht vergessen machen, daß die Festung seit jeher der Stolz—Alles kann man vergessen machen, lieber Freund! Also hör zu, die Festung war eh nix mehr wert, lauter altes Graffelwerk—Wie? Modernste Geschütze? Ich sag dir, lauter altes Graffelwerk, verstanden? No also, gut. Zweitens, paß auf: Nicht durch Feindesgewalt, sondern durch Hunger! Verstanden? . . . Nicht durch Hunger, sondern durch Gwalt, ah was red ich, nicht durch Gewalt, sondern durch Hunger! . . . Wie er sie dann genommen hätte? Durch Hunger? Nein, dann selbstverständlich durch Gewalt, frag net so viel . . . (274)

Followed by an abridged version of the conversation's repetition in Act III:

--Servus, also hast den Bericht über Przemsyl fertig? --Noch nicht? . . . Was, hast wieder alles vergessen? Paß auf, Hauptgesichtspunkte: Während unsere Besatzung bekanntlich durch Hunger . . . also keineswegs durch Hunger überwältigt, Feind hat nie gehungert! Verstehst? Nur wir! . . . Ferner: Festung vollkommen intact, unversehrt in unsern Besitz gelangt—modernste Geschütze—Wie? Man kann nicht vergessen machen? Altes Graffelwerk? Aber nein, jetzt nicht mehr natürlich! Alles kann man vergessen machen, lieber Freund! Also hör zu, mach kan Pallawatsch—modernste Festung—Österreichs alter Stolz—unversehrt zurückerobert. Nicht durch Gewalt, sondern durch Hunger, ah was red ich, nicht durch Hunger, sondern durch Gewalt! (364).

Recording the experience of that which threatened to be scribbled away without ever having been experienced by those who were actually experiencing it is the conceit of the dyad above, and one of the central paradoxes of the drama conceived as a whole.²¹⁷ The Nörgler makes this notion explicit when he claims: “Ach, der Heldentod schwebt in einer Gaswolke und unser Erlebnis ist im Bericht abgebunden! 40,000 russische Leichen waren nur eine Extraausgabe . . . Die sich selbst verschlingende Quantität läßt nur noch Gefühl für das, was man unmittelbar

²¹⁷ Calasso has provocatively written that “the greatest experiment takes place where the capacity to imagine it is lacking. In this sense, World War I is the unsurpassed experimental event of the century. And that is how Kraus saw it . . . What the age did without perceiving it *had* to be experienced and expressed by Kraus.” See Calasso, 219.

sehen, begreifen, betasten kann” (209). In the example above, the general makes clear that as long as the event is mediated through the newspaper, Austrians can just as easily forget that the fortress was the “pride” of their nation as they can remember it as soon as it has been recaptured. What distinguishes this form of repetition is *what* the general repeats: “Everything can be forgotten, my friend.” But the doubling of this dubious phrase serves precisely the opposite function: to *remind* its reader not to forget, and even more so, not to forget that everything can be so easily forgotten.

And finally, the last scene of the Prologue marks both an end and a beginning. It takes place at the funeral of Franz Ferdinand and his wife; those in attendance are the Hofrat Nepalleck, “eine Abordnung von Gemeinderäten,” two functionaries, a doctor, a woman in distress and an editorial journalist. Every dignitary expresses remorse and tries to justify his or her attendance by insisting on his or her own social worth, until the pretense of solemnity is interrupted by the tautological utterance of the two council members, Stein and Hein: “Ich weiß zwar nicht, was ich hier zu suchen habe, aber da auch ich da bin, bin ich auch da” (64). As the scene progresses, the attendees’ statements become more and more absurd: the two consuls, for example, admit “Wir haben zwar keine nennenswerte Beziehung zu dem Verewigten gehabt, sind aber dessenungeachtet herbeigeeilt, um unsere Pflicht zu erfüllen” (64) and the presence of the art dealers and book handlers appears equally suspicious. As the funeral procession then turns to prayer and the Nörgler gives his first monologue, the scene abruptly ends with the editor (probably Benedikt) commanding his journalist to report on what he sees: “Schreiben Sie, wie sie beten!” (66).

An abridged version of this scene is rehearsed toward the end of the final act, set this time at the Nordbahnhof during the last days of the war. The stage direction reads as follows: “Ein

Zug mit Austauschinvaliden ist soeben eingetroffen. Auf Tragbahren werden Leiber, die sich in Zuckungen winden, aus den Waggons geladen. Die Tragbahren werden aufgestellt” (666). The shoal of dignitaries has reappeared, each repeating a truncated version of his or her previous reason for having attended the funeral of the Archduke and Duchess back in 1914. What distinguishes this scene from its original iteration is revealed at the very end, when the editor-in-chief—as badges of honor are being distributed to the disabled ex-service men to the tune of the Radetzky March—commands his neighboring journalist: “Schreiben Sie, wie sie lauschen!” (669). The war *in nuce* is, essentially, wedged between the two statements of the editor, the one that commences the play’s action and the one that signals its imminent end. Between the ostensible “prayer” of the dignitaries at the funeral and the “eavesdropping” of the same group at the falsely ceremonial reception of the war returnees, the editor has changed only one word.²¹⁸

To better understand the relationship between scenic reprisal and the external, historical event it critiques, I turn once again to Zupančič. Elaborating upon the tripartite structure of Gilles Deleuze’s theory of repetition, she explains:

One is repetition in the temporal mode of ‘Before’ (*Avant*), repetition in relation to the past, to something that has already been; it is a mechanical, stereotypical, ‘bare’ (*nue*) repetition, which does not bring about anything new and does not change a thing The second repetition is a repetition that always appears in some disguise; its temporal mode is that of ‘During’ (*Pendant*) The third repetition implies the mode of the Future, of what is (yet) to come (*Avenir*). In this singular mode the repetition . . . is the embodiment of the *novelty of repetition*, of repetition as novelty.²¹⁹ (157)

Returning to the example above, the first mode of repetition, that of the *past*, is the extra-textual event being satirized (even if it cannot be traced to an actual historical event): the “mechanical” behavior of those in attendance at the funeral as well as the reception of the ex-servicemen, conceived of as two isolated events. For these figures, hardly anything has changed in the four

²¹⁸ Hindemith writes that this scenic parallel “allegorisiert einen thematischen Zusammenhang, in welchem Entwicklung zum Stillstand erklärt wird durch eine omnipotente Phrasenform, ein starres Zeremoniell, das alles unter sich begräbt.” See Hindemith, 87.

²¹⁹ Emphasis added.

years that separates these events. Yet if the critique stopped there, it would not quite attain the level of satire. Thus the journalist is inserted into the scenes to demonstrate the limitations of his own position as observer of the events he records. This journalist repeats this first repetition in the “disguise” of reportage, thereby reifying this moment by turning it into a continuous present, whose actual differentiation is incapable of affecting the language of the journalist who describes it. The third repetition, which, for Deleuze, produces the real “difference” or “novelty,” would then be the insertion of these first two moments into the beginning and the end of the drama, conceived of now as a dyad. The critical gesture emerges only in this last mode of repetition, which condenses the first two repetitions into one single moment, writes it to its end, and thereby points, however indirectly, toward a moment *beyond* repetition.

V. Pledging to Posterity: The Case of the Nörgler

The paradox from which satire suffers is that it is both a part of as well as excluded from the object of its ridicule. In the last section of my analysis, I thus turn to the figure in whom this predicament is best expressed: the Nörgler. Both the central figure in the drama as well as its self-proclaimed author—“Ich habe eine Tragödie geschrieben, deren untergehender Held die Menschheit ist” (671)—the Nörgler is essentially a *Randfigur*, both part of the world he satirizes and distinct from it. Hindemith has thus pointed to the difficulties that the Nörgler presents to his interpreters:

Der Nörgler ist der Schöpfer des Werkes, in welchem er zugleich als eine zentrale Figur auftritt und spricht. Er entwickelt sich darin. Er stellt die einzige Figur dar im Drama, die eine Entwicklung durchmacht. Auf ihn bezieht sich die Gattungsbeschreibung *Tragödie*. Für den Interpreten hat das zwei Konsequenzen. Erstens orientiert er sich an den Reflexionen und Deutungen des Geschehens, die der Nörgler gibt Zweitens aber hat er sich zu hüten, sich vorschnell auf den Standpunkt des Nörglers zu stellen, denn dieser ist als Figur innerhalb des Spiels, als integrales Moment des Werkes, zu interpretieren Der Hauptfehler, der den meisten der bisherigen Anstrengungen gegenüber dem Werk anhaftet, besteht darin, die Nörglerpassagen einseitig als statischen Kommentar, als eine dem Werk beigegebene Philosophie zu lesen. (133-134)

From this warning of how *not* to read the Nörgler—as a mere commentator on the “plot,” and as a modern analog to the ancient chorus—it follows that a secondary interpretative mistake would be to conflate the Nörgler with Kraus himself, as certain critics have done.²²⁰ For while parallels between Kraus and the drama’s resident satirist are undeniable, the Nörgler is best understood as the drama’s last and perhaps most crucial embodiment of repetition, quoting verbatim from the *Fackel*-Kraus’s essays and aphorisms,²²¹ Shakespeare, political figures involved in the war’s orchestration,²²² other figures in the play (who are often ventriloquizing their historical counterparts), the prologue, and even himself.²²³ If then, for Benjamin, Kraus renders the newspaper “quotable,” the Nörgler renders even Kraus quotable, making it impossible to accept the former’s running commentary on the war as the drama’s last word. He does not pretend to hover above his dramatic world in a state of “Weltenthobenheit,” but plunges, rather, directly into its thicket.²²⁴ The Nörgler does assume “eine Rolle, die er nicht ausfüllen kann: die des Wissenden, der die Zusammenhänge durchschaut und als Einziger souverän analysieren

²²⁰ Karl Riha, for example, writes: “In der Figur des ‘Nörglers’ meldet sich aber auch hier der Autor selbst zu Wort, der Fackel-Kraus, der Sprache und Sprechende der Zeit beim Wort nimmt.” See Riha, *Kritik, Satire, Parodie* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag: 1992), 138.

²²¹ One example (among many) of this textual phenomenon can be found in Act V, Scene 8, when the Nörgler reads aloud from a gloss entitled “Ein Irrsinniger auf dem Einspännergaul,” which alegorically describes the relationship between Wilhelm II and Franz Josef. The Nörgler is reading a gloss from *Die Fackel*, in which he describes this image as “eines, das ziemlich gut zeigt, wie ich mir die Lage der Welt im Krieg, die Lage unserer Welt, schon immer vorgestellt habe.” See F 418, 15, 1916.

²²² The most conspicuous Shakespeare quotation is from Hamlet, included in both the prologue and toward the very end of the Nörgler’s last speech: “Und laß der Welt, die noch nicht weiß, mich sagen, / Wie alles dies geschah; so sollt ihr hören / Von Taten, fleischlich, blutig, unnatürlich, / Zufälligen Gerichten, blindem Mord; / von Toden, durch Gewalt und List bewirkt, / Und Planen, die verfehlt, zurückgefallen / Auf der Erfinder Haupt: dies alles kann ich / Mit Wahrheit melden.” (681)

²²³ For example, when the Nörgler states, “Wir wollten den Weltmarkt in der Ritterrüstung erobern—wir werden mit dem schlechteren Geschäft vorlieb nehmen müssen, sie am Tandelmarkt zu verkaufen” (658), he is citing Kraus’s prologue I discussed earlier.

²²⁴ In drawing a distinction between the ironist and the satirist—a distinction to which I will return—Arntzen writes: “Im Gegensatz zu Ironie, die die zum Schema erstarrte Wirklichkeit gerade noch für gut befindet, um mit ihr ein Spiel zu treiben, und den Ironiker in Weltenthobenheit schweben läßt, leidet der Satiriker an der Wirklichkeit, die im Untergang steht, und gestaltet sie dennoch.” See Arntzen, *Literatur im Zeitalter der Information*, 168.

kann.²²⁵ Indeed, nowhere does the Nörgler claim such a position of superiority; rather, his explicit renunciation of such superiority is precisely what constitutes his dialectical function.

The Nörgler almost exclusively appears in the text in dialogue with his counterpart, the Optimist, the only character who listens, or rather, attempts to listen to the Nörgler's grumbling, and whose naïve interjections represent the fleeting remnants of "healthy common sense" amidst the sea of absurdity.²²⁶ Toward the end of the first extensive exchange between the two, the Nörgler asserts what the role of the Optimist vis-à-vis the Nörgler is, whereby the Optimist responds with what will become his characteristic gesture of misunderstanding:

DER NÖRGLER. . . . [Mein Auge] gewahrt die Konturen [der Zukunft], und Phantasie tut das übrige. Und mein Ohr hört Geräusche, die andere nicht hören, und sie stören mir die Musik der Sphären, die andere auch nicht hören. Denken Sie darüber nach, und wenn Sie dann noch nicht von selbst zu einem Schluß kommen, so rufen Sie mich. Ich unterhalte mich gern mit Ihnen. *Sie sind ein Stichwortbringer für meine Monologe.* Ich möchte mit Ihnen vor das Publikum. Jetzt kann ich diesem nur sagen, daß ich schweige, und wenn möglich, was ich schweige.
DER OPTIMIST. Was etwa?²²⁷ (224).

Just as Benjamin suggests in his essay on Kraus, the Nörgler's pathos-laden monologues are, too, nothing but this "silence" unfolded. But the Optimist, too, is a singular character in the drama, insofar as he is not portrayed satirically, but rather in such a way that his arguments appear, at times, to be consistent in and of themselves, until the Nörgler interrupts (which is frequent) and carries out these arguments to their logical extreme. In this way, the Nörgler's monologues-qua-dialogues serve as the platform for his dialectics, as he parries each and every defense of the war, ventriloquized through the Optimist, by making *explicit* what they amount to only *implicitly*. The Optimist's disbelief, refusal, or sheer ignorance hints at the incommensurability of ostensibly

²²⁵ See Djassemey, *Die verfolgende Unschuld*, 119.

²²⁶ In a precise description of the role of the Optimist, Hindemith further writes: "[Der Optimist] ist die künstlichste Figur des Dramas, gleichsam die Verkörperung einer Methode, er hört den Nörgler als einziger noch, er hört ihm zu, allerdings ohne ihn jemals so genau zu verstehen, dass er zu denken, zu sprechen und zu sehen vermöchte, wie jener. Der Optimist ist die schlechte, mißlungene Vermittlung des Gegensatz von Phrase und Wort. . . . Kaum satirisch verzeichnet, stellt er den gesunden Menschenverstand dar, den es nicht geben kann, und der gerade deshalb mit borniertem Ernst ausgestattet und stur sein will, was nicht sein kann: Versöhnung, Mitte der Vernunft. Der Optimist hat sein Vorbild in der 'Mittler'-Gestalt der Goetheschen Wahlverwandschaften." See Hindemith, 59-60.

²²⁷ Emphasis added.

“healthy common sense” with an understanding of the true motives informing the war’s perpetuation. And thus as the drama progresses, or retrogresses into apocalyptic chaos, the Optimist’s misunderstandings only increase: “Ich verstehe Sie wieder einmal nicht” (409), he helplessly claims, indexing not only his cluelessness, but also the Nörgler’s slow and steady fall into the madness of war. This is how to interpret the earlier claim that the Nörgler is the only character in the drama to undergo a “development.”

On the most general level, the Nörgler’s position is one of total and totalizing *opposition*; plunging into the deepest stratum of the war’s substance, he experiences, to his horror, its absolute nothingness: “Lassen Sie mich diesen Gedankengang bis zum Galgen der Menschheit nicht weiter gehen—und dennoch muß ich, denn ich bin ihr sterbender Spion, und mein herzbeklemmendes Erlebnis ist der horror vor jenem vacuum, das diese beispiellose Ereignisfülle in den Gemütern, in den Apparaten vorfindet!” (210). This refusal to complete a thought “and yet” being compelled to do so is one the Nörgler’s quintessential gestures, his way of both resigning to the vanity of his efforts and yet feeling obliged to show how every possible legitimate motivation or reason for the war’s existence culminates in the same, all-encompassing “Leere, in die wir alle gestürzt sind und die uns verschlungen hat” (412). One of the war’s greatest crimes, he determines, it is that it has become itself a force, in dialectical terms, of abstract negation, reducing all individual “qualities” to nothing more than what he calls “quantities”:

DER OPTIMIST. Die Schmutzige Begleitung großer Dinge ist eine unvermeidliche Begleiterscheinung. Es ist ja möglich, daß sich die Welt nicht in der Nacht auf den I. August 1914 geändert hat. Auch scheint mir Phantasie wirklich nicht zu jenen menschlichen Eigenschaften zu gehören, die im Krieg Betätigung finden. Aber wenn ich Sie recht verstehe, wollen Sie überhaupt leugnen, daß ein moderner Krieg den menschlichen Qualitäten Spielraum lasse.

DER NÖRGLER. Sie haben mich recht verstanden; er läßt ihnen schon deshalb keinen Spielraum, weil die Tatsache des modernen Krieges von der Negation menschlicher Qualitäten lebt. Es gibt keine.

DER OPTIMIST. Was gibt es denn?

DER NÖRGLER. Es gibt Quantitäten, die sich gegenseitig gleichmäßig vermindern, indem sie zu beweisen suchen, daß sie es mit den in maschinelle Energien umgesetzten Quantitäten nicht aufnehmen können; daß Mörser auch mit Massen fertig werden. (210)

Human beings, machines, weapons, or animals—all have been negated in their singularity and reduced to mere fodder for the war effort, rendered indistinguishable from the perspective of the war, which, for the Nörgler, is the only true enemy worth speaking about. The Nörgler's point, furthermore, is that in modern warfare there are no "epiphenomena" but only various iterations or *repetitions* of the war itself, and thus that each ostensible byproduct of the war belongs, rather, to its very substance, each is a slight variation of the same, unifying "österreichischen Antlitzes" (412): "[Dieser Krieg] hat sich nicht an der Oberfläche des Lebens abgespielt, sondern im Leben selbst gewütet. Die Front ist ins Hinterland hineingewachsen. Sie wird dort bleiben" (659).

Thus rather than speaking of cause and effect, the Nörgler can only invoke conditions of possibility, such as the role of human fantasy—or the lack thereof—in the production of war: "die Phantasie der Neuzeit ist hinter den technischen Errungenschaften der Menschheit zurückgeblieben" (208). In passages such as this one, it appears that the Nörgler is defending a bourgeois humanism that he knows has no more purchase in the world but nonetheless must be expressed, even if such expression is to be the last. He is careful, however, not to blame technology itself for the destruction it wields, but only the technology that is not buffered by human fantasy or imagination, which have been irrevocably crippled by modern phraseology. True fantasy would have the foresight to envision the consequences of technology's vast capabilities. Under the current circumstances, the Nörgler continues,

[s]o sehr ist das Mittel Selbstzweck geworden, daß wir im Frieden nur noch militärisch denken und der Kampf nur noch ein Mittel ist, um zu neuen Waffen zu gelangen. Ein Krieg zur höheren Ehre der Rüstungsindustrie. Wir wollen nicht nur mehr Export und darum mehr Kanonen, wir wollen auch mehr Kanonen um ihrer selbst willen: und darum müssen sie losgehen. Unser Leben und Denken ist unter das Interesse des Schwerindustriellen gestellt; das ist eine schwere Last. Wir leben unter der Kanone. Und da sich jener mit Gott verbündet hat, so sind wir verloren. Das ist der Zustand. (216)

Updated for the times, the Nörgler reveals his partial indebtedness to the more traditional satirist within him, as he inveighs against a “verkehrte Welt.” This is a world that has gone mad with tautology, one that confuses and conflates means and ends, and has, in the process, lost complete understanding of both. He concludes that the war is self-perpetuating, that the actors and the acted upon are hardly distinguishable “unter der Kanone,” an image that is representative of the war’s quite literal inhumanity.²²⁸

Amidst the chaos, and in defense of abstract notions such as “Phantasie,” “Geist” and “Menschlichkeit,” the question of *guilt* emerges as the most difficult to address, both for the Nörgler and for his interpreters. Again, this is a discourse that occupies the Nörgler from the very beginning up until his last words: what is the nature of this guilt? And to whom is it to be ascribed when, as he states, “*wir* in einer Welt zu atmen ertragen haben, welche Kriege führt, für die sie niemanden verantwortlich machen kann” (413).²²⁹ This articulated sigh, however, does not prevent the Nörgler from addressing this discourse. And thus toward the very end of the first act, he offers a key insight into why his drama can still be classified as a tragedy. The following is what he (paradoxically) claims to “keep silent” (“was ich schweige”):

Daß dieser Krieg von heute nichts ist als ein Ausbruch des Friedens, und daß er nicht durch Frieden zu beenden wäre, sondern durch den Krieg des Kosmos gegen diesen hundstollen Planeten! Daß Menschenopfer unerhört fallen mußten nicht beklagenswert weil sie ein fremder Wille zur Schlachtbank trieb, sondern tragisch, weil sie ein unbekannter Schuld zu büßen hatten. (224)

This war is *their* tragedy, the Nörgler insists, precisely because they are not aware of their own guilt and thus become sacrifices without ever confessing to it. He thus claims that this war,

²²⁸ One of the few exceptions to the “quantities” the Nörgler believes are both the cause and the result of the war effort are the beasts of burden that, too, had to be sacrificed for the cause. In a rather vivid description of the suffering that the horses have been forced to bear in the line of duty, he states: “Und ihre Blutzugenschaft wird die Schinder und Schänder der Kreatur lauter anklagen als das Martertum der Menschen; denn sie waren stumm. Das wunde Pferd, auf dessen Rücken die Form der Geschützlast eingezeichnet war, die Last des Menschentods, ist ein Traumbild, an dessen Schrecknis jene sterben werden, die sich auf Lorbeern schlafen gelegt haben.” (619)

²²⁹ Emphasis added.

unlike those that preceded it, will not end through a peace treaty but only through the total destruction of the world that has given rise to it.

At other junctures, however, the Nörgler differentiates slightly and is more explicit about going after the Central Powers—since it is, as he reminds us (and Benjamin confirms), the task of the satirist to dirty his own nest, not out of allegiance to a particular identity, but because of the sheer intimacy with such identity that self-criticism presupposes.²³⁰ In a conversation with the Optimist about the irresponsibility of the *Staatsmänner* and the *Staatsoberhäupter*, and more specifically about the misdeeds of Count Leopold Berchtold, the Imperial Foreign Minister during the war, the Nörgler ironically and bitterly interjects, re-appropriating the Optimist's previous words:

Sie waren alle nicht bei vollem Bewußtsein. Österreich kann nichts dafür! Es hat sich bloß von Deutschland Mut machen lassen, dieses in den Krieg zu zerren. Und Deutschland hat Österreich in jenen Krieg getrieben, den es nicht gewollt hat. Die dort sind die verfolgende Unschuld und mir san eh die reinen Lamperln. Beide können nichts dafür. (409)

Turning Austria's claim to innocence against itself and rendering Germany's aggression as guilty as it could possibly be, the Nörgler undermines both parties. "Beide können nichts dafür," and this is precisely the problem: there is no one (within this national constellation) to blame, because everyone is to blame, which amounts to the same thing. This is perhaps why the Nörgler's final word on the subject is that while guilt may still exist, the guilty have all but disappeared:

Gibt es Schuldige? Nein, sonst gäbe es Rächer, sonst hätte der Held Menschheit sich gegen den Fluch gewehrt, der Knecht seiner Mittel zu sein und der Märtyrer seiner Notwendigkeit. Und zehrt das Lebensmittel vom Lebenszweck, so verlangt es den Dienst am Todesmittel, um noch die Überlebenden zu vergiften. Gäbe es Schuldige, die Menschheit hätte sich gegen den Zwang gewehrt, Held zu sein zu solchem Zwecke! (671).

²³⁰ When the Optimist accuses the Nörgler of only criticizing Germany and Austria, the Nörgler gladly accepts and explains: "Diese schmutzige Welt behauptet von dem, der ihr den Schmutz wegräumt, er hätte ihr in gebracht. Mein Patriotismus—eben ein anderer als der der Patrioten—vertrüge es nicht, einem fremdlichen Satiriker die Arbeit zu überlassen. Das hat meine Haltung während des Krieges bestimmt" (508).

It is this constitutive difficulty in ascribing guilt to actors and agents that places the legitimacy of the Nörgler's function within the drama into question. But even he, or rather, especially he is most aware of this predicament, illustrated by a brief exchange that could serve as the insignia of one of the drama's core problems:

DER OPTIMIST (*will eine Zigarette anzünden*). Sonderbar, kein Zündholz fängt.

DER NÖRGLER. Das kommt vom Ultimatum an Serbien.

DER ÖPTIMIST. Ich sage, kein Zündholz fängt!

DER NÖRGLER. Ich sage, weil es gelungen ist, die Welt in Brand zu stecken! (658-659).

For the Nörgler, the image is hardly a metaphor: How does one light a match (let alone an entire "torch") when the whole world has been set ablaze? This is the fundamental question with which the Nörgler struggles throughout his "development." As he edges closer toward insanity, it becomes clear that he has assumed the guilt of the war, that he sees himself as merely another "noise" both produced by it and implicated in its production, despite his ability to decipher its plots and machinations and derive a position of reason or moral clarity, which, for the Nörgler, are effectively interchangeable terms. He thus boldly (and rather cryptically) proclaims:

Ich habe nichts getan, als diese tödliche Quantität verkürzt, die sich in ihrer Unermeßlichkeit auf den Unbestand von Zeit und Zeitung beriefe. All Ihr Blut war doch nur Tinte—nun wird mit Blut geschrieben sein! Dieses ist der Weltkrieg. Dies ist mein Manifest. Ich habe alles reiflich erwogen. Ich habe die Tragödie, die in Szenen der zerfallenden Menschheit zerfällt, auf mich genommen, damit sie der Geist höre, der sich der Opfer erbarmt, und hätte er selbst für alle Zukunft der Verbindung mit einem Menschenohr entsagt. Er empfangen den Grundton dieser Zeit, das Echo meines blutigen Wahnsinns, *durch den ich mitschuldig bin an diesen Geräuschen*. Er lasse es als Erlösung gelten!"²³¹ (681).

Despite the apocalyptic undertone, the Nörgler is still quoting Franz Josef's notorious proclamation, "Ich habe alles reiflich erwogen," which inaugurated the war, and which makes repeated appearances throughout the drama.²³² Perhaps it is this repetition that first contributes to the Nörgler's sense of guilt: that he can do nothing but quote the language of war makes him

²³¹ Emphasis added. This is precisely the passage that Benjamin quotes in his essay when he discusses the guilt of the satirist.

²³² Kraus quotes this phrase throughout his wartime writings in *Die Fackel*. Edward Timms has, however, shown that Kraus (and the Nörgler) had actually been repeatedly misquoting the original line from the Proclamation, which was "Ich habe alles geprüft und erwogen." For more, see Timms, *Karl Kraus, Apocalyptic Satirist: Culture and Catastrophe in Habsburg Vienna* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 344.

suspicious in his own eyes. The stylistic repetition of the “Z”-sound (“in Szenen der zerfallenden Menschheit zerfällt) betrays continuity with other playwrights from the past, namely Büchner, and thus evinces another form of repetition.²³³ Forming an alliance with the “spirit” watching from the temporal beyond, the Nörgler’s own tragedy, to recall, is his position at the drama’s margins, who, in his inability to purely speculate (or, like the journalist, “describe” the events that transpire), is consumed by his own satirical method, becoming the drama’s last “sacrifice.” This is why the “keynote” of the era, which unites all of the minor notes—revealing, in true dialectical fashion, that these other notes are only *quantitatively* distinct from one another—is the echo of *his* “bloodstained madness,” and not vice versa. That is: it is not the war itself, but the Nörgler’s repetition of the war, which he sees as the war, that he bequeaths to posterity.²³⁴

If, then, there is a difference to be made between the Nörgler and the other characters in the drama, it is that he is the only figure explicitly conscious of his guilt, whereas they are not, which is what, as the Nörgler has claimed, constitutes *their* tragedy. But this distinction severely complicates the status of the Nörgler. He cannot be classified as a tragic character in the classical sense, since he is ultimately aware of his guilt. His development, rather, testifies to the dialectical tension that arises between his role as an ironic commentator on the drama’s events, who attempts to gain perspective over them, and his role as an immanent “character” that essentially

²³³ Commentators have pointed out that more than just stylistic devices connect Kraus to Büchner. Krolop, for example, writes that Büchner serves as a “Kronzeugen für ein Zentralmotiv des Kriegswerks der Fackel und der LTdM – die Ideologiekritik an der heroischen Phrase als der Manipulation mißbrauchter Sprache zu verlogener ornamentierender Umstilisierung der entsetzlichen Realität mißbrauchten Lebens und anonymen Massensterbens,” who “vermittelt wertvolle Aufschlüsse über Tendenz und Struktur des Weltkriegsdramas.” See Krolop, 125.

²³⁴ Calasso and Leo Lensing have made similar claims. Calasso writes that “Kraus does not want to remove himself from guilt; he is not seeking a paradise of origins nor one of postrevolution, and his inflexible immobility has a strength that criticism leaves intact.” I argue that Kraus seeks something beyond the admission of his complicity. See Calasso, 224. And Lensing has argued, “[b]y equating this ‘fundamental sound of the times’ with the ‘echo of his bloody insanity,’ he points to his own inescapable complicity in the war. Kraus’s monstrous drama remains as ambiguous as it is bold and scathing.” Lensing’s translation of “Grundton” as “fundamental note” is, however, too literal. See Lensing, “War and the Press,” in *A New History of German Literature*, eds. David Wellberry and Judith Ryan (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), 717.

suffers the same fate as the rest of the characters, and is, in the end, driven into oblivion.²³⁵ As the static commentator, his perspective is that of the *Fackel*-Kraus, but as the character, he is best understood as the *repetition* of Kraus. Another way to understand this dynamic would be to invoke Manfred Fuhrmann's distinction between the "Hofnarr," who criticizes courtly life from within, and the "gewöhnliche Satiriker," who must attack from without, as it were. Using Diderot's *Rameau's Nephew* as his example, he argues: "Diderots Dialog bezieht, soweit er Satire ist . . . ein gut Teil seiner Vehemenz aus der Tatsache, daß er nicht nur den 'Monarchen' und seinen 'Hof,' sondern auch den 'Hofnarren' als korrupt hinstellt."²³⁶ In the case at hand, however, the crucial distinction is between the two functions of the Nörgler within the same text.

This split, indeed, forces the Nörgler to exhaust every possible position vis-à-vis the war, including his own. In so doing, he has moved from determinate to abstract negation, and thus through him, all distinctions between satirist, audience and object of ridicule begin to collapse. In this sense, he has successfully imitated the formal gesture of the war: abstract negation. It is thus no coincidence that the Nörgler delivers his final monologue in the absence of his erstwhile interlocutor, since their dialogues, in truth, have always served as veneers for his monologues. Indeed, the Nörgler *cannot* have an audience, he cannot anticipate nor demand applause or laughter (like a more conventional satirist), and he cannot be interrupted; this is the precondition of his existence. "Ach, weil dieses Drama keinen anderen Helden hat als die Menschheit," he claims, "so hat es auch keinen Hörer!" (671), pointing to the necessary entanglement between his historical *Mitwelt* and his real or imagined audience. Engulfed by the war, the Nörgler has effectively renounced the totality of his historical moment; even the Optimist makes this explicit, earlier accusing his partner of "demolishing everything," the substantial along with the

²³⁵ The Nörgler could even be considered a comic character, comic, however, only to the reader, not to himself.

²³⁶ See Fuhrmann, "Narr und Satire," in *Das Komische* (Munich: Fink, 1976), 428.

insubstantial.²³⁷ In this regard, the Nörgler would appear to closely resemble what Søren Kierkegaard a century earlier had called the “pure ironist.”²³⁸ To explain, I turn briefly to the philosopher’s description of such a figure, which he provocatively compares to the “prophet” in his 1841 dissertation:

For the ironic subject, the given actuality has lost its validity entirely; it has become for him an imperfect form that is a hindrance everywhere. But on the other hand, he does not possess the new The prophet, as was noted above, has is lost to his generation, but essentially that is the case only because he is preoccupied with his visions. The ironist, however, has stepped out of line with his age, has turned around and faced it The ironist is also a sacrifice that the world process demands, not as if the ironist always needed in the strictest sense to fall as a sacrifice, but his fervor in the service of world spirit consumes him.²³⁹

Indeed, the Nörgler shares qualities with both the Kierkegaardian prophet and ironist vis-à-vis their total rejection of the “gegebene[n] Wirklichkeit,” especially when considering the pathos informing the Nörgler’s zealotry and his self-proclaimed role as a sacrifice to the spirit of his time (as well as its victim).

Yet the one category conspicuously absent from Kierkegaard’s description is that of *witness* for the future, and this, I would finally argue, is precisely what distinguishes the Nörgler from the pure ironist, who negates absolutely and endlessly. If the war itself is pure negativity, the Nörgler’s *difference* is that he negates as if by necessity to preserve the language of war for a future generation wholly distinct from his own, for a true posterity. Kraus is actually the first to hint at the quasi-utopian underside of his otherwise thoroughly apocalyptic vision, when he pleads in his opening monologue, prior to the drama’s prologue: “Und es mag zu befürchten

²³⁷ Frustrated, the Optimist asserts: “Ich sehe, Sie bleiben Ihrer Gewohnheit, *alles niederzureißen*, selbst vor den heroischen Vorbildern unserer kriegerischen Epoche treu” (408). Emphasis added.

²³⁸ This is also essentially what Canetti, and to an extent, Benjamin, accuses Kraus of being. Conceptually distinguishing irony from satire, however, is no easy task, as even the most sophisticated thinkers have conflated the two terms. In a post-WWII gloss entitled “Juvenals Irrtum,” Adorno, for example, uses the terms irony and satire interchangeably, rejecting both figures/dispositions as inadequate and meaningless after the Holocaust. He writes: “Kein Spalt im Fels des Bestehenden, an dem der Griff des Ironikers sich zu halten vermöchte.” See Adorno, *Schriften 4: Minima Moralia* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2003), 237-239.

²³⁹ Kierkegaard, *On the Concept of Irony*, ed. and trans. Howard and Edna Kong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 265-266.

sein, daß noch eine Zukunft, die den Lenden einer so wüsten Gegenwart entsprossen ist, trotz größerer Distanz der größeren Kraft des Begreifens entbehre. Dennoch muß ein so restloses Schuldbekenntnis, dieser Menschheit anzugehören, irgendwo willkommen und irgendeinmal vom Nutzen sein” (10). Again, there is that hopeful “dennoch” inserted amidst an overwhelming cloud of cynicism regarding the possibility that some “use” may one day emerge from this thoroughly stained moment in human history. It is, indeed, this curious admixture of hope and cynicism that carries over into the Nörgler’s own monologues, evidenced even in his final words when he makes his pledge to posterity:

Warum wurde mir nicht die Gedankenkraft, die geschändete Menschheit zu einem Aufschrei zu zwingen? Warum ist mein Gegenruf nicht stärker als dieses blecherne Kommando, das Macht hatte über die Seelen eines Erdenrunds? Ich bewahre Dokumente für eine Zeit, die sie nicht mehr fassen wird oder so weit vom Heute lebt, daß sie sagen wird, ich sei ein Fälscher gewesen. Doch nein, die Zeit wird nicht kommen, das zu sagen. Denn sie wird nicht sein. (671)

Filled with regret over his impotence in the face of such an overwhelming power, the Nörgler still allows for the possibility that *in time*, his satire will be deemed a forgery by an audience that fails to comprehend its contents—this is the Nörgler qua “gekränkter Idealist,” who is speaking both to and for a posterity qualitatively beyond his own era.²⁴⁰ This imagined temporal beyond, I suggest, is what conditions and anchors the Nörgler’s position; it is the only possible *Gegenbild* to which he can allude, and what it looks like necessarily remains unspoken.²⁴¹ And yet here, the “doch nein,” reminiscent of the “dennoch” from earlier, serves the opposite function: namely, to place this vision in check, to deny the possibility that such a moment and its corresponding audience could ever arise.

²⁴⁰ Kurt Tucholsky writes that the satirist “ist ein gekränkter Idealist: er will die Welt gut haben, sie ist schlecht, und nun rennt er gegen das Schlechte an.” See Tucholsky, “Was darf die Satire,” in *Gesammelte Werke 2: 1919-1920* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1985), 43.

²⁴¹ Here I refer to Wolfgang Preisendanz, who argues, regarding the satirical, “daß sich die Potentialität des non-a nicht auf eine definitive Gegenbildlichkeit festlegen läßt.” The Nörgler’s *Nachwelt* is clearly an example of the indefinite. See Preisendanz, “Negativität und Positivität im Satirischen,” in *Das Komische*, 414.

The Nörgler's greatest fear, then, is that the war and everything it consists of will never come to an end, that his *Mitwelt*, in other words, will never become a *Nachwelt*. He expresses as much earlier on in the drama:

DER OPTIMIST. Aber wenn einmal der Friede kommt—

DER NÖRGLER. —so wird der Krieg beginnen!

DER OPTIMIST. Jeder Krieg wurde doch noch durch einen Frieden beendet.

DER NÖRGLER. Dieser nicht. . . . Die Welt geht unter, und man wird es nicht wissen. Alles was gestern war, wird man vergessen haben; was heute ist, nicht sehen; was morgen kommt, nicht fürchten. Man wird vergessen haben, daß man den Krieg verloren, vergessen haben, daß man ihn begonnen, vergessen, daß man ihn geführt hat. Darum wird er nicht aufhören.²⁴² (659)

Through the repetition of the word “vergessen,” this exchange invokes the earlier scene between the general and the journalist regarding the Przemysl fortress; here, however, the Nörgler implies that the true significance of the war had decidedly not been experienced while it was occurring, and therefore must be repeated through his tragedy if it is to be experienced for the *first* time.²⁴³ But the other implication is just as crucial: if the war never ends, neither does the satire.²⁴⁴ The Nörgler's paradox is that he longs for a true posterity, which, however, is the exclusive domain of an audience for whom his satire would be unintelligible, since merely to recognize it means to be somehow implicated in it. But in order to become this posterity, such an audience is also being warned not to forget the event being satirized, lest it continue without end, as the Nörgler suggests above. This remains a productive, if unresolved tension in the Nörgler's character, since it makes explicit one of the central questions the drama poses to its interpreters, a question equally suited for the critic and the historian (or rather, the historiographer): at what point does the *Mitwelt* become the *Nachwelt*, both within the text proper and in terms of temporality more broadly conceived? The Nörgler, standing at the threshold of these two worlds, believes he is

²⁴² Calasso echoes the Nörgler's prescience by writing: “before Nazism existed, even only as a name, Kraus wrote the most precise description of Nazism to appear in the German language.” See Calasso, 106.

²⁴³ Accordingly, Canetti concludes that “[d]er Weltkrieg ist vollständig, ohne Trost und Schonung, ohne Verschönerung, Verringerung, und vor allem . . . ohne Gewöhnung in die ‘*Letzten Tage der Menschheit*’ eingegangen.” See Canetti, 339.

²⁴⁴ In 1929 Kraus gave a speech entitled “Im dreißigsten Kriegsjahr,” which most likely alluded to/commemorated three events: the thirtieth anniversary of *Die Fackel*, the war that Kraus had been waging during the journal's entire span of existence, and the Thirty Years War. See F 800, 1, 1929.

writing a text that will never end—that nothing lies outside of the text—while he nonetheless hopes to be proven wrong.

Toward the end of the fourth act, the Nörgler and the Optimist discuss an infamous postcard that displays a photo of the hanged Italian politician, Cesare Battisti, and next to him, his gleeful executioners (the photo also serves as the frontispiece to the drama). “Denn es wurde nicht nur gehängt,” the Nörgler states,

es wurde auch gestellt; und photographiert wurden nicht bloß die Hinrichtungen, sondern auch die Betrachter, ja sogar noch die Photographen. Und der besondere Effekt unserer Scheußlichkeit ist nun, daß jene feindliche Propaganda, die statt zu lügen einfach unsere Wahrheiten reproduziert hat, unsere Taten gar nicht erst photographieren mußte, weil sie zu ihrer Überraschung unsere eigenen Photographien von unsern Taten schon am Tatorte vorgefunden hat, also uns “als Ganze”, all in unserer Ahnungslosigkeit—die wir nicht spürten, daß kein Verbrechen uns so vor der Umwelt entblößen könnte wie unser triumphierendes Geständnis, wie der Stolz des Verbrechers, der sich dabei noch “aufnehmen” läßt und ein feindliches Gesicht macht, weil er ja eine Mordsfreud hat, sich selbst auf frischer Tat erwischen zu können. Denn nicht daß er getötet, auch nicht daß er’s photographiert hat, sondern daß er sich mitphotographiert hat; und daß er sich photographierend mitphotographiert hat—das macht seinen Typus zum unvergänglichen Lichtbild unserer Kultur. Als ob, was wir getan haben, nicht für sich selbst sprechen würde!²⁴⁵ (510).

For the Nörgler, this photograph provides an image of the concentric circles of ideology fueling the war. At the center stands the deed of execution, which he finds reprehensible enough. But even worse are the grinning perpetrators who surround the victim; worse than that is their pose for the camera; and worse than that are the photograph and the photographer that capture the entire scene—and then there is the Nörgler holding the photograph, who can do nothing more than grumble about its contents. To add one final repetition, the image reappears as one of the last “Erscheinungen” prior to the drama’s convulsive epilogue, “Die letzte Nacht.”²⁴⁶ These truths, the Nörgler concludes, are the real lies, which speak louder than any more conventional

²⁴⁵ Commenting on this scene, Djasemy writes: “Battistis Henker wird auf diese Weise zum Prototyp der begriffslosen, tautologischen und durch keinerlei Gewissenskrupel beeinträchtigten Selbststilisierung der ‘Bodenständigen’. Man präpariert sich selbst als Objekt und behandelt auch die anderen als Objekte . . .” See *Die verfolgende Unschuld*, 165.

²⁴⁶ The crucial stage direction reads, “Ins Fiebrige verzerrte Heurigenmusik setzt ein. Die Hinrichtung Battistis. Lachende Soldaten umstehen den Leichnam, Neugierige recken die Häle. Die Hände über dem Haupt des Toten der fidele Scharfrichter,” followed by the appearance of “das Österreichische Antlitz” (723).

lies that could be told by the enemy nations, a recurring motif in his monologues throughout the drama.

But it is also useful to imagine this “immortal” photograph as having taken up the role of the satirist himself, in that it preserves an image for posterity of what really happened; its existence alone pledges, at the very least, not to allow this nadir in human history to be stricken from the record books.²⁴⁷ The inability to intervene, or provide a corrective to the madness is compensated by the vanishing but nonetheless residual plea that the photograph will be seen by a future generation. But the photograph also speaks to the paradox just elaborated, in that the true posterity that the Nörgler anticipates would be one for which this photograph, too, had become unintelligible, and which would understand neither the crime portrayed nor the satire because the conditions that perpetually demand to be satirized would have all but disappeared. For the Nörgler, posterity can only emerge once “the whole apparatus of repetition as a ‘terrible power’” has been brought to an end, once the moment being critiqued can be viewed as a singular moment, wholly severed off from the moment that succeeds it.²⁴⁸ In this way, the Nörgler’s absolute satire offers a critique in whose clutches nobody is absolved. It functions by negating the whole that is the present—“denn in Analogie zu Adornos Wort gibt es kein richtiges Sprechen im falschen”—if only to show how this whole is, indeed, a false one, that it speaks one and the same language and must be repeated as such.²⁴⁹

At the end of *Nestroy und die Nachwelt*, Kraus proclaims:

Überall läßt sich irdisch lachen. Solchem Gelächter aber antwortet die Satire. Denn sie ist die Kunst, die vor allen anderen Künsten sich überlebt, aber auch die tote Zeit. Je härter der Stoff, desto größer der Angriff. Je verzweifelter der Kampf, desto stärker die Kunst. Der satirische Künstler steht am Ende einer

²⁴⁷ This resonates with what Roland Barthes says about the photograph, whose effect “besteht nicht in der Wiederherstellung des (durch Zeit, durch Entfernung) Aufgehobenen, sondern in der Beglaubigung, daß das, was ich sehe, tatsächlich dagewesen ist.” See Barthes, *Die helle Kammer: Bemerkungen zur Photographie*, trans. Dietrich Leube (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1989), 92.

²⁴⁸ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 10.

²⁴⁹ Arntzen, *Sprachspiel und Bedeutung*, 435.

Entwicklung, die sich der Kunst versagt. Er ist ihr Produkt und ihr hoffnungsloses Gegenteil. Er organisiert die Flucht des Geistes vor der Menschheit, er ist die Rückwärtskonzentrierung. Nach ihm die Sintflut. (F 349, 23)

Earthly laughter is the cynical laughter of false satirists, for whom laughter is the end goal of their work. Thus with this declaration, Kraus partially anticipates the substance of the drama he began to compose three years later, comprised as it was of an apocalyptic deluge of sounds and voices, which together constitute the “dead time” mentioned above. He describes satire as that art which outlives other artforms precisely because it is “their product and their hopeless opposition.” This notion corroborates what I wrote about Kraus’s theory of satire earlier, which is that it aims to write its object of ridicule to its end by depicting it as a bygone, determinate historical moment (“die Rückwärtskonzentrierung”), in contrast to the false satire that is, rather, consumed by the *Stoff* it aims to negate and thus appears dated the moment it is conceived. But in terms of the structure of absolute satire, *Die letzten Tage* moves beyond what is conceived of in *Nestroy*, insofar as it precludes even the possibility that the satirist can take a stand external to, or at the end of the temporal “development” that it envisions; indeed, the end of such a development is precisely what the Nörgler places into question, since the war, for him, never really ends. Kraus’s absolute satire has allegiance neither to a pre-existing audience nor to a pre-determined position of any sort that would claim to be untouched by its critique. It does not, however, negate for the sake of negation alone—as Canetti had intimated earlier—but is, rather, conditioned and driven by the quasi-utopian moment that has yet to come, in other words, by a posterity that would render absolute satire obsolete. This does not mean, however, that it is not riddled with contradiction.

CHAPTER 3

Worte im Stande der Unschuld: Elias Canetti's Komödie der Eitelkeit

Ich hätte die Macht nie wirklich kennen gelernt, wenn ich sie nicht ausgeübt und nicht selber das Opfer dieser eigenen Übung geworden wäre. So ist mir die Macht nun dreifach vertraut: ich habe sie beobachtet, ich habe sie ausgeübt, ich habe sie erlitten.²⁵⁰

I. Passing the Torch: The Satire of Self-Denunciation

Like wax figurines, the characters in Elias Canetti's *Komödie der Eitelkeit* (1934) sit in front of their mirrors at the beginning of the drama's third act, each a stranger to the next, all ashamed to be there yet starving for those brief few minutes in which they will—illegally—stare at their reflection without interruption: "Vor jedem Spiegel sitzt regungslos ein Mensch, die Arme hart in die Hüften gestemmt, die Ellbogen spitz und gehässig gegen die Nachbarn gekehrt. Niemand spricht. Niemand atmet. Die Luft ist wie aus Glas... Jeder wäre über seinen Nachbarn zu Tode erschrocken, doch Ellbogen sind blind und die Augenblicke teuer bezahlt."²⁵¹ The world of this drama is a dystopic one, infused with power, corrupted and corrupting at once. But it is also a laughable world, which we know from the opening scene, when one of the main characters steps forward on stage to remind the audience that it ought to laugh, and indeed, "das lachen ist nicht verboten" (73). Critics have often addressed the resonances between Canetti's satirical work and the more anthropological/ philosophical speculations to be found in his colossal study of crowd behavior, *Masse und Macht* (1960). Significantly less attention, however, has been paid to the ways in which Canetti's work engages the very problem of satire itself, and even less to this discourse when transposed onto his dramatic oeuvre. Canetti, like Kraus, is deeply concerned with the limits and possibility of cultural critique in modernity.

²⁵⁰ Elias Canetti, *Die Provinz des Menschen* (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1973), 112.

²⁵¹ Canetti, *Dramen* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 2007), 165.

The relationship between these two figures is, however, complicated. Beginning in 1924, Canetti regularly attended Kraus's public readings in Vienna, paying careful attention to every detail of the satirist's one-man performances: "Während neun Jahren habe ich jedes gesprochene und geschriebene Wort von ihm auf mich einwirken lassen, in fünf davon ohne Widerstand, in vier mit wachsender Kritik."²⁵² *Die Fackel* and these public readings certainly left their impact, but it was an event that occurred outside of this space that perhaps best illuminates the way Canetti interpreted Kraus's singularity: the burning of the Palace of Justice in Vienna on July 15, 1927, which took place at the height of Canetti's uncritical obeisance. Not only did this event serve as Canetti's first authentic experience of the "crowd"; its aftermath, the violent death of ninety individuals at the behest of the Viennese Police Chief Johann Schober, met in Kraus a formidable opponent. Canetti recalls: "In den Tagen und Wochen tiefster Niedergeschlagenheit unmittelbar danach," Canetti writes, "gab es noch *einen* legitimen Zusammenhang mit Literatur, und das war Karl Kraus."²⁵³ Having hung up posters all over the city, Kraus publicly demanded that Schober "step down" from his position, confirming for Canetti that Kraus was the only figure that had consistently and adequately responded to the violence engulfing Vienna and Europe at large.²⁵⁴

This gesture was, for Canetti, typically Krausian in the way that it established a position of absolute authority without having to rely on pre-established ideology; it was pure opposition. Against the more Marxist-inflected practice of literary "engagement," Canetti was to later write: "Da ist das kümmerliche Wort vom 'Engagement' Es klingt, als ob man in einem Angestellten-Verhältnis zu den wichtigsten Dingen stehen sollte. Die wahre Verantwortlichkeit

²⁵² Canetti, *Das Gewissen der Worte*, 340-341.

²⁵³ Canetti, *Die Fackel im Ohr: Lebensgeschichte 1921-1931* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 2005), 231.

²⁵⁴ Kraus also printed his demand, "Ich fordere Sie auf, abzutreten," in *Die Fackel*. See F 766, 46, 1927.

ist um hundert Grad schwerer, denn sie ist souverän und bestimmt sich selbst.”²⁵⁵ For Canetti, literature’s “true responsibility,” represented, for a time, by Kraus, is to be self-determining and case-specific, not ideologically bound and/or subservient to a fixed cause or party.²⁵⁶ Like Kraus, Canetti therefore avoided political allegiances for most of his life; but unlike his erstwhile master—the one who taught him to “open up his ear” to the relationship between language and *Gesinnung*²⁵⁷—Canetti was much more explicit in theorizing his primary object of critique: the phenomenon, structure and exercise of power (*Macht*).²⁵⁸

One could speculate that this development in Canetti’s thought, too, was a product of Kraus’s influence, which partially explains why the relationship between these two writers becomes less a matter for literary history and more an object of literary criticism when one begins to analyze why Canetti ultimately turned away from Kraus’s satirical persona. Gradually, Canetti began to see that the Krausian “law,” his “wall of judgment,” was fallible. He writes: “Ich glaube, es war ein Unbehagen über die Natur dieser Mauer und der trostlose Anblick der Wüste zu beiden Seite, was mich allmählich gegen Kraus aufbrachte.”²⁵⁹ It was not disagreements or disputes with Kraus’s individual judgments with which Canetti took issue, but

²⁵⁵ Canetti, *Gewissen der Worte*, 136.

²⁵⁶ The word “Engagement” could be a slightly veiled reference to Brecht, from whom Canetti always wished to distinguish himself. When asked about the parallels between Brechtian “Verfremdungstechniken” and Canetti’s own methods, the latter responded: “Sehen Sie, es geht ja Brecht sehr um eine Kluft zwischen dem Zuhörer und dem, was dargestellt ist. Gerade daran glaube ich nicht. Meine Auffassung des Dramas ist da der Brecht’schen entgegengesetzt. Ich will diese Kluft nicht, ich will Erschütterung, ich will Grauen, eine offen anerkannte Teilnahme, wie sie im antiken Drama schon da war. Was Brecht theoretische verfochten hat, ist zwar nützlich für gewisse Dinge, die er erzielen will. Ich bin mir aber nicht einmal sicher, ob seine Dramen dort gut sind, wo er das anwendet.” See “Gespräch mit Manfred Durzak,” in *Elias Canetti: Aufsätze, Reden, Gespräche* (Munich: Hanser, 2005), 304.

²⁵⁷ On Kraus’s “schooling,” Canetti writes: “Viel wichtiger war, daß man gleichzeitig das Hören erlernte. Alles, was gesprochen wurde, überall, jederzeit, von wem immer, bot sich zum Hören an, eine Dimension der Welt, von der man bis dahin nichts geahnt hatte, und da es um die Verbindung von Sprache und Menschen ging, in all ihren Varianten, war es vielleicht die bedeutendste, jedenfalls die reichste.” See *Die Fackel im Ohr*, 208.

²⁵⁸ Canetti makes an important categorical distinction between *Macht* and *Gewalt*: “Mit *Gewalt* verbindet man die Vorstellung von etwas, das nah und gegenwärtig ist. Sie ist zwingender und unmittelbarer als die Macht. Man spricht, verstärkend, von physischer Gewalt . . . Macht ist allgemeiner und geräumiger als Gewalt, sie enthält viel mehr, und sie ist nicht mehr ganz so dynamisch. Sie ist umständlicher und hat sogar ein gewisses Maß von Geduld.” See Canetti, *Masse und Macht* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 2005), 333.

²⁵⁹ GdW, 138.

rather the *godlike* authority with which Kraus executed them. It was an authority that robbed each of Kraus's adherents, Canetti included, of the ability to make unadulterated, independent judgments, for Canetti the greatest crime an author could commit, since it was an exercise, and therefore an abuse of power: "Der Kern der Sache war, daß er sich selber alles Urteilen angeeignet hatte und niemandem, für den er ein Vorbild war, ein eigenes gestattetete."²⁶⁰ Kraus's exclusive aim was to discipline an obedient "Hetzmasse aus Intellektuellen," to bring his "Opfer zur Strecke" and not to relinquish his hunt until said victim fell completely silent.²⁶¹

From this perspective, Kraus's public readings—and I would add to this, his broader satirical persona, performative at its core—were hardly more than civilized expressions of pre-civilized aggression. Unsettling for all of its implications and yet worthy of consideration, Canetti later compared his experience of Kraus to having lived "unter einer Diktatur," thereby establishing formal symmetry between the power-hungry satirist Kraus and the political powers to which Europe succumbed in the late 1930s.²⁶² If, then, in the previous chapter I essentially dismissed this position by showing how Kraus's work attempts to avoid such a conflation, here I wish to take Canetti's claim at its word in order to determine the weight it may have exerted on

²⁶⁰ GdW, 138. One prominent exception to this general rule was Veza Canetti, whom Canetti describes as always maintaining a certain distance to Kraus, evidenced, among other gestures, by her love of Heine. Canetti ventriloquizes Veza while reflecting on one of their conversations: "Man sei doch nicht mit allem einverstanden, was dort [bei den Vorlesungen] gesagt werde. Sie habe die höchste Verehrung für Karl Kraus, aber sie lasse sich von ihm nicht vorschreiben, was man lesen dürfe und was nicht. Sie zeigte mir Heines 'Französische Zustände.' Ob ich das kenne? Das sei eines der unterhaltsamsten und gescheitesten Bücher . . . sie bestand darauf, mir ihre Unabhängigkeit zu beweisen." See *Fackel im Ohr*, 152.

²⁶¹ GdW, 132. The language with which Canetti describes Kraus's method resonates with the language he uses to describe the *Hetzmassen* in *Masse und Macht*. For this particular mass formation, "Das Ziel ist alles. Das Opfer ist das Ziel, doch es ist auch der Punkt der großen Dichte: Es vereinigt die Handlungen aller in sich." Canetti next traces the origins of the *Hetzmasse* to the pre-civilized "Jagdmeute," invoking another parallel to Kraus's process. There is no doubt in Canetti's mind, I would suggest, that Kraus's followers had gathered before him in order to collectively partake in the violent act of "Ausstoßens" and "Zusammen-Tötens," two features characteristic of all *Hetzmassen* in Canetti's schematic. See Canetti, *Masse und Macht*, 54-55.

²⁶² GdW, 139. Robert Musil came to a similar conclusion regarding the relationship between Kraus and Hitler. In a journal entry entitled "K.K u H.," written in 1937, Musil writes: "Wenn K K. den Vorlesungssaal betritt, steht das Publikum solange, bis er sich setzt. Und das, obzwar er völlig versagt hat. Sie lieben ihn 'erst recht.' Ähnlich wirken die Mißerfolge Hs Liebe vergrößernd. Das ist das Verheerende an der K-ianerei. Es war alles schon vorgebildet, was geschehen ist. Sie halten ihm Treue, auch wenn er es nicht verdient. Ist das einfach Schaltungs- u. Ausschaltungswirkung? . . ." See Musil, *Gesammelte Werke II* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1978), 846.

his own literary production and conception of satire.

For despite Canetti's belated rejection of Kraus, he never completely abandoned the genre of satire as such (at least during the time period in question, when he produced *Die Blendung* and two dramas). Iring Fetscher has thus rightly argued, "[m]it seiner Abwendung von dem Idol Kraus hat Elias Canetti der Satire nicht wirklich Lebewohl gesagt," crucially adding, "[e]r hat aber an die Stelle der denunziatorischen Satire die Satire der Selbstanprangerung ersetzt."²⁶³ Borrowing from Canetti's own terminology, Fetscher suggests that Canetti replaced Kraus's "denunciatory satire," in which the satirist attempts to position himself 'outside' of his object of critique, with one of pure "self-denunciation," the type of satire that Canetti had identified in another, less acknowledged source: Georg Büchner's *Woyzeck*. In Canetti's reading of Büchner, he elaborates on the meaning of this concept:

Ich denke an die frontale Präsentation wichtiger Figuren, etwas, was man als ihre *Selbstanprangerung* bezeichnen könnte. Die Sicherheit, mit der sie alles ausschließen, was nicht sie selber ist, das aggressive Bestehen auf sich, bis in die Wahl ihrer Worte, der unbekümmerte Verzicht auf die eigentliche Welt, in der sie aber kräftig und gehässig um sich schlagen Schon in ihren ersten Sätzen stellen sich diese Figuren ganz dar.²⁶⁴

The use of the word "gehässig" recalls the excerpt from *Komödie I* quoted earlier, but more conspicuous is the term "frontal presentation"—akin to the "gestic" in Brecht²⁶⁵—which suggests that *Woyzeck* functions as an effective social critique for Canetti because its characters, specifically the doctor and the drum major, are presented in such a way as to appear both helpless and blameworthy, both as victims of power structures beyond their control and as the executors of such power. They relentlessly insist upon themselves and their way of acting, in spite, or perhaps because of the complex reality that they wholly ignore or renounce. Trapped by their

²⁶³ See Iring Fetscher, "Elias Canetti als Satiriker" in *Hüter der Verwandlung: Beiträge zum Werk von Elias Canetti* (Munich: Hanser, 1985), 230.

²⁶⁴ See Canetti, "Georg Büchner" in *GdW*, 320.

²⁶⁵ For more on Brecht's conception of the "gestic," see "The Question of Criteria for Judging Acting (Notes to Mann ist Mann)" in *Brecht on Theater: The Development of an Aesthetic*, edited and translated by John Willett (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992), 53-56.

limited *linguistic* horizon, they cannot but identify with their function in the drama—hence their “frontal presentation,” exposed, one-dimensional and undivided: their guilt is the result of nothing more than their implicit claim to innocence. It is a guilt that goes unrecognized and unspoken; this is what makes them, I would add, tragic characters (though not tragic heroes).

For Canetti, Woyzeck’s words—in stark contrast to those of Kraus’s *Nörgler*—are “noch Worte im Stande der Unschuld. Sie sind nicht zerrieben und mißbraucht, sie sind nicht Münze, Waffe, Vorrat, es sind Worte, als wären sie eben entstanden.”²⁶⁶ And because of this innocence, Woyzeck “infects his torturers with his innocence”: “*Sie können nichts anders sein, als sie sind.*”²⁶⁷ Büchner succeeds in producing characters that are not tainted before they speak, as they are in Kraus’s work. And in Büchner, all traces of external moralization have yielded to the self-exposure of internal contradiction, and his text thus constitutes for Canetti the truly *immanent* critique. Kraus’s method, despite its heavy reliance on direct quotation, is denied partial legitimacy because it too closely parallels the very forms of political power it rebukes. Kraus’s judgments, which are always “blinding,” come from without.²⁶⁸ In contrast to Woyzeck, the *Nörgler*, rather, has been “infected” by *guilt*, rendering the entirety of his critique suspicious. But was Canetti ultimately able to succeed in actualizing the transition from Krausian to Büchnerian satire in his dramatic work, as Fetcher claims above? To what extent was he able to fully revolt against “the superhuman effort and absolute superiority of the person [Kraus] who, in quoting others, became the author of the real, utterly contemptible meaning of their statements”?²⁶⁹

²⁶⁶ “Büchner,” 320.

²⁶⁷ Quoted in Fetscher, 222.

²⁶⁸ On the relationship between judgment and power, Canetti writes: “Das Urteil ist nur ein Urteil, wenn es mit etwas wie unheimlicher Sicherheit abgegeben wird. Es kennt keine Milde, wie es keine Vorsicht kennt . . . Es ist die Macht des Richters, die man sich auf diese Weise zubilligt . . . Er . . . urteilt sozusagen immerzu. Sein Urteil ist blindend.” See Canetti, *MuM*, 351-352.

²⁶⁹ See Barnouw, “Utopian Dissent: Canetti’s Dramatic Fictions,” in *Critical Essays on Elias Canetti*, ed. David Darby (New York: G.K. Hall, 2000), 124. Barnouw is, of course, referring to Kraus.

These questions can best be addressed by turning to Canetti's most political drama, *Komödie der Eitelkeit*, which first needs to be situated in its literary and historical context.

“Eines Tages kam mir der Gedanke,” Canetti once reflected, “daß die Welt nicht mehr so darzustellen war wie im früheren Romanen, sozusagen vom Standpunkt *eines* Schriftstellers aus, die Welt war *zerfallen*, und nur wenn man den Mut hatte, sie in ihrer Zerfallenheit zu zeigen, war es noch möglich, eine wahrhafte Vorstellung von ihr zu geben.”²⁷⁰ In many ways, this quote embodies Canetti's negative vision of modernity as such, certainly informing the two major works that have come to define his career: the modernist-satirical novel, *Die Blendung*, published in 1935, and *Masse und Macht*, published in 1960 while Canetti was living in exile in London.²⁷¹ Combined, these works represent Canetti's two distinct, though not necessarily opposing personae: the satirist and the anthropologist-philosopher, the latter concerned with tracing the genealogy of “crowds and power,” the former, with ridiculing this phenomenon. In an attempt to synthesize these two dispositions, William Donahue has argued, “Canetti unabashedly employed fiction as well as nonfiction to investigate a world he felt to be both increasingly menacing and yet unfailingly awe-inspiring.”²⁷²

Yet relatively little scholarship has been devoted to Canetti's three satirical dramas: *Hochzeit*, *Komödie der Eitelkeit* and *Die Befristeten*. The first two were written during the early 1930s while Canetti was living in Vienna (along with *Die Blendung*), but apart from a few private, one-man performances Canetti gave in front of friends and acquaintances, neither drama

²⁷⁰ GdW, 331. It is possible that Canetti's use of the word “zerfallen” was influenced by conversations he had with his friend Hermann Broch, whose theory of the “Zerfall der Werte” finds its most robust articulation in Broch's major novelistic work, *Die Schlafwandler: Eine Romantrilogie* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1978).

²⁷¹ Bernhard Spies has suggested that “[i]m Unterschied zu den Schriftstellern, deren Exil einen Abschnitt ihres Lebens und ihrer Produktion ausmacht, bildet das Leben und Schreiben im Exil die Grundsituationen dieses Autors.” The question of exile will not truly take center stage, however, until the next chapter. See Spies, *Die Komödie in der deutschsprachigen Literatur des Exils: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte und Theorie des komischen Dramas im 20. Jahrhundert* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1997), 157.

²⁷² See Donahue, *The End of Modernism: Elias Canetti's Auto-da-Fe* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press: 2001), 203.

was staged until several decades later.²⁷³ *Hochzeit*, which satirizes the events leading up to and figures involved in a wedding, was written in 1932 but did not debut until 1965. It was only the director Hans Hollman's stagings of these plays in the late seventies that generated audiences and positive reviews.²⁷⁴ Canetti wrote *Die Befristeten* in 1952 while living in exile in London. Revolving around a dystopian society in which all of its members are given numerical names that allegedly signify how many years they have to live (known as their "Augenblick"), this play did not receive its German premiere until 1967.²⁷⁵ Structurally common to all of these dramas is what Canetti has called their "Grundeinfall." Each play, that is, proceeds from a fundamental, bizarre and rather far-fetched conceit that nonetheless conditions each character's actions and sets in motion the drama's chain of events.²⁷⁶

On the surface, *Komödie der Eitelkeit*, which Canetti wrote "unter dem Eindruck der Ereignisse in Deutschland," is a satirical allegory of the rise of, as well as life under totalitarian rule.²⁷⁷ The 'comedy' takes place in a nameless society during an unknown time, and opens in front of a large fire into which the town's citizens are throwing pictures, paintings and mirrors in response to a recently instituted edict that forbids the production and consumption of any and all

²⁷³ For example, Canetti gave a reading in front of, among others, Hermann Broch and Franz Werfel. See Canetti, *Das Augenspiel: Lebensgeschichte 1931-1937* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 2008), 112-119.

²⁷⁴ Canetti was, too, pleased with Hollman's work. Referring to the production of *Die Befristeten*, Canetti says: "Der Eindruck war außerordentlich günstig. Ich habe mich über die Sorgfalt, mit der Hans Hollmann, der Regisseur, hier Szenen gedeutet und gefaßt hat, ungeheuer gefreut. Ich hatte das Gefühl, daß dieses Stück in keiner Weise entstellt oder mißbraucht wird." See Canetti, "Gespräch mit Uwe Schweikert," in *Aufsätze, Reden, Gespräche*, 334.

²⁷⁵ On the history of these performances, Helga Kraft writes: "The premiere of *Hochzeit* in Braunschweig in 1965 caused a scandal and resulted in a complaint being lodged with the police for its lewd scenes. No less a public figure than Theodor Adorno came to Canetti's defense, stating that the play's intentions were honorable. *KdE* also premiered in Braunschweig in 1965. *Die Befristeten* had its world premiere in Oxford, England in 1954 and had to wait until 1967 to be performed in Vienna. In the late 1970s, Canetti's plays were more successful on stage, as for instance *KdE* in Basel in 1978. See Kraft, "Staging a Critique of Modernism: Canetti's Plays," in *A Companion to the Works of Elias Canetti*, 153.

²⁷⁶ In an interview with Manfred Durzak, Canetti further elaborates on what this concept entails for him: "Ich will gar nicht viel Reflexion. Mir ist viel wichtiger, daß ein Einfall, das, was ich den Grundeinfall nenne, vorliegt, wie ich auch nie ein Drama beginnen würde ohne einen vollkommen neuen Grundeinfall, von dem ich überzeugt bin, daß er noch nie verwendet worden ist." Canetti's renunciation of "reflection" is a further indication of his insistence on differentiating his work and its intended effect on its audience from that of Brecht and his method. See Canetti, *ARG*, 307.

²⁷⁷ See Canetti, "Zur Entstehung der Komödie der Eitelkeit," in *Aufsätze, Reden, Gespräche*, 106.

images of the self: vanity is to be banished from this society, once and for all.²⁷⁸ Divided into three “Parts,” most of the play’s characters are introduced in the first few pages: the barker Wenzel Wondrak, three best friends (Fräulein Mai, Witwe Weihrauch and Schwester Luise), Barloch the packer and his wife Anna, Franzl and Franzl Nada (an old public porter and his sister), six little girls, the teacher Fritz Schakerl, Emilie Fant and her pompous son Francois, the couple Heinrich Föhn and Leda Frisch, Egon and Lya Kaldaun and their baby son, Marie the maid, the preacher Brosam, Therese Kreiss (the owner of a general store) and her daughter Milli, the coiffeur Fritz Held, the “director” Josef Garaus and the huckster S. Bleiss, previously a photographer who is now out of a job and forced to turn to the black market.

Part One concludes with a suicide attempt, as a guilt-laden Therese nearly throws herself into the fire before being saved right before her plunge. The second part is set amidst the decadence of a society that has not seen a reflection of itself in a decade and is starving for recognition. A black market of mirrors and shards has emerged in the wake of this absence, along with a “brothel” in which people pay to look at themselves in the mirror (recall the scene I described earlier). Attempts at subverting the law reach absurd proportions: the little girls stare into each others’ eyes to catch a glimpse of themselves; fishing is only permitted if the fisherman turns his back to the water so as not to see his reflection; flattering of any sort is also declared illegal, even, it seems, for the author, who portrays no character in flattering light. Part Three builds toward a climax before dissolving into a false resolution: gathered together in the bordello of mirrors, the townspeople unite in revolt against this oppressive regime, breaking out of the

²⁷⁸ In describing how Canetti came upon the idea for this play, he writes: “Schon ein, zwei Jahre vorher und ursprünglich gar nicht im Zusammenhang mit den Ereignissen der Zeit hatte mich der Einfall eines Spiegelverbots beschäftigt. Wenn ich im Friseursalon saß, wo mir die Haare geschnitten wurden, war es mir lästig, immer auf das eigene Bild vor mir zu schauen, dieses immerselbe Gegenüber empfand ich als Zwang und Beengung. So irrten meine Blicke nach rechts und links ab, wo Leute saßen, die von sich fasziniert waren. Sie betrachteten sich eingehend, sie studierten sich . . . und was mich am meisten wunderte: sie achteten nie darauf, daß ich sie während dieser ganzen Zeit beobachtete, so sehr und so ausschließlich waren sie mit sich beschäftigt.” See Canetti, “Zur Entstehung,” 107.

bordello with mirrors in their hands while chanting, though explicitly *not* in unison, “ich!” These last words of the drama provide a stark but fitting contrast to Wenzel Wondrak’s quasi-utopian call for a sense of “wir” in the drama’s commencing scene.

The few critics that have addressed the drama tend to treat it purely as an allegory. Helga Kraft, for example, has argued that the burning of images in the drama is a literary response to the Nazi book burning, and that the breaking of mirrors eerily anticipates *Kristallnacht* of 1938.²⁷⁹ Iring Fetscher argues, “[d]as Stück ist eine präzise Satire über den Totalitarismus und seine reale Auswirkungen. Das gilt für die Szenen, in denen Massenenthusiasmus gezeigt wird ebenso wie für die ununterdrückbaren Umwege und Auswege,” seeing more of a one-to-one correlation between historical events and their dramatic representation (226-227). In the most thorough analysis of the drama to date, Barbara Bauer has shown how the drama’s critique of spoken language is inextricable from its critique of totalitarian ideology: “Die Sprache der Figuren Canettis ist für den Rezipienten seiner Werke ein Schlüssel zu den aggressiven Motiven und Zielen ihres Denkens und Handelns. Canetti ist der Überzeugung, dass Sprechakte erst in einem fortgeschrittenen Stadium der Evolution gestische Handlungen ersetzt haben. . . .”²⁸⁰ Bauer rightly identifies in the drama, apart from its Krausian inheritance, a modern critique of the *lack* of self-consciousness that drives people to commit unspeakable acts, which are first anticipated in their violent language, a discourse I will take up in my own reading.²⁸¹ More in line with my concerns, Dagmar Barnouw polemically argues that *Komödie* fails to transcend its subservience to the tenets of Krausian satire, despite Canetti’s claims to the contrary. Barnouw’s

²⁷⁹ See Kraft, “Staging a Critique,” 149. Canetti himself writes: “Ich hielt die Komödie, sobald sie abgeschlossen war, für eine legitime Entgegnung auf die Bücherverbrennung.” See *Augenspiel*, 111.

²⁸⁰ See Bauer “‘Unter dem Eindruck der Ereignisse in Deutschland’: Ideologiekritik und Sprachkritik in Elias Canettis *Komödie der Eitelkeit*” in *Canetti als Leser*, ed. Gerhard Neumann (Freiburg im Greisgau: Rombach, 1996), 102.

²⁸¹ For Bauer, Canetti has reversed the philosophical problem of Sophoclean tragedy by presenting characters absent of self-consciousness, who, by virtue of this absence, are elevated to a new type of hero: the conscious-less mass. For more see Bauer, 110.

criticism of the play is that “the victims’—the author’s—accusations stay in the foreground, always audible, and the figures remain stuck in their acoustic masks” (a concept I will address shortly). In other words, Canetti’s drama, for Barnouw, does not complete the Büchnerian metamorphosis he intended, insofar as it still exercises the groundless, external moral authority that he so radically places into question.

Komödie der Eitelkeit, however, cannot be reduced to a political allegory alone; the way it addresses the question of power transcends the level of both its explicit and its allegorical content. For like Kraus, Canetti is formally engaged with the problematic of satire along with the satirist’s relationship to his audience or reader—this engagement is his response to the historical circumstances that provided the immediate occasion for the work. After first analyzing the drama’s critique of language, or, more accurately, speech, I will thus direct my attention to the political and historical contents of the satire: power, totalitarianism, crowd behavior, subjectivity, secularization and the vicissitudes of modernity. Here I will investigate precisely how the satire *mirrors* the power structures it challenges, interrogating Canetti’s provocative claim that the poet is the “Gegenbild des Machthabers.”²⁸² Is the satirist necessarily the exception to this rule, or does he serve as the liminal figure that delegitimizes its claim? The last section will return to the crucial question of laughter, showing how the drama’s *laughability* breaks down the permeable barriers between satirist, satirized and audience, potentially bringing the work closer to Kraus than Canetti claims it to be.

II. The “Acoustic Mask” and *Komödie*’s Critique of Language

Die Grenzen meiner Sprache bedeuten die Grenzen meiner Welt.²⁸³

²⁸² For more on Canetti’s notion of the poet, see “Der andere Prozeß. Kafkas Briefe an Felice,” and “Der Beruf des Dichters,” in GdW, 165-253 and 360-372.

²⁸³ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logicus-Philosophicus*, Satz 5.6, 118. William Daugherty argues that Canetti may, indeed, have been influenced by Wittgenstein’s famous distinction between the sayable and the showable as described in the *Tractatus*. See Daugherty, *Die Faust im Wappen: Elias Canettis Suche nach dem “wahren Wort”* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2011), 19.

Ludwig Wittgenstein's famous dictum regarding the way one's language conditions the limits of one's world serves as an appropriate philosophical analog for understanding the way language functions in *Komödie*. Within the context of the drama, the question would be to what extent this "limit" or "border" is somehow unjustifiably imposed on the characters, as Barnouw claims to be the case. In a crucial contrast to both *Woyzeck* and *Die letzten Tage, Komödie* contains no central character that anchors the drama and against which all others can be measured. What this conspicuous absence does, however, is draw attention to each dialogue and dialogic pair in the drama, since no one figure, and no one figure's way of speaking, has any more claim to authority over the next. These dialogues themselves become the centerpiece of the drama, providing the foundation for all of its other critiques. Two characters, Barloch and his wife Anna, partake in such a dialogue just before throwing their possessions into the sacrificial fire in the drama's opening Part:

ANNA. Das kannst net machn. Das ghört si net.
 BARLOCH. Was ghört si net? Für mich ghört si alles! Jetzt wann i will, hau i die ganze Stadt zsamm. Des ghört si für mi; die ganze Stadt! (*Er stoßt nach jedem Satz*)
 ANNA. Das gibt ein Unglück.
 BARLOCH. Was, ein Unglück! Nix gibt ein Unglück. Des muß ins Feuer, und des kommt ins Feuer.
 ANNA. Es ghört do nix dein.
 BARLOCH. Und wer haut's ins Feuer? I!
 ANNA. Aber das ist ja Diebstahl an fremdem Eigentum.
 BARLOCH. Eigentum? Eigentum? I dank schön, Eigentum. Das ist kein Eigentum nicht. Das ist ein Verbrechen.
 ANNA. I hörs scho kommen alle. I fürcht mi so.
 BARLOCH. Paß auf, wenn's kommen. Ich bin der große Held. Paß auf.²⁸⁴

It is not so much how the two speak in terms of their class-inflected dialect (a certain brand of working-class *Wienerisch*), but rather how they relate to one another in dialogue. Violence underscores the brutish Barloch's each and every word; his exclamatory punching after each sentence provides the visual cue to what is clearly discernible from his utterances. But while Barloch's patriarchal, misogynistic and authorial tone are clearly foregrounded, Anna is not

²⁸⁴ Canetti, *Dramen*, 77.

exculpated completely. Indeed, their shared way of speaking betrays the otherwise obscured content of their exchange: the matter of possession, which clearly exercises power over the couple. Each accuses the other of committing the greater crime: Barloch of stealing from Anna, Anna of owning forbidding images and mirrors in the first place. Each has a legitimate claim within the constraints of the *Grundeinfall* in which they operate, but their mutual inability to recognize the symmetry of their positions, the differences of which are undermined by the similarities in their speech patterns, cancels out their respective claims. But they simply cannot speak any other way.

Anna and Barloch are defined by how their language separates them off from every other character or set of characters in the drama. In one of his *Aufzeichnungen*, Canetti offers an explanation of his understanding of character that partially illuminates what is at work in this drama:

Über einen einzelnen Menschen, wie er wirklich ist, ließe sich ein ganzes Buch schreiben. Auch damit wäre er nicht erschöpft, und man käme mit ihm nie zu Ende. Geht man aber dem nach, wie man über einen Menschen denkt, wie man ihn heraufbeschwört, wie man ihn im Gedächtnis behält, so kommt man auf ein viel einfacheres Bild: es sind wenige Eigenschaften, durch die er auffällt und sich besonders von anderen unterscheidet. Diese Eigenschaften übertreibt man sich auf Kosten der übrigen und sobald man sie einmal beim Namen genannt hat, spielen sie in der Erinnerung an ihn eine entscheidende Rolle. Sie sind, was sich einem am tiefsten eingeprägt hat, sie sind der *Charakter*.²⁸⁵

What can be filled in here is that it is exclusively the linguistic markers of these dramatic characters that constitute these *Eigenschaften*. The particularities of their speech patterns are exaggerated at the expense of those traits that each character shares with others, rendering them akin to caricatures. Excluded from this form of characterization is insight into the character's inner psychology, which certainly applies to the world of this drama, in which the motives and

²⁸⁵ See Canetti, *Das Geheimherz der Uhr* (Frankfurt: Fischer 1999), 21. The "Aufzeichnung" was first composed in 1974. More concretely, Canetti refers here to his late text *Der Ohrenzeuge: Fünfzig Charakter* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 2007), a sketch of fifty "characters" he creates, each of which possesses a singular quality that reveals itself in every action of the character. This text has its literary roots in Theophrastus' *Characters*.

thoughts of the characters hardly play a role.²⁸⁶ Rather, each figure's "acoustic mask"—which Canetti defines as "the linguistic shape of a human being, the things that remain constant in his speech, this language that came into being with him, that is his alone, and that will pass away only with him"²⁸⁷—is all that is needed to obtain the necessary information regarding his or her *function* within the drama, that is, his or her social standing, temperament and political inclination.²⁸⁸ As Daniel Daugherty has rightly commented, "Spracharm sind die Sprecher und Textautomate, die ihr Programm unter allen Umständen erfüllen" (34).

One thus finds in the dialogues between the old porter Franzl Nada and the pompous Francois Fant another relationship both based on the exercise of power and dependent on hierarchy. Again in the first scene, Nada (whose name means "nothing" in Spanish) is carrying Fant's mirrors to the fire:

NADA. Schwer, schwer, junger Herr.
 FANT. Nur weiter, es wird schon gehen.
 NADA. Wann i des gwußt hätt, daß S' so viel Spiegeln habn! A so schwer!
 FANT. Lieber Freund, entweder oder.
 NADA. I mein ja nur.
 FANT (*bleibt stehen*). Übrigens, wenn Sie nicht weiter wollen, ich find auch wem andern.
 NADA (*erschrocken*). Aber i bitt schön, junger Herr, das war net so gmeint. Mit meine grauen Haar. Wer wird denn gleich bös sein?
 FANT. Also bitte.
 NADA. Es ist ja nur das Alter.
 FANT. Jeder tut seinen Teil. (79)

One can deduce from the way Nada speaks that he comes from a similar milieu as Barloch and Anna; from the way Fant treats him, it is also clear that members of this class are interchangeable ("ich finde auch wem andern"), valuable only in terms of the service they provide for members

²⁸⁶ In this sense, Canetti shares with figures such as Brecht (despite his intentions), Alfred Döblin, and Franz Kafka the modernist refusal to portray the inner psychology of his characters, or to treat them as bourgeois subjects with interiority.

²⁸⁷ See Durzak, 94.

²⁸⁸ Hans Hollmann, the first director to successfully stage Canetti's plays, recalls: "Das, was Canetti unter akustischer Maske meint, klingt zwar schon bei Nestroy an, treibt Karl Kraus fast immer zur Karikatur, zur akustischen Fratze hin, wendet Horvath wohl häufig an, aber nie ganz konsequent und nicht in allen Stücken; einzig Canetti erschafft seine Figuren ausschließlich damit." While Hollmann distinguishes between the acoustic mask and the caricature, it would be worth exploring to what extent the former could be considered a subspecies of the latter. See Hollmann, "Arbeit an den Dramen," in *Hüter der Verwandlung*, 233.

of Fant's class, and sacrificing their labor in order to "do their part." Again, a socio-economic relationship is both concealed and expressed in this minor exchange, which betrays more generally the structures of power that both inform this social order and have been solidified through the language of its subjects. Nada, who is treated by most as a burden on society and as a social outcast (apart from his sister, who sacrifices five years of her life in prison to save him), is one of the drama's few sympathetic characters. Yet insofar as he is essentially forced by his oppressors to constantly apologize for his honesty—"das war net so gemeint"—he seems to have internalized the regime's automatic character, sharing with his oppressors their linguistic immutability.

The exchanges between the members of the Kaldaun family illustrate a different though related phenomenon. Consisting of "vier Köpfen," this family stands in for the petit-bourgeoisie, replete with one nameless child and a disgruntled maid, Marie. Their ostensible dialogues often serve as veneers for the monologues spoken by each respective character; they do not so much speak to one another as transmit, as one critic writes, "spoken signals from separate, mutually alien worlds."²⁸⁹ The sacrificial fire provides the backdrop for this first exchange between Lya and Egon, husband and wife:

LYA. Was soll ich heut opfern, Egon?

EGON. Die Hosen sind wieder nicht gebügelt.

LYA. Egon, was soll ich heut opfern?

EGON. Ich red von den Hosen. Die Hosen sind wieder nicht gebügelt. Ganz einfach.

LYA. Soll ich heut den Taschenspiegel opfern, Egon?

EGON. Ich brauch mir das nicht gefallen zu lassen. Die Hosen sind wieder nicht gebügelt

LYA. Marie, Sie hören schon wieder nicht. Die Hosen sind nicht gebügelt. Mein Mann, der gnädige Herr, brauchen sich das nicht gefallen zu lassen. (90)

The decision Lya tries to make—what she should sacrifice to the fire—is negotiated like any other affair. This decision, however, is of no concern to Egon, whose attention is exclusively

²⁸⁹ See Peter Laemmle, "The Power and Powerlessness of the Ear Witness: The Dramatic in Canetti's Early Plays," in *Critical Essays*, 110.

directed towards his un-ironed pants and how he cannot make a public appearance in such shabby attire. The two are not speaking to one another, nor do they appear to respond to each other's respective concerns. Even when Lya passes Egon's message onto Marie (who was supposed to have ironed the pants before Egon put them on), she repeats her husband's mechanical speech patterns verbatim, evoking one of the central modes of communication between the two.²⁹⁰ Egon and Lya speak past one another in lieu of real communication, and the true victim of this empty exchange is the servant Marie, adding another layer of signification to Lya's opening line, "[w]as soll ich heut opfern, Egon?" Once again, the dialogue may explicitly be about what is to be sacrificed to the fire, but more importantly, it foregrounds the way language has been reduced to content-less units of communication, literally exchanged between two automata.²⁹¹

Regarding these speech patterns, Barbara Bauer has argued that "[e]in solches Sprachverhalten können sich nur Herrscher totalitärer Staaten und die Angehörigen ihres Sicherheitsapparats leisten, die ihrer Macht absolut gewiß sind" (103), echoing Canetti's words about *Woyzeck* while suggesting that a form of reified ideology speaks through these characters, an ideology that they never place into question. Their unshakable certainty in what and how they speak is the signifier for the totalitarianism such certainty both anticipates and already embodies, making them innocent from their perspective but guilty to their readers. As perpetrators—and

²⁹⁰ The Kaldaun's exchanges serve as examples of how linguistic repetition, too, functions as a mode of critique in the drama. In the scene above, Lya repeats her husband's phrases, "ich bin nicht gesonnen" and "ganz einfach," which he himself repeats throughout; their child repeats the word "Fo-ja!" ("Feuer") that he hears from his parents several times during this opening scene; and Wenzel Wondrak repeats the phrase "meine Herrschaften," in virtually all of his interactions with his various interlocutors.

²⁹¹ Bernhard Spies has argued that in this drama, Canetti "reduziert das zugleich Subjektive und Intersubjektive der Menschlichkeit auf das *Verfahren der Verständigung* und führt deren Scheitern vor. Er faßt das Verstehen nicht mehr als Verständigung über einen bestimmten Inhalt und auch nicht mehr als Tugend des Verständnisses, sondern als formellen Vorgang der Kommunikation, und deren systematisches Mißlingen macht er sinnfällig." See Spies, 161.

here I am thinking of Fant, Föhn, Barloch, Garaus and Schakerl, the society's leaders and the preservers of order—they insult, make demands, howl, accuse and incarcerate the powerless around them. Schakerl, for example, loses his inveterate stutter (enshrined in his name) the moment he essentially unites with the law he announces:

SCHAKERL. I-i-ich hab die Ph-ph-photographien nicht.

DIE FANT. Meine Photographien? Die hat er ja nicht mit. Wer redet von meinen Photographien? Aber meine Spiegel hat er mir alle aus dem Haus getragen. Vierzehn Spiegel! Meine vierzehn Spiegel! Wie sollen meine Mädchen arbeiten ohne meine Spiegel? Das ist kein Arbeiten. So kann man nicht arbeiten. Meine Mädchen sind verzweifelt!

SCHAKERL. *(ist während ihrer letzten Worte größer geworden. Er zieht ein Papier aus der Tasche und liest mit lauter, hoher Stimme vor, wobei er kein einziges Mal ins Stottern gerät):*

KUNDMACHUNG. Die Regierung hat beschlossen. Erstens: Der Besitz und Gebrauch von Spiegeln ist verboten. Sämtlich vorhandenen Spiegel werden vernichtet. Jegliche Erzeugung von Spiegeln wird eingestellt. Nach Ablauf von dreißig Tagen wird jeder, der des Besitzes oder Gebrauchs eines Spiegels überführt wird, mit Zuchthaus von zwölf bis zwanzig Jahren bestraft. Auf die Erzeugung von Spiegeln steht die Todesstrafe. (85)

Only by exercising power over others, by reading the law vis-à-vis the ownership and use of mirrors, does Schakerl's speech lose its hesitation and does he become certain of his authority, since a stutter indicates, in this context, hesitance to employ language as an instrument of power and thus to fully identify with its claims.²⁹² But insofar as Schakerl cannot seem to control when he stutters and when he speaks, he is also a mere vessel for the ideology that speaks through him and over which he has little control. This is what, unsettling as it may be, binds him and the other exercisers of power to the victims of this social order—primarily Franzl and Franzl Nada, Marie, Luise and Therese—whose worlds, too, are severely confined by their language, but who have no choice but to identify with it.

One could argue that this type of characterization is the result of Canetti's insufficient grasp of totalitarianism, or, as Barnouw implies, of his limited understanding of character

²⁹² Comparing Schakerl to the authoritarian character, Spies writes: "Auf frappante Weise zeigt Canetti, wie ähnlich dieser Geistigkeit der offenkundig autoritäre Charakter ist: Wo der Intellektuelle seine Gewißheit, recht zu haben, durch die komplizierte Annäherung seines Denkens an den Gang der Dinge sicherstellt, da verschafft sich der stotternde Lehrer Schakerl Selbstsicherheit, indem er direkte Unterwürfigkeit praktiziert und umstandlos die Stimme seiner Herrn spielt: Er liest den Regierungserlaß vor . . . solange er das tut, ist sein Sprachproblem verschwunden." See Spies, 160.

development (disregarding of the historical circumstances that might make it necessary to produce such characters). More likely, however, it foregrounds the very predicament that arises in creating a drama that satirizes the dynamics and elements of power. To fulfill its function, *Komödie* must occupy (read: ventriloquize) each and every possible response to its *Grundeinfall*, knowing, however, that the very act of reducing a character to an automaton mimics the structure of power being critiqued, if one agrees with the basic assumption that totalitarian governments rule not over citizens but over subjects who serve as functionaries within the given order. At the very least, this is the assumption informing this drama. The question still remains of whether this problem can ever be avoided. Admittedly, I have thus far only provided an abstract sketch of the type of totalitarian rule portrayed in this drama; in next making the drama's political stakes more concrete, the particularities of the formal symmetry to which I am alluding will become more salient.

III. Politics, Power and Radical Secularization

Like the other work Canetti produced in Vienna, *Komödie* does not address questions of language and power as if they existed in a historical vacuum.²⁹³ Bauer has indeed read into the drama specific historical-psychological categories that Canetti later articulated in *Masse und Macht*: the *Befehls-*, *Loyalitäts-* and *Kompensationsmechanismus*, which, she argues, can be mapped on to the relational structures of the characters in the text.²⁹⁴ More specifically, she shows how the drama converts the actual anti-Semitism of the Nazis into the trenchant and incorrigible misogyny of many of the drama's central male figures: Barloch, Föhn, Fant and

²⁹³ Referring to the way other scholars have tended to irresponsibly ignore the impact of specific historical events—most noticeably the burning of the Jusitizpalast in 1927—Gerald Stieg writes: “Ein solcher Umgang mit einem historischen Datum, das Canetti selbst geradezu mythisch verdichtet hat, scheint mir leichtfertig, er raubt nämlich dem Werk seine grausame Erfahrungsbasis und macht aus ihm, je nach dem, ein anthropologisches oder psychologisches Kompendium Aber das ändert nichts daran, daß Canetti nicht aus Abstraktionen geschöpft hat, sondern aus der Wirklichkeitserfahrung, als hochbewußter und unersättlicher *Menschenfresser*.” See Stieg, “Elias Canetti als Zeitzeuge,” in *Experte der Macht*, eds. Kurt Bartsch and Gerhard Melzer (Graz: Droschl, 1985), 30.

²⁹⁴ See Bauer, 40.

Wondrak (82).²⁹⁵ For Bauer, just as the Nazis identified in the Jews the *cause* of all of Germany's economic problems, in the drama, the community's leaders identify the root of the social ill (vanity) in the individuals in whom this problem finds its most conspicuous expression (women).

Indeed, examples of misogynist rhetoric abound in the play. Föhn's is the most explicit and unabashed, as is the parallel it forms with classical anti-Semitic rhetoric. He declares: "Wir sind verweiblicht. Das ist unser Unglück. Der Spiegel, ein Apparat aus dem Berufsleben der Frau, hat von uns Männern, im eigentlichsten Sinne des Wortes Besitz ergriffen" (87-88).²⁹⁶ Enraged to find the huckster Bleiss selling shards of mirror to his wife and her friends, Barloch is quick to blame the women for their inability to resist temptation: "Das machet euch eine Freud, so ein Scherben, was? . . . Ja, verbotene Früchte! Das sind so richtig die Weiber! Das könnt euch so passen, daß s' den Scherben da finden bei mir und ich zum Tod verurteilt werd!" (107); when Francois Fant expresses his disgust at the way the little girls stare into each others' eyes and asks what can be done, the barker Wondrak immediately replies with the most violent of suggestions: "Augen ausstechen, meine Herrschaften . . . Das einzige, beste Mittel, was hilft" (129). That such a statement could be tolerated, let alone considered, hints at the decrepit state of the society being portrayed and thus indirectly at the frightening process of normalization. The misogyny also takes on absurd forms of self-aggrandizement, embodied once again by Föhn, who asks his wife Leda, after confessing his alleged love to her, to address him formally: "Ich möchte dich bitten, mich nicht mehr zu duzen. Es stört mich in meiner Entwicklung. Ich bin

²⁹⁵ Bauer writes: "Mit dem Spiegelverbot, das hinsichtlich seiner Wirkungen den Aufruf zum Boykott jüdischer Geschäfte und Waren gleicht, führt Canetti eine Politik ad absurdum, die eine rassistische Ideologie an die Stelle wirtschaftlicher und sozialer Maßnahmen setzte." See Bauer, 86.

²⁹⁶ The expression "Das ist unser Unglück" might be an allusion to the slogan, "Die Juden sind unser Unglück," coined by the nineteenth-century German nationalist Heinrich von Treischke, providing even more evidence for Bauer's theory.

nicht irgendeiner Mann, dem das gleichgültig ist. Es gibt mir jedesmal einen Stich, wenn du mir ‘Du’ sagst” (137). Indeed, virtually all of the relationships in the drama are reducible to aggressive acts of possession directed at the women. In this sense, the parallel between historical anti-Semitism and dramatic misogyny (not to discount the role of misogyny during the Third Reich) provides a helpful framework for understanding the points of contact between text and context.

But identifying the misogyny and showing it to be a reflection on the historical moment do not exhaust its function within the drama. To recall from the last chapter, Kraus had established the critical failure of the false satirist, who attacks the particular rather than show how the particular has been hypostasized into a false universal and making *that* the object of critique (for him, this is usually the press). Something similar is at work in the misogynistic characters in *Komödie*, whose blindness to the structure informing the social unrest leads them to make false accusations. If the town’s leaders easily blame the women for the rampant vanity tearing at the community’s social fabric, it is because it is easier to identify a symptom than a structure—but not coincidentally, the very instrument that would make such *self*-reflection possible has been declared illegal. A parallel thus emerges between those who hold the power in the dramatic world, and the satirist who targets exclusively individuals (or even types of individuals), both of whose attacks rely on false accusations and are produced by blindness.” The critique at hand is then not just of anti-Semitism qua misogyny, or of the misogyny immanent in fascist thought, but also of the very act of confusing the symptom for the cause (even of the attempt to locate a cause): this is the act that binds the false satirist to the fascist type being portrayed in the drama. Is this a confession or a critique? Or both? In either case, this parallel sheds significant light on the role of the forbidden mirror, and on how it mediates the

relationship between (false?) satire and fascist ideology: as a medium of reflection, the mirror is both a precondition for both self-critique (immanent critique), as well as for narcissism, which, when practiced at the exclusion of all others, can serve as the foundation of fascist thinking.

I turn elsewhere, however, to find a less allegorical treatment of the intersections between form, content and context: the drama's stage directions. As curious instances of language that are both immanent to the text (when read) and externalized (when staged), stage directions occupy a liminal position. In one sense, they make explicit authorial intention by simply showing how a gesture or statement is to be carried out and thus received. Without stage directions, there can be no action. Yet at what point does a stage direction come dangerously close to merely reproducing the structure of ideology, actively interfering with the process of making an independent judgment, precisely what Canetti identifies in Kraus's satire? We read how Francois Fant treats Nada as more of an obstruction to his movement than as an individual: "*Er stoßt den Alten mit dem Fuß beiseite*" (80). At the very end of Part I, the gathering crowd is described as follows: "*Von allen Seiten strömen Menschen zu*" (101).²⁹⁷ At one point, Luise is described as being entranced by the forbidden mirror when Barloch comes home to find Bleiss selling his wares and services to the women: "*Luise: (ohne den starren Blick vom Spiegelchen abzuwenden, als ob sie beten würde)...*" (106).²⁹⁸ The allusion to prayer suggests the totem-like quality of the shard in the eyes of its worshippers. In a similar vein, Therese's daughter Millie approaches a puddle that

²⁹⁷ Interestingly, this stage direction recalls the line, "*Es bildet sich Gruppen,*" repeated throughout the pages of *Die letzten Tage der Menschheit* and which Roberto Calasso calls the most chilling lines of the entire drama. See Calasso, *The Forty-Nine Steps*. It is also in lines like these that can one clearly identify the trajectory of Canetti's thought as it arrived at the theory of the crowd explicated in *Masse und Macht*. Edgar Piel similarly concludes: "Während 'Masse und Macht' in den vierziger und fünfziger Jahren als Kondensat einer mehr als 20jährigen Erforschung von Träumen, Mythen, vergangenen Riten, Religionen und fremden, zum Teil primitiven Bräuchen geschrieben wurde, begegnet man aber der hier beschriebenen Urszenerie bei Canetti auch schon früher, in seinen frühen Dramen von 1933/34. . . ." See Piel, "Der Gewalt den Garaus machen: Archaische Szenerie und neuer Mythos bei Canetti," in *Hüter der Verwandlung*, 153.

²⁹⁸ This moment provides a point of intersection between the drama's political critique and its critique of secularization, which I will next discuss.

has just formed over a mirror buried in the ground: “*Die Pfütze sticht ihr ins Auge. Sie kniet davor nieder und fährt sich rasch einmal übers Haar*” (158). The description of her fixing her hair evokes an image of worship or prayer before a false god—it thus appears that Millie is not just fixing her hair.

These stage directions certainly offer insights into how power functions in the drama (and in the society it satirizes), how it is exercised, and what effect it has over those who have ceded their autonomy to it. But as a visible trace of the author/director’s authority, they also mirror—and this raises questions about the entire function of stage directions in drama more broadly conceived—the dialectic of implicit ideology and explicit power: the figures are blind to the stage directions but are nonetheless guided by them. These directions provide an illustrative metaphor for understanding the way ideology expresses itself in actions and gestures, but the reproduction of the mechanism of ideology and its subsequent control over the interpretation of these actions must be taken into consideration. There is violence inherent in the interpretation that the stage direction presupposes.

Within the realm of the political, I lastly turn my attention to the question of revolution, which is, admittedly, the dimension of the drama least open to a formal or more dialectical interpretation. To recall, at the end of Part III, the entire community joins together at the bordello of mirrors in order to stare at their respective reflections as if consuming a narcotic; for a while, they do not see one another. The dystopian vision then reaches its climactic moment:

Es wird strahlend hell. In einem grellen Spiegelsaal sitzen stumm an die zwanzig Menschen. Zwei Spiegelgalerien laufen von rechts und von links auf den Hintergrund zu und treffen sich dort in einer breiten Doppeltür. Vor jedem Spiegel sitzt regungslos ein Mensch, die Arme hart in die Hüften gestemmt, die Ellbogen spitz und gehässig gegen die Nachbarn gekehrt. Niemand spricht. Niemand atmet. Die Luft ist wie aus Glas. (165)

Föhn, who has paid for a luxury cabin in which a machine dispenses applause when he speaks, nearly goes insane when the machine malfunctions, an act that anticipates the malfunction within

the larger social machine of which he is a part. Left with nothing, he begins an oration against this oppressive regime, which appears to be a reflection on the dramatic character as such: “Ein Mensch ist keine Vogelscheuche, und besondere Menschen wie wir schon gar nicht. Wir tragen ein edles Bild im Herzen. Wann wird es wahrhaft unser sein?” (170). In this brief moment of clarity, it seems that Föhn recognizes, on some level, that this regime has turned its subjects into scarecrows; what he longs for, however, is a new beginning based on the values and victories of the past: “Und das Alte, das man erledigt und abgetan glaubte, kehrt siegreich und strahlend wieder. Verachtet mir das Alte nicht!” (170). Föhn’s message spreads throughout the entire bordello, repeating itself incessantly as if on a loop and exhibiting another example of the drama’s use of repetition. Yet rather than mobilize the characters toward a true revolution, one based on mutually implicated collectivity *and* individuality, “[a]lle schleudern ihre Arme vor. Jeder packt seinen Spiegel und reißt ihn aus der Wand. Alle springen hoch und schreien: Ich! Ich! Ich! Ich! Ich! Ich! Ich! Ich!” (177). Indeed, this is no revolution at all, but a mock-revolution under satire, a return to an even more rudimentary and atomized sense of individuality than that which reigned previously; the collective response to oppression will presumably lead to more oppression, albeit of a different order. Wondrak’s repetition of “wir” at the beginning of the drama turns out to be a false prophecy and a distant memory, and the drama cynically dissolves into an orgy of self-adulation, violence and the rise of a martyr for the cause:

Mit hoehgehobenen Spiegeln stürzen sie nach vorn. Von rechts laufen Garaus und die Fant in den Saal und stellen sich mit flehentlichen Gebärden der Menge in den Weg. Ihre beschwichtigenden Worte verlieren sich im Lärm. Sie werden überrannt und bleiben liegen. Die Menge drängt rechts hinaus. Unzählige aus den hinteren Galerien drängen nach. Die spiegellosen Wände brechen zusammen und man ist wieder auf der

Straße

Ein schwarzer Strom treibt auf ihr daher. Von allen Seiten fließen Menschen zu.²⁹⁹ Jeder hält einen Spiegel

²⁹⁹ Again there appears a stage direction that both indexes the crowd formation that later became Canetti’s primary object of study as well as the resonance with *Die letzten Tage*’s “es bildet sich Gruppen.”

*oder ein Bild von sich hoch. Von tosenden Ich-Rufen widerhallt die Luft. ICH! ICH! ICH! ICH! ICH! ICH!
ICH! ICH! Es wird kein rechter Chor daraus. Auf einer Insel im Hintergrund erhebt sich langsam das
Denkmal von Heinrich Föhn. (177-178)*

Wondrak was wrong about his prophecy, but in sensing how fascism could force together a community of hesitant but vulnerable believers, disparate in needs but desperate for leadership and salvation, the satire proved its prescience.

The question of salvation is, indeed, not far from the drama's hermeneutic center, evincing its theological undertones and situating Canetti within the genealogy of satire as Benjamin (and Kraus) understands it. Manfred Bollacher has argued that "[z]u den Grunderfahrungen Elias Canettis...gehört die radikale Säkularisierung der Welt, in der die Idee einer transzendenten Wirklichkeit der Immanenz einer auf Tod und Tötung gegründeten Religion der Macht gewichen ist."³⁰⁰ While Canetti generally avoided the term secularization, the notion that the religion of transcendence had been replaced by a twentieth-century cult of death, killing and power informs his work through and through. For Canetti, the radical secularization that was coextensive with twentieth century modernity demanded a radical form of critique, and considering that the *Grundeinfall* of the drama in question is the banishment of vanity—one of the seven deadly sins—an analysis of the drama's satirical treatment of secularization is highly relevant.

The preacher Brosam, whose name presumably alludes to how the Eucharist had, in him, devolved into a mere "crumb," believes that society, in banning instruments of vanity, has finally caught up with the intention of divine law. However, he is effectively disqualified as a voice of authority when he marries the virgin 'Marie' at the end of the play and the two spend their honeymoon together at the bordello. In this way, the preacher—the historical figure, to recall,

³⁰⁰ See Bollacher, "Canetti und das Judentum," in *Ein Dichter braucht Ahnen": Elias Canetti und die europäische Tradition* (Peter Lang: 1997), 37.

from which the satirist emerged—reveals himself to be just another other character, but his obsession with the problem of vanity is not to be ignored.³⁰¹ The attempt to ban vanity entirely has led to its gross increase, and with it, the emergence of a community more rotten than the one initially punished for the crime it did not know it was committing. The ban has engendered a false community of subjects lacking authentic individuality: the mock-revolution at the end consists of nothing more than a celebration of damaged egos.³⁰² Insofar as the political decision to ban mirrors and images fails—a decision initially derived from religious impulses—the individual and collective attempts to undermine or sidestep its effects appear absurd and obscene. In other words, the drama is careful not to offer a static commentary on the role of vanity in society, but rather provides a spectrum in which the various responses to the attempt to control such a phenomenon could be played out and against each other. This is part of the drama's broader attempt *not* to pass a judgment or moralize, but rather to let the internal contradictions of its given conceit develop logically and speak for themselves—its Büchnerian legacy.

It is through the figure of Garaus that one of these central contradictions or tensions is best expressed. After getting out of his bath at the end of Part II, he begins a monologue on the meaning of man:

Denn was ist das heutzutage, ein Mensch? Ein Mensch ist sein Ebenbild. Was sagst? Kusch! Sein Ebenbild. Ja, und ein Mensch ohne Ebenbild brings zu nichts . . . Da steht eine Überschrift. Ich bitte zu schauen. Der Blutsonntag. Der gestrige Tag hat bedauerlicherweise zahlreiche neue Opfer gefordert. Wieder sind 98 Menschen einem tückischen Geschick zum Opfer gefallen. Sie warfen das Leben mit leichter Hand dahin. Es hatte ihnen nichts mehr zu bieten . . . (155-156).

³⁰¹ It is worth noting that Canetti had Abraham a Sancta Clara—the figure whom Benjamin sees as a forerunner to Kraus—in mind when creating the character Brosam: “Die Heftigkeit dieser Predigt, ihr Barocker Ton, der wie so manches Polternde in der deutschen Literatur Abraham a Sancta Clara entstammt. . . .” One wonders if Kraus is also being mocked in this character. See *Augenspiel*, 115.

³⁰² Helga Kraft has tried to show how the ban on images, photographs and mirrors uncannily anticipates religious fundamentalism in the twenty-first century, with its prohibitions that benefit those in power while suppressing those subjected to such prohibitions. See Kraft, 149.

Blaming the ban on images and mirrors for the alarming number of suicides in recent days, Garaus suggests that without a medium for reflection (a mirror), the human loses his image and thus all sense of meaning in the world (“bringt zu nichts”). In response to this absence, however, he appears to have no other choice but to elevate himself to the position of a god (“Ein Mensch ist sein Ebenbild”), in whose image, so goes the Judeo-Christian formula, the human has been formed. Though Garaus does not come this conclusion, the point seems to be that reflection’s medium, the mirror/image, is in itself without intrinsic value; under scrutiny, rather, is both its ban as well as its excessive usage, since both actions potentially contain within them the seeds of totalitarianism: the former because it is a form of coercion imposed externally and without the consent of those whom it will affect, the latter because of the exclusionary disposition it entails (to which I earlier alluded), which can lead to what Barnouw has called “utopian exclusion” and the “silencing of others.”³⁰³

While no more central to the drama than anyone else, Garaus is also the figure in whom the pressing question of guilt—clearly one of Canetti’s concerns, especially when recalling his comments on *Woyzeck*—is most lucidly expressed. Much like the case in *Die letzten Tage, Komödie* implicitly asks where guilt is to be assigned in a world consisting only of functionaries. A microcosm of this discourse is on display just after Garaus finishes his monologue from the scene above, when he notices a crack in the mirror that his wife Luise has just handed to him. In an act of rage, he raises his fist and drops the mirror on Luise’s head, who collapses and dies under the pressure; it is explicitly unclear whether her collapse is the direct result of the collision or whether she dies of her own fragile condition (158), but Garaus certainly plays a role in her death. And thus prodded on by his coiffeur, Fritz Held, Garaus visits Leda Föhn-Frisch, the wife of Heinrich Föhn and the drama’s resident psychoanalyst, who conducts her sessions in a luxury

³⁰³ See Barnouw, 124.

cabin at the bordello that she also operates. Their dialogue proceeds as follows:

LEDA FÖHN-FRISCH. Ich fürchte, Herr Direktor, Sie denken zuviel. Lassen Sie sich jetzt einmal gehen. Strengen Sie sich gar nicht an. Ich weiß, Sie haben so viel wichtige Dinge im Kopf. Ein Mann in Ihrer Verantwortlichen Stellung! Das ist nur natürlich. Kein Mensch wird Ihnen einen Vorwurf draus machen. Das versteht sich von selbst. Das geht gar nicht anders bei Ihnen. Aber wenn Sie mir einen Gefallen tun wollen, mir persönlich—Sie sagen doch, daß ich Ihnen sympathisch bin—, dann lassen Sie sich jetzt einmal ganz gehen, denken Sie an nichts. Ruhn Sie sich aus. Warten Sie, vielleicht setzten Sie sich besser so. (*Sie dreht seinen Stuhl um, so daß er dem Spiegel den Rücken kehrt*)
GARAUS. Das wär gar nicht schlecht, wenn man sich einmal ausspannen könnte, so von Herzen.
LEDA. Und jetzt, sitzen Sie gut? Ich denke, ja, jetzt erzählen Sie mir ganz einfach, was Ihnen so durch den Kopf geht.
GARAUS. Ja wenn das so einfach wäre, meine Gnädige.
LEDA. Ich will Ihnen helfen. Dazu bin ich ja da. Erinnern Sie sich, einmal, da waren Sie schon ein großer Bub, und da hatten Sie was angestellt, etwas Schreckliches, etwas ganz Schreckliches, vor dem Papa hatten Sie Angst, überhaupt gegen den Papa hatten Sie manchmal einen solchen Haß, da kamen Sie zur Mutter und legten den Kopf auf ihren Schoß und beichteten Sagen Sie mir ruhig, was Ihnen durch den Kopf geht, ich weiß ja doch alles – ob Sie’s jetzt selber sagen oder nicht, es ist nur, damit wir rascher vorwärtskommen. (171-172)

As Leda’s acoustic mask reveals itself to be psychoanalytic jargon—and here the critique of language overlaps with a highly specific cultural critique—it becomes obvious that the purpose of this visit is to rid Garaus of any trace of guilt he might still have about his wife’s death. Leda claims to know everything beforehand, then tells the “großer Bub,” in an attempt at exculpation, “Sie können nichts dafür, daß Ihnen die Frau gestorben ist. Sterben muß jeder. Das ist ein Naturgesetz.” This crucial line—*sie können nichts dafür*—could apply to all of the characters within this dramatic world, condensing one of the central predicaments of the satire into one phrase, and furthermore resonating with Canetti’s earlier comment about Büchner’s characters, who “können nichts anders sein, als sie sind.”³⁰⁴ In Garaus’s specific case, Leda assures him that she is only “auf Ihre Heilung bedacht,” raising an important question through semantic ambiguity: is she trying to “cure” Garaus of a physical ailment, or “heal” him in a more spiritual sense? Or are these, for her, the same thing? Having pointed out that Garaus’s resistance to look at his reflection is connected to the role the mirror played in his wife’s “accidental” death, Leda comes to this conclusion:

³⁰⁴ This line also recalls one of the Nörgler’s lines about Germany’s and Austria’s avoidance of responsibility when it came to the question of who instigated the war: “Beide können nichts dafür.” See Kraus, *Die letzten Tage*, 409.

LEDA: Geben Sie sich keiner Täuschung hin! Unser Gedächtnis trügt uns oft. Wir verwechseln oft Ursache mit Wirkung. Sie haben jetzt das Gefühl, daß das alles schon früher passiert ist; daß Sie schon zu Lebzeiten Ihrer Frau an nichts mehr Freude hatten; daß der Spiegel, Urbild aller Freude des Menschen, ja, ja, schauen Sie nur, da kann ich Ihnen nicht helfen, es ist so, Sie haben also das Gefühl, daß dieser Spiegel in Ihnen früher zerbrochen ist und die Frau dann starb. Sie fürchten, am Tode Ihrer Frau mitschuldig zu sein, weil das Unglück mit dem Spiegel schon vorher passiert war. Aber es ist nicht so, glauben Sie mir, alles, was Sie darüber denken, ist falsch erst ist Ihre Frau gestorben, und dann zerbrach der Spiegel.

GARAUS: Sehr richtig! Sehr richtig! (172).

The jab at psychoanalysis is not surprising given Canetti's lifelong campaign against it.³⁰⁵

Specific to this scene, however, is the way the session is depicted as analogous to another process that developed much earlier in history, but from which the secular psychoanalytic session may have derived: that of confession, even alluded to by the use of the word "beichten" in the earlier exchange. The Catholic ritual of entering a separate (and sacred) space, confessing one's sins to a Priest and being absolved of them is here being satirized and reworked into a series of reversals: instead of confessing to the sin, Garaus is encouraged to deny it; instead of being absolved for the act of murder, he is being convinced of its nonexistence; instead of being chided for his desires, he is being urged to indulge them. Absent from the text is any trace of nostalgia for Habsburg Catholicism, riddled as it was with corruption and hypocrisy. But neither is the secular iteration of such ritual, in the guise of a treatment that seeks to deny individual agency or responsibility, depicted as a morally viable alternative (even if such a rendition amounts to hardly more than a caricature of the actual practice): "Die Leut gehn krank und gebrochen rein, wens rauskommen, sind sie unschuldig wie ein neugeborenes Kind," says the unassuming Fritz Held, pointing thereby to the absurdity contained in the process of *Heilung* (169).³⁰⁶ Both the empty gesture of religiosity in the face of modernity (Brosam/the ban on

³⁰⁵ For a thorough discussion of the complicated relationship between Canetti and Freud—and the former's critique of the latter—see Donahue, *The End of Modernism*, 137-172.

³⁰⁶ Bauer comes to a similar conclusion, though she connects the satire of psychoanalysis to the larger critique of power at work in the drama and not at all to the question of secularization: "Die Psychoanalyse wird von Föhns Frau als Instrument der Herrschaftsstabilisierung benutzt. Das schlechte Gewissen, das Garaus nach der Ermordung

mirrors and images), as well as the confidence in the ability for modern, secular and ostensibly scientific treatments to relieve individuals of guilt (Garaus/Leda) are placed under a satirical lens. The question of secularization becomes an indictment of its failure, and a world without transcendence has been rendered, in this drama, as one without a sense of “wahre[n] Verantwortlichkeit.”³⁰⁷

To whom, then, does the drama assign guilt and responsibility? Where can one locate the agency? Are interventions even possible in this thoroughly administered dramatic world? If I have thus far analyzed the way *Komödie* treats political and theological discourses both on the level of content and by highlighting the moments in which parallels emerge between the form of satirical critique and the power exercised by the drama’s characters, I will lastly turn to the drama’s status as a ‘comedy’ in order to further invoke the role of the reader/audience in its interpretation. Laughter and humor are constitutive elements of this satire, and as such they are ciphers for the complicity (of the characters, the satirist and the audience) that the drama insinuates but does not enunciate in its attempt to execute the demands of self-denunciating satire.

IV. The Problem of Laughter and Laughability

I may therefore conclude, that the passion of laughter is nothing else but a sudden glory arising from sudden conception of some eminency in ourselves, by comparison with the infirmities of others, or with our own formerly... It is no wonder therefore that men take it heinously to be laughed at or derided, that is, triumphed over.³⁰⁸

seiner Frau plagt, wird ihm in einer Luxuskabine des Spiegelbordells von der Analytikerin ausgeredet.” See Bauer, 94-95.

³⁰⁷ Because Canetti is hesitant to endorse either one of these perspectives in his drama—and because of Canetti’s own resistance to psychoanalysis—I would disagree with Laemmle, who argues that “Canetti’s dramas are a piece of concrete psychoanalysis; that is, they make visible the reactions to drives that are unconscious, displaced, or sublimated under external moral pressure.” I am not convinced that the language of “drives” and the “unconscious” can be applied to this play. See Laemmle, 111.

³⁰⁸ Thomas Hobbes, *The Elements of Law, Natural and Politic: Part I* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 54-55.

In the drama's opening scene, Wenzel Wondrak stands alone on stage and recites a monologue to the audience, whom he refers to as "meine Herrschaften," a phrase he repeats throughout the drama whenever he is speaking to anyone. In this way, he incorporates the audience into the drama itself:

Wer wird denn abergläubisch sein, meine Herrschaften, wer wird, wer wird, wer wird denn abergläubisch sein! Treten Sie ein, ich lade Sie höflichst und P.T. ein. Sie können auch lachen, wenn Sie wollen, lachen ist nicht verboten, noch ist das Lachen erlaubt, Sie sollen sogar lachen, lachen wie der Bajazzo, als der ich mich dem hochgeschätzten Publikum verehrlichst vorzustellen gedenke. (73)

Considering that we are dealing with a comedy, it is curious that Wondrak the "Bajazzo" (a synonym for the more common "Hanswurst") makes explicit that laughing is allowed and even encouraged. He seems to suggest that there is something suspicious about laughter in this context, since why would he mention that it is acceptable to laugh at a comedy?³⁰⁹ What is specifically laughable in the drama, and what does this reveal? Turning to a particular scene may help illuminate this problem. In the middle of Part II, (Josef) Garaus encounters the packer (Josef) Barloch, the latter "arm und abgerissen," on the street (145). The two soon notice that they they resemble each other in physical appearance, which later proves to be almost impossible for the self-obsessed Garaus to handle. Their dialogue proceeds as follows:

GARAUS. Passen S' a bißl auf, ja! Ich finde!

BARLOCH. No, no.

GARAUS. Das hab ich grad gern, anstoßen.

BARLOCH. Tut mir leid, Herr. Gschehn ist Ihnen ja nix.

GARAUS. Schaun S'her, den Mantel habn S' mir verdrückt. Weil ich das so gut leiden kann.

BARLOCH. Wird schon net so arg sein!

GARAUS. Da hört sich aber doch alles auf! Was fällt Ihnen denn eigentlich ein? (*Er schaut sich, jetzt erst, den Frechling an und fährt bei seinem Anblick zusammen*) Ja, wie – wie kommen denn Sie daher!

BARLOCH. Auf meine zwa Beiner. Des muß i schon sagn. Sie kommen mir bekannt vor.

GARAUS. Ja, Sie mir auch. Ich finde. Wie schaun Sie nur aus! Ja, genießen Sie sich denn gar nicht? Der Anzug! (*Er befühlt Barlochs Anzug*)

³⁰⁹ Gerald Stieg has argued that "Canettis 'Komödie' ist in Wahrheit eine Tragödie des Bewußtseins," yet rather than representing the painful process of coming to consciousness, as in the case of classical tragedy, what is played out is the opposite: the more dubious and foreboding process of "Bewußtseinsvernichtung." This raises the question of whether the drama could then also be considered a *Komödie des Unbewußtseins*. See Stieg, "Die Masse als dramatische Person. Überlegungen zu Elias Canettis *Komödie der Eitelkeit*," in *Elias Canettis Anthropologie und Poetik* (Munich: Hanser, 1984), 91, 112.

BARLOCH (*befühlt den Anzug von Garaus*). Erlauben schon. I weiß gar net, wie ich dazu komme.
 Sündteuer!
 GARAUS. Gelungen ist das. Jetzt sagen Sie mal “Ah!”
 BARLOCH. Ah!
 GARAUS. Stimmt. Die Zähne stimmen. Sehr merkwürdig. Könnten S’ den Kopf nicht ein bißerl – ich
 mein, herhalten?
 BARLOCH. No, warum denn net? (*Sie halten einander die Köpfe entgegen und befühlen sich gegenseitig.
 Barloch, der selber keinen hat, nimmt Garaus den Hut herunter*)
 GARAUS. Identisch. (*Barloch setzt sich den Hut auf*) Schon gar mit dem Hut. (145-146)

Gerald Stieg suggests that this scene “ist ausschließlich über der Thematisierung der Anagnorisis und des Ebenbildes aufgebaut” (106). Given that the lack of recognition is one of the central themes of this drama, his theory about this play being the reversal of ancient Greek tragedy is plausible, but what Stieg ignores is how this scene also provides support for the drama’s claim to be a comedy. Barloch initially mistakes Garaus’s question, “wie kommen denn Sie daher,” to be a question about how he literally arrived at this spot, thus answering accordingly: “auf meine zwa Beiner.” Clearly, Garaus is speaking more colloquially. Garaus cannot accept that someone as distinguished as him could resemble a member of the working class, or more accurately, that a member of the working class could resemble him. The humor of the dialogue is constituted by the fact that each recognizes not the other but only himself *in* the other (as in a mirror), while to the reader, these characters are clearly distinguishable through their distinct acoustic masks. This interplay of contrast, similarity, misunderstanding and false recognition, repeated in various iterations, is what furnishes the drama with its comic structure, if we understand the comic in the sense that Hans Blumenberg defines it: “der Zusammenstoß von Wirklichkeitsbegriffen, deren Unverständigkeit gegeneinander lächerlich, in der Konsequenz aber auch tödlich sein kann.”³¹⁰ Garaus cannot reconcile himself with his pseudo-*Ebenbild*, Barloch, who is actually a different person, and this nearly drives him insane: “Ich weiß ja wirklich nicht,” he later confesses, “ob ich das überleb. Ich fürcht, ich überleb es nicht” (149). Despite then, the gravity of the play’s

³¹⁰ See Blumenberg, “Der Sturz des Protophilosophen zur Komik der Reinen Theorie – Anhand einer Rezeptionsgeschichte der Thales-Anekdote,” in *Das Komische* (Munich: Fink Verlag, 1976), 11.

content, these are all, indeed, comic characters.

Or more precisely expressed: they are *laughable* characters within a comic structure.³¹¹

Whether the audience or reader actually laughs at them is inconsequential; what is important is that this very laughability breaks down the borders between the satirist, the audience and the object of satire, fulfilling Wondrak's premonition in his opening speech. Indeed in a crucial passage about the origins of laughter in *Masse und Macht*, Canetti himself explains why this is no innocuous phenomenon:

Das Lachen ist als vulgar beanstandet worden, weil man dabei den Mund weit öffnet und die Zähne entblößt.³¹² Gewiß enthält das Lachen in seinem Ursprung die Freude an einer Beute oder Speise, die einem als sicher erscheint Man lacht, anstatt es zu essen Der Mensch allein hat es gelernt, den vollkommenen Prozeß der Einverleibung durch einen symbolischen Akt zu ersetzen Unter Tieren gibt allein die Hyäne ein Laut von sich, der unserem Lachen wirklich nahekommt.³¹³

For Canetti, laughter has “symbolically” replaced the violent act of aggression committed by a predator toward his prey, namely that of consumption or *Einverleibung*. It is thus worth highlighting the parallel between Canetti and Benjamin, for whom *Einverleibung* constitutes the satirical act *par excellence*.³¹⁴ Crucial is that both writers see the bodily act of consumption or incorporation at work in satire, but while Benjamin identifies it with the satirist's mimicry, Canetti finds it in the act of laughter itself, the moment of elation at an imminent triumph—hence the indebtedness to Hobbes. Either way, there is something diabolical and animalistic

³¹¹ It is no easy task to make a categorical distinction between the comical and the laughable, and it is not the task of this dissertation to contribute substantially to this discourse. Hans Robert Jauss, however, has offered interesting speculations regarding this distinction, drawing from both Hegel and Helmuth Plessner. He writes: “Die Schwelle zum eigentlich Komischen ist also dort überschritten, wo die ästhetische Einstellung in der Gegensinnigkeit einer Situation den komischen Konflikt zwischen zwei verschiedenen Ebenen des menschlichen Daseins entdeckt . . . die nur lächerliche Ähnlichkeit gleichgekleideter Personen (Falle) tritt in ein komisches Licht, wenn sie als unbeabsichtigter Effekt eine ungewollte Gruppenidentität stiftet. . . .” See Jauss, *Das Komische*, 367. Regarding the example above, I would stick with my claim that they are laughable characters acting within a comical structure.

³¹² When Garaus makes Barloch open his mouth to bear his teeth, he is almost *making* the latter laugh, the coercive connotation of the word intended.

³¹³ See Canetti, *MuM*, 262.

³¹⁴ Manfred Schneider has further argued that Canetti clearly had Kraus in mind when describing the violent and aggressive origins of laughter, and he, too, makes a veiled reference to Benjamin: “Doch im Auge mancher Beobachter ist die anthropophagische Meute, die sich mit entblößten Zähnen an den Opfern der Krausschen Satire weidet, nur der vielköpfige Zwilling des Menschenfressers Karl Kraus.” See Schneider, “Canettis Exorcismus des Komischen,” in “*Ein Dichter braucht Ahnen*,” 55.

about laughter's origins for Canetti, which we must understand to be at work in this drama.³¹⁵

Manfred Schneider argues that Canetti therefore wishes to bring laughter “zum Verstummen” and drive it “aus der Urszene, über die sich so viele Lachtheoretiker beugten” (58). Schneider sees laughter in Canetti as a symptom of the “fallen” world in which Canetti operates, irredeemable and guilt-laden, and thus part of Canetti's critique of secularization. He concludes with a leading question: “Und geht es nicht auch in den Komödien Canettis darum, das Lachen unmöglich zu machen? Ohne Spiegel, ohne Ungewißheit des Todes sind ja elementare Varianten des Komischen, die Imitation, das Äffische und der Humor, zur Unmöglichkeit verdammt” (58).³¹⁶ But Anne Peiter makes the more nuanced argument by showing that Canetti's theory of laughter is, rather, marked by a profound ambivalence. If for Peiter, Canetti sees the dialectic of nature and culture at work in human laughter, it is also evident to her, “dass Canetti es ablehnt, den Verzicht auf die Gewalt, den der Lachende leistet, als wirkliche Gewaltlosigkeit anzuerkennen” (286). There is always a trace of violence left in laughter, reminding those who laugh—and those who are laughed at—of its origins.³¹⁷ Canetti's ambivalence thus leaves room for understanding laughter both as the achieved renunciation as well as a cipher of one's submission to a figure of authority: “Menschen, die lachen, beweisen demnach nicht nur ihren Gewaltverzicht, sondern auch ihre Zugehörigkeit zu einer Gemeinde, die zur Unterwerfung unter den Machthaber—Kraus oder Hitler etwa—entschlossen ist” (281). Peiter does not hesitate to associate Canetti's ruminations on the subject with the two historical

³¹⁵ Anne Peiter, in summarizing Canetti's theory, suggests that for Canetti, the “Unterschied zwischen Mensch und Tier tue sich auf, wo der Verzicht [auf eine Beute] beginnt.” See Peiter, *Komik und Gewalt: zur literarischen Verarbeitung der beiden Weltkriege und der Shoah* (Köln: Böhlau, 2007), 274.

³¹⁶ The lack of uncertainty regarding one's time of death is a reference to Canetti's third and final play, *Die Befristeten*.

³¹⁷ Peiter then transposes laughter onto the scene of war, in which she describes those on the battlefield as laughless, while those making the decisions from above, away from the immediate violence of war, are the ones laughing. She adds, however, that in modern warfare, even those directly responsible for the damage can laugh, since they, dropping bombs from on high, no longer have to look at their enemy in the eye before they kill him. See Peiter, 284-286.

figures Canetti explicitly linked.³¹⁸ One could say that if laughter in modernity is no longer an expression of pure violence (*Gewalt*), it is still an expression of power (*Macht*).³¹⁹

The implications of Canetti's theory of laughter are especially equipped to address this aspect of the drama in question. To reiterate: my argument is not that the one who laughs is culpable; rather, the laughable is built into the drama as a way to indict all parties involved: satirist, audience/reader, and object of ridicule. In this way, *Komödie* shares yet another common element with *Die letzten Tage*—illuminating another dimension of absolute satire—in that its laughability participates in the dynamics of power exhibited and critiqued in the text.³²⁰ In one sense, such laughability has taken over the role that the Nörgler once played: the laughing audience becomes part of the community subjected to the will of the “Machthaber,” if we understand this to be the satirical disposition itself, which demands consent. Laughter would then also serve, *pace* Canetti, as the cipher for one's own complicity with, and submission to the will of the satirist, who stands in for the dictator: in this way, laughter nearly closes the gap between the mere recognition of power and the exercise of it. All of the drama's figures are “Bajazzos,” reminding their reader/audience that as long as there is laughter, there is power, but also—and this is the key paradox—that laughter is necessary in order to make this recognition in the first place. Laughability is the placeholder for the utopian vision to which the drama can only negatively allude.

In describing the relationship between laughter and war, Peiter concludes: “Die Lachenden, die am Krieg nicht beteiligt sind, sind die eigentlichen Gewalttäter, die tötenden

³¹⁸ Recall Canetti's earlier admission that being Kraus's devotee was akin to living under a dictatorship.

³¹⁹ In distinguishing Canetti's theory from Henri Bergson's, Peiter writes: “Steht bei Bergson das Lachen im Dienst der Gesellschaft, die Abweichungen von einer als Norm gesetzten Lebendigkeit sanktioniert, so wird bei Canetti das Lachen zunächst einmal als *physisches* und damit dann doch auch als *tierisches* Ereignis im Augenschein genommen.” See Peiter, 274.

³²⁰ Stieg goes as far to argue that “[d]ie Komödie mit ihrem Grundeinfall kann gelesen werden als Metadrama der *Letzten Tage*, geschrieben im Augenblick, da Kraus vor Hitler auf den Einfall verzichtete.” See Stieg, “Die Masse als dramatische Person,” 93.

Soldaten aber gehören auf die Seite der Opfer” (284). Metaphorically bridging the theater of war to the theater of drama, one could say that the satirist along with the laughing audience/reader observe the laughable characters from a distance, while the characters themselves—those who inflict actual violence upon each other—remain utterly laughless: their guilt is a result of their inability to laugh. This might be the drama’s final word on the way satire can be political without advocating a particular position, or without becoming blatant *Tendenzsatire*.

V. Conclusion

In considering Canetti’s dramatic oeuvre as a whole, Peter Laemmle has concluded:

Canetti does not want to improve and instruct his spectator. This is where he differs quite essentially from his model Karl Kraus. It would never occur to [Canetti] to send onstage the moralist who, with raised index finger, editorializes an event whose moral intent is already evident—as Karl Kraus did with the character of the ‘Grumbler’ in the *The Last Days of Mankind*. Canetti’s moralism has nothing to do with the defense of moral norms. It springs rather from a fear of what people can be capable of . . . His form of satire thus loses the reproachful character that marked satire as a genre from Juvenal to Karl Kraus . . . (117).

Laemmle sees Kraus’s “defense of moral norms” as belonging to a wholly different order than Canetti’s “moralism,” whose dramas are, for Laemmle, absent of the judgment and reproach that constitute Kraus’s more Juvenalian satire. What informs Canetti’s texts, for Laemmle, is the fear of what people are capable of doing (in the future), not the wrath directed at what they have already done (in the past). In this way, Canetti’s satire fulfills Lukács’s condition of portraying that which is possible. Laemmle further suggests that at the root of Canetti’s satires lies not misanthropy, as is ostensibly the case with Kraus, but rather a “utopian humanism” (117). Yet while this utopianism may be traceable in some of Canetti’s more essayistic work, it is hardly, if at all present in *Komödie*—again, perhaps evinced only in the dual function of its laughability. It is thus difficult to determine what sort of “Gegenbild” Canetti might be hinting at in this drama;

it is certainly not a conventional “humanism,” as Bernhard Spies would have it.³²¹ Neither Laemmle nor Spies is being critical enough.

Spies can only come to this conclusion because he views Canetti as a mere witness to his dystopia, and not in any way as a participant.³²² But the characters in *Komödie* often blur the line between victim and perpetrator; hardly any figure is entirely innocent of the criminality that informs the world of this drama, but neither is any one figure or institution solely responsible for its perpetuation and ultimate dissolution. The drama does not contain the wrath so obsessively articulated in *Die letzten Tage*, but even if it lacks a Canetti proxy (à la the Nörgler), laughability stands in for the author’s absence. What Canetti demands—a self-contained, immanent satire of “self-denunciation” in the vein of *Woyzeck* (at least his reading of it)—proves to be formally impossible, simply because to intervene already means to intervene *from without*. But this does not necessarily indicate the drama’s failure, as Barnouw had earlier argued. Rather, it further illuminates the structure and predicament of modern satire in one of its more radical iterations, and more importantly, in the face of such a formidable opponent as fascism. The drama, I suggest, foregrounds social contradictions in order to show that they are laughable *in themselves*. If Canetti’s satire is even more cynical than Kraus’s, one need only consider the historical events that Canetti was both responding to and anticipating.

³²¹ Spies writes: “Canettis Komödie bezieht sich auf die Grundprinzipien des Humanismus . . .”, which is hard to accept given that the drama presupposes the annihilation of subjectivity. See Spies, 161. I will further explore the dimensions of the grotesque when I analyze Lasker-Schüler’s drama in the next chapter.

³²² Spies writes: “Der Autor des absurden Spiels muß sich *nicht* standing versichern, daß er und seine Utopie vom allgemeinen Übel (noch) nicht vereinnahmt sind, weil er das Problem, er könnte dazugehören, gar nicht hat.” See Spies, 168. Emphasis added.

CHAPTER 4

Satire Undone: Else Lasker-Schüler's *IchundIch*

Die Dämonen von heutzutage sind so übertrieben wie ein Theaterbösewicht auf der Schmiere, doch die Schmiere ist ein Stück Welttheater geworden oder eine Menagerie, und vor deren Insassen vergeht das Lachen.³²³

Und doch macht solches Denken die Wehrlosigkeit mit wie nur eines, das nicht einmal diese ausdrücken vermöchte; es erlebt mit dem Verhängnis der Dinge das ihres Wachstums, den Wettlauf der Satire mit dem Stoff, der in triumphaler Ahnungslosigkeit die Form vollendet und ausspielt, deren Nachbildung nicht mehr möglich ist, deren Abbildung nicht mehr geglaubt wird, deren Udenkbarkeit zum Fehler des Bildners wird.³²⁴

I. The Reality of Fascism and the End of Satire

To recall: Kraus did not actually fall silent as the National Socialists rose to power, and yet his last poem, “Man frage nicht,” which concludes with the line, “das Wort entschlief, als jene Welt erwachte,” has often been interpreted as a symbolic capitulation before the powers that came to be.³²⁵ Satire has been outdone by the reality that transcends it. Similarly, Ernst Bloch writes in 1937 that today’s “demons,” comparable to the miscreants on the stages of bad vaudeville theater, have themselves become so “exaggerated” that they have transformed history into a “world-theater” or a “menagerie,” but one, in implicit contrast to previous incarnations thereof, that can no longer be laughed at. Each in his own way—Kraus through his densely allusive *Walpurgisnacht* (which weaves in Goethe and Schiller in the context of the Third Reich), Bloch in less ambiguous terms—thus points to the intimate relationship between the National Socialists and the histrionic. And yet each is skeptical about the role of satire and

³²³ Ernst Bloch, “Der Nazi und das Unsägliche,” from *Gesamtausgabe Band II: Politische Messungen, Pestzeit, Vormärz* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970), 187.

³²⁴ Kraus, *Die Dritte Walpurgisnacht* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1989), 31.

³²⁵ See Kraus, F 888, 4, 1933. Kraus’s last poem similarly prompted a wide range of reactions from supporters and detractors alike. Perhaps most famous among these is Brecht’s poem—“Über die Bedeutung des zehnzeiligen Gedichtes in der 888. Nummer der Fackel”—in which he offers a defense of this silence: “Als der Beredte sich entschuldigte / Daß seine Stimmer versage / Trat das Schweigen vor den Richtertisch und / Gab sich zu erkennen als Zeuge.” Reprinted in Paul Schick, *Karl Kraus: in Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1978), 129. After Kraus declared his support for Dollfuß as the lesser of two evils, Brecht rescinded his earlier defense, again in poetic form, and ended their friendship.

laughter more broadly conceived as plausible aesthetic or political responses to the historical caesura that Bloch calls “das Unsägliche.”

The notion that satire had essentially arrived at its historical conclusion actually anticipated several critical debates that occurred in the decades following the Second World War about the status of comedy vis-à-vis the Third Reich. Adorno, for example, denied the very possibility that irony, satire, and humor (all of which he equated) could serve as adequate responses to fascism because such comedians and ironists could no longer presume that they had the abstract notion of “world history” behind them.³²⁶ But what does it mean for satire and its concomitant effect, laughter, to have run their course? In an attempt to account for the severe curtailing of satirical lyric poetry (the “Schmähgedicht”) produced by poets in exile after 1939—a discourse that comes closer to the concerns of this chapter—Wolfgang Emmerich first turns to nineteenth-century philosophy for a possible explanation. First pointing out that the Hegelian opposition between “der endlichen Subjektivität” and “der entarteten Äußerlichkeit” came to full expression under fascism, he then argues “daß eine Extremsituation dieses Verhältnisses erreicht war, eine äußerste Zuspitzung im Widerspruch von Ideal und Wirklichkeit, die vielen Autoren die Satire als *sinnlos* erscheinen ließ.”³²⁷ While not addressing the problematic of exilic *drama* and perhaps (though understandably) too focused on the historical individual at the expense of the poetic subject, Emmerich points to the necessary failure of satirical language to confront the historical reality on which it necessarily depends. For Emmerich, the ostensibly

³²⁶ The whole quotation from Adorno comes from the short essay, “Ist die Kunst heiter?” and reads as follows: “Unverkennbar das Läppische, Schmierenskomödiantische, Subalterne, die Wahlverwandschaft Hitlers und der Seinen mit Revolverjournalismus und Spitzeltum. Lachen läßt darüber sich nicht. Die blutige Realität war nicht jener Geist oder Ungeist, dessen der Geist zu spotten vermöchte . . . Komödien über den Faschismus aber machten sich zu Komplizen jener törichten Denkgewöhnheit, die ihn vorweg für geschlagen hält, weil die stärkeren Bataillone der Weltgeschichte gegen ihn stünden . . . Die geschichtlichen Kräfte, welche das Grauen hervorbrachten, stammen aus der Gesellschaftsstruktur an sich. Es sind keine der Oberfläche und viel zu mächtig, als daß es irgendetwas zustünde, sie zu behandeln, als hätte er die Weltgeschichte hinter sich, und die Führer wären tatsächlich die Clowns, deren Gedalber ihre Mordreden nachträglich erst ähnlich wurden.” See Adorno, *NL*, 604.

³²⁷ See Emmerich, *Lyrik des Exils* (Frankfurt: Reclam, 1986), 35.

indissoluble ‘I’ presupposed by any satirical poem—and, I would add, by satire as such the way I have thus far been presenting it—could no longer preserve itself within the “extreme situation” that fascism presented to these specifically exiled writers. As a result of this fundamental “Identitätskrise,” satire appeared to them as without sense or meaning.³²⁸

Within the context of theater, more recent analyses have not only rediscovered the several satirical and comical dramas written in exile between 1933 and 1945, but have also attempted to rehabilitate or, at the very least, provide a historical-theoretical explanation of this phenomenon. Borrowing his terminology from Benjamin, Stephan Braese has argued that the “Ambivalenz, die solche Einverleibung [des Gegners] – d.h.: die satirische Methode – in der Konfrontation mit dem Nationalsozialismus birgt, bildet den zentralen Gegenstand der satirepoetologischen Debatte,” suggesting that the essence of satire remained, on some level, intact during this period, despite having to confront the question of its own complicity or ambiguity vis-à-vis the object of its critique—precisely the problematic Kraus and Canetti were confronting in their respective works even before the Second World War.³²⁹ In other words, if satire consists in *incorporating* its object, the political and ethical stakes of this practice are raised to a considerable degree given our—and perhaps even their—knowledge of the radical evil that Nazism appeared to embody, the evil that Bloch believed required a new vocabulary altogether. And in a comprehensive aesthetic analysis of the different modes of comic theater produced in exile, Bernhard Spies has argued that many of these comedies, on the one hand, were direct outgrowths of the techniques and aesthetic dispositions that were developed during the Weimar Period and subsequently

³²⁸ Referring specifically to Kurt Tucholsky, Emmerich writes that the consequence of such a realization was “literarische Kapitulation.” See Emmerich, 35.

³²⁹ See Braese, “Selbstbegegnung,” in *Hitler im Visier: Literarische Satiren und Karikaturen als Waffe gegen Nationalsozialismus* (Wuppertal: Arco, 2005), 18. The core of Braese’s article, which takes Benjamin’s theory of satire as its point of departure, is the largely unknown satirical novel by Heinrich Mann written in 1943, *Lidice*, whose primary subject matter is the historical massacre at the eponymous Czechoslovakian town and the assassination of Heydrich that prompted it.

continued during the postwar era in the guise of Absurdism.³³⁰ On the other hand, their authors had to contend with the paradox of being faced with the hostile conditions that threatened the individual subject combined with the awareness of the singular power of the enemy. As Spies writes, “Die Komödie des Exils streitet daher nicht nur gegen den Nationalsozialismus. Sie führt diesen Streit, indem sie gegen die nur zu begründete Furcht kämpft, dem bekannten Übel zu erliegen, kurz: indem sie darum kämpft, *dass Komödie noch möglich sei*” (17). The comedies and satires produced in exile (whose authors included such figures as Georg Kaiser, Bertolt Brecht, and Franz Werfel) were not only written in unified opposition to fascism; they were written in order to prove that they could be written at all, that the comic was indeed still to be considered a viable aesthetic response to the phenomenon of National Socialism.

In surveying the development of this genre to its historical end (and the several subcategories that he differentiates from within, including the *Zeitstück*, the *Boulevardstück*, satire and the grotesque), Spies comes to an understandably cynical conclusion about the status of comedy written in exile, one worth repeating as a way to introduce the text that will henceforth occupy my critical attention:

Wenn die Komödie der Selbstbehauptung zum moralischen Welttheater wird, das nicht mehr dem Menschen seine Welt erschließt, sondern nur noch sein eigenes Stattfinden gegen die Welt verteidigt, dann liegt das Eingeständnis nahe, daß es die eine Welt mit einer intelligiblen und als eigene Wirklichkeit des Subjekts erfahrbaren Ordnung nicht gibt. (149)

A text not discussed by Spies—perhaps because it would challenge his understanding of aesthetic continuity during the period of exile, and yet surprising given his concern with both

³³⁰ See Spies, *Die Komödie in der deutschsprachigen Literatur des Exils*, 5. As far as I can tell, this is the only fairly recent comprehensive account and analysis of the various types of comic theater produced in exile, including close readings of works by Brecht, Werfel, Canetti, Hörvath, Kaiser, and several others. One of Spies’s fundamental theses is that these comedies did not provide some sort of caesura in the long tradition of comic drama, and are, rather, to be seen as (at least formally) continuations and extensions of the dramatic techniques developed during the Weimar era. Spies analyzes various types of comedy that comprised this spectrum: *Boulevardstücke*, *Zeitstücke*, satires, grotesques, and the more utopian-oriented variation.

“Welttheater” as well as with questions of authorial subjectivity—is the third and final drama that Else Lasker-Schüler wrote while living in exile in Jerusalem: *IchundIch: eine theatralische Tragödie* (1940-41)³³¹, a grotesque parody of the Nazis and of “high” German culture alike.³³²

Consisting primarily of a play within a play that has been written by the explicitly exiled “Dichterin” (who is also a character in the drama) and directed by the likewise exiled Austrian-Jewish playwright Max Reinhardt, *IchundIch* is certainly the most formally experimental and arguably the most politically engaged drama Lasker-Schüler wrote, better situated not within the trajectory of her dramatic oeuvre but rather within the context of her late poetry.³³³ The drama opens with a prelude in which the “Dichterin” is walking through the streets of Jerusalem in the early 1940s, telling her guest, as they are about to enter a theater in the fictional “Höllengrund” near the Tower of David, that the events about to transpire took place ten and a half years ago “in der gottverlassenen Nacistadt”³³⁴ (185). The first through fifth act comprise the play within the play, which takes place in Hell; in the sixth act we return to Jerusalem, specifically to the garden

³³¹ Lasker-Schüler, *IchundIch* in *Werke und Briefe: Kritische Ausgabe – Band 2: Dramen* (Frankfurt: Jüdischer Verlag im Suhrkamp, 1996), 314-360.

³³² Though it was written sometime between 1940-41, *IchundIch* was not formally recognized until several decades later. It was Margarete Kupper who rediscovered the drama in 1970 and wrote its first afterword; the drama’s first staging in Germany took place in Düsseldorf in 1979 under the direction of Michael Gruner. Part of the reason for this belatedness can be traced back to the drama’s initial readers, Werner Kraft and Ernst Ginsburg, both of whom were critics and friends of Lasker-Schüler living in Jerusalem. Given the drama’s seeming illegibility, grammatical incorrectness, and aesthetic incoherence, Ginsburg wrote to Kraft, “Denn dieses Drama ist doch der Spiegel der jammervollsten Zerstörung und Auflösung,” and further, “daß ich von Herzen bitten möchte, im Interesse des Angedenkens und des unzerstörten Bildes der Lasker von einer Veröffentlichung dieses Stückes abzuzehen. Ich habe nur mit tiefster Erschütterung, ja ich gestehe: zuweilen nur unter Tränen lesen können.” Quoted from Kevin Vennemann’s recent *Nachwort* to *IchundIch* (Frankfurt: Jüdischer Verlag im Suhrkamp, 2009), 98-99. For more on the drama’s *Entstehungsgeschichte*, including its first performance in Jerusalem, see “Anmerkungen,” 68-78.

³³³ Lasker-Schüler’s other two plays include *Die Wupper* (1908) and *Arthur Aronymus und seine Väter* (1933), respectively, the second of which earned her the Kleist award. The late collection of poems for which ELS is most well known is entitled *Mein blaues Klavier* (1943), many of whose poems address the themes of exile, death, her relationship to her mother, and the crumbling world around her. In 1937, ELS wrote a prose piece on her ambulatory experiences in Palestine titled *Das Hebräerland*, which was ultimately included in the collection *Das PalästinaBuch*. She initially intended to include *IchundIch* in a sequel to this first collection, to be titled *Das zweite PalästinaBuch*, but this project never came to fruition. For more on this sequence of events and more generally on Lasker-Schüler’s literary output during her final years in exile, see Sigrid Bauschinger, *Else Lasker-Schüler: Biographie* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2004), 353-447.

³³⁴ It is unclear why Lasker-Schüler used “c” instead of the common “z” in her spelling of “Naci,” though I would surmise that it had something to do with wanting to subvert traditional orthography as a way to express a political conviction. She might also simply be poking fun.

of an eye doctor, and the postlude is also set there, presumably inside the theater. Among the drama's three primary sets of characters are historical personalities culled from the contemporary German, American, and Palestinian landscape; fictional characters from Goethe's *Faust*; and biblical figures that have reappeared on their "native" land. Together, these include Faust and Mephisto (the drama's central dialogic pair), the Ritz Brothers (an American comic trio), the Baal (an idol from the Old Testament), Marte Schwertlein, Hitler, Göbbels, Göhring, von Ribbentrop, Schirach, van der Lubbe, etc., and several dancing devils. The audience, the critics, the journalist Gershon Swet and a scarecrow all make appearances; and then there is the poet herself, who often interrupts her own creation, and whose sundered ego lends the drama its title ("IchundIch"), though, as I will be showing, there are many similar subjective divisions within the characters' constitutions that inform the drama's conception.³³⁵ The story revolves around the conversations between Faust and Mephisto about the state of the world and the possibility of eternity, while the subplot features the Nazis' ultimately failed attempt to conquer hell once they have taken over the world.

Given the wide-ranging scope of the cast, the multiple aesthetic techniques employed, and the various themes and motifs the drama encompasses—heaven and the conquest of hell, exile, literary accumulation, mortality and immortality, humans, devils and angels, Faustian striving, Mephistophelian negation, death, destruction and Nazi rule—Irene Pieper has rightly identified *IchundIch*, along with Kraus's *Die letzten Tage*, as an exemplary representative of "Welttheater," much like Bloch had called the Nazis themselves. For Pieper, such a form of theater brings "die epochentypische Spannung zwischen der Sehnsucht nach einem Gesamtsinn

³³⁵ Brian Richardson has argued that such a constitutive split in the poet's character (one way of understanding the title "IchundIch") is representative of the way modern drama "has for some time transcended the simple, humanist narrator figure and has gone on to create 'unnatural' narrators who exceed and subvert the limit of individual consciousness." See Richardson, *Unnatural Voices: Extreme Narration in Modern and Contemporary Fiction*, (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2006), 113.

von Welt und Geschichte und der Erfahrung seines Entzugs und Verlusts zum Ausdruck.” It would certainly be plausible to read the tension between the longing for wholeness and meaning and the realization of its loss or impossibility in *IchundIch* as a parallel to the Faustian conflict between the finite and the infinite, articulated in both the drama’s formal structure as well as its central thematic premise: the sundering of the poet’s subjectivity into both the creator of, and character within her dramatic world.³³⁶ This duality suggests a structure of implication, but the poet, as will become clear, is not to be conflated with the Nörgler from *Die letzten Tage*.

In the afterword to the drama’s first unabridged publication, Margarete Kupper writes that Lasker-Schüler’s “Sinn für Humor” was “der Sinn für die Parodie, und sie wußte wohl, wie gut sie selbst zu parodieren war Nicht nur Bestandteile von Goethes Faust, sondern auch solche von dessen Parodierung scheinen hier wiederum parodistisch aufgenommen worden zu sein.”³³⁷ Describing how the play parodies Lasker-Schüler’s earlier poems, Goethe as a historical personality, *Faust Teil I* and *II*, and even parodies of *Faust* at once (Theodor Vischer’s *Faust. Der Tragödie dritter Teil*), Kupper underscores without delving into the implications of a crucial category that I will retain for my analysis: parody.³³⁸ Andrea Krauß’s thoroughly comprehensive and deconstructive reading furthermore offers important insights into the relationship between the parodic, intertextual and trans-epochal nature of the drama and the status of Lasker-Schüler

³³⁶ In her analysis, Pieper brings together Benjamin’s *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*, Kraus’s *Die letzten Tage*, Hofmannsthal’s *Das Salzburger grosse Welttheater*, and Lasker-Schüler’s *IchundIch* in order to tease out shared features of each text that together constitute her definition of “Welttheater.” See the introduction to Pieper, *Modernes Welttheater: Untersuchungen zum Welttheatermotiv zwischen Katastrophenerfahrung und Weltanschauungssuche bei Walter Benjamin, Karl Kraus, Hugo von Hofmannsthal und Else Lasker-Schüler* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2000), 11-42.

³³⁷ See Kupper, “Nachwort” in Else Lasker-Schüler, *Die Wupper und andere Dramen* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1986), 317.

³³⁸ Betty Falkenberg has further echoed Kupper’s sentiments, calling *IchundIch* an “elaborate arabesque on the Faustian theme.” See Falkenberg, *Else Lasker-Schüler: A Life* (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Pub, 2003), 198.

as a poet living and writing in exile.³³⁹ And most recently, Kevin Vennemann has argued that *IchundIch* deserves a place in the conversation about contemporary satires of National Socialism, which, he claims, were not merely Hollywood affair: “Genau zwischen [Chaplin’s *The Great Dictator* and Lubitsch’s *To Be or Not to Be*] . . . holt Else Lasker-Schüler sich mit Max Reinhardt und den Ritz Brothers als Nebenfiguren ihres Schauspiels *IchundIch* ein kleines Stück Hollywood auch ins schwierige Exil nach Jerusalem” (93). Each of these critics thus recognizes the drama’s comic treatment of the Nazi figures and the literary characters as well as underscores the significance of Lasker-Schüler’s exilic experience for the drama’s conception. My intention, however, is to read these categories as mutually conditioning one another, as well as to further clarify the terms parody, exile, satire and the grotesque as they function in this particular context.

Notoriously difficult concepts to define, exile and *Exilliteratur* occupy their own critical discourse, even a summary of which cannot be reproduced here. In terms of exile as a historical condition, Elizabeth Bronfen understands the latter as the politically motivated forced (or unforced) expulsion from one’s home country, after which the exile seeks out a new home abroad. Exiles, even those who choose this condition, are separated from their “natural” surroundings and the attendant social context entailed by such surroundings. They often must abandon their first language and learn the language and customs of a new culture, which always remains, in a sense, foreign to them. In “Exil in der Literatur: Zwischen Metapher und Realität,” Bronfen further advocates the idea that exile is not a purely historical condition, that it also bespeaks something like a trans-epochal poetic condition often expressed in the language of metaphor.³⁴⁰

Exile thus functions, for Bronfen, as a heuristic for textual analysis that is “sowohl biographisch

³³⁹ See Krauß, *Zerbrechende Tradierung: Zu Kontexten des Schauspiels “IchundIch” von Else Lasker-Schüler* (Vienna: Passagenverlag, 2002).

³⁴⁰ See Bronfen, “Exil in der Literatur: Zwischen Metapher und Realität,” *Arcadia* 28:2 (1993), 167-183. Bronfen’s understanding of exile and its literature could also be linked to the question of the diaspora, though this is not a discourse I will be taking up in this chapter.

referentiell, thematisch inhaltlich und textästhetisch strukturell zu dekodieren” (171). With this Bronfen implies that a work of exile does not have to have been produced in exile, and that exile can also be understood as an aesthetic category.

In surveying the scope of secondary literature on the subject, Bettina Englmann rejects the way that scholars of *Exilliteratur*—roughly understood to refer to the literature produced between 1933 and 1945—have repeatedly failed to register both the historical specificity of this moment as well as the contribution that *Exilliteratur* has made to literary modernism, given that it still tends to be largely discussed under what she calls the “Verfallsparadigma,” coextensive with the assumption that there was very little aesthetic innovation that came out of this period. Englmann accordingly writes: “Völlig aus dem Blick gerät, daß Exilliteratur eine Literatur des 20. Jahrhunderts ist, eine Literatur der Moderne, die historisch fest verortet ist, und zwar in der Literatur der 30er und 40er Jahre” (4).³⁴¹ Bronfen and Englmann thus conclude—and I follow suit—that the literature of exile needs to be understood in its proper historical context *as well as* interpreted as a poetic practice that can take on many different forms and can affect all levels of the writing (and reading) process. Which brings us back to the case of Lasker-Schüler, who, after failed attempts to secure permanent residence in Switzerland, finally settled in Jerusalem in 1937, in a land that Alfred Bodenheimer has called her “auferlegte Heimat,” pointing to the ambiguity felt by the German-Jewish poet upon her ostensible “return” (17).³⁴²

Pertaining specifically to the comic dimension of *IchundIch*, my argument is that this drama is not a satire of the National Socialists in any conventional sense, but, rather, a reflection on the limitations of satire that manifests itself predominantly in the form of a parody that must

³⁴¹ For more, see Englmann, *Poetik des Exils: Die Modernität der deutschsprachigen Exilliteratur* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2001).

³⁴² See Bodenheimer, *Die auferlegte Heimat: Else Lasker-Schülers Emigration in Palästina* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1995).

be understood in conjunction with the experience and practice of exile as it unfolds throughout this chapter. Parody, unlike satire (and therefore unlike the other texts I have thus far analyzed) requires what Linda Hutcheon calls a “target text” that is “always another work of art, or, more generally, another form of coded discourse”—in this way, its critique of historical reality is always mediated through another text.³⁴³ Kraus makes an interesting point when he declares the death of satire in the face of the National Socialists; but the spirit of satire, I will argue, is reborn in *IchundIch* in the guise of parody. And in this particular case, it is a parody that formally undermines one of satire’s ineluctable presuppositions: the undivided individual subjectivity that posits itself over and against the strictly historical world. Just as any instantiation of a genre or textual practice will necessarily contribute to a richer understanding of this genre’s meaning and function over time, *IchundIch* contains a parody of *Faust*, Goethe, the classical German tradition and Nazi discourse, but it also questions the very notion of a stable, originary, or in any way centered precursor text to begin with, and therein lies its connection to exile as a textual practice and a critical perspective. By focusing on the drama’s employment of quotation, interruption, *Einverleibung*, the grotesque, and laughter, I will finally show how *IchundIch* both dialogues with texts from the past (including those that I have previously subjected to analysis) as well provides a unique *Schauplatz* for understanding the essential links between and among these various terms. Lasker-Schüler’s drama challenges the notion that National Socialism “hat schlechterdings nichts, was lachen macht,”³⁴⁴ and it also shows how a formally experimental drama could re-invent the status of the comic at a historical juncture that was beyond laughable.

II. “Nur Ewigkeit ist kein Exil”: Parody in Exile

³⁴³ See Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 16.

³⁴⁴ See Franz Norbert Mennemeier and Frithjop Trapp, *Deutsche Exildramatik 1933-1950* (Munich: Fink, 1980), 19.

Referring to the play as a “Höllenspiel” performed on her “Herzensbühne” (186),³⁴⁵ the poet exits the stage at the end of the *Vorspiel* whistling the tune to a nineteenth-century Swabian *Volkslied* and thereby ushering in the play within the play: “Muß i denn muß i denn zum Städtli hinaus, Städtli hinaus – und du, mein Schatz, bleibst hier.....”.³⁴⁶ The song describes a soldier’s promise to remain faithful to his lover as he departs for war, establishing a connection between the play about to unfold and the “war” described in it, and hinting at the painful possibility of not being able to return home: an invocation of exile, in which the theater could be made analogous to the “Städtli” of the song. The scene thus invokes a sense of displacement, for the poet (the character in the drama, but clearly also an allusion to Lasker-Schüler), too, is not “at home” (187). She is, rather, traversing the foreign streets of Jerusalem. The divisions between play and play within the play and home and abroad reflect the split subjectivity of the poet, who appears to be estranged from herself.³⁴⁷

Indeed, nearly all figures and locations in the drama are, in some sense, displaced or exiled from their original home, both spatially and temporally. The first act, for example, takes place in the “Höllengrund” of ancient Palestine, somewhere near the Tower of David (the historical entrance to the Old City of Jerusalem) but itself not a geographically recognizable location. This particular Jerusalem is foreign to all of the characters: Max Reinhardt has been summoned from Hollywood to direct the play, as have the Ritz Brothers, a comic trio who

³⁴⁵ Inca Rumold interprets the “Herzensbühne” as a direct function of the drama’s central theme: “The fusion of I and I, rather than a mere yearning for finding the self, is a strategy by which the author becomes her own text. By presenting the subject—herself—as object, she confronts its multiple sociohistorical components on the ‘stage of her heart’ (*Herzensbühne*).” See Rumold, “Introduction” in *Three Plays: Dark River, Arthur Aronymous and his Ancestors, and I and I* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2005), xvii.

³⁴⁶ This *Volkslied* is a traditional soldier’s song of departure from the nineteenth century that has been attributed originally to Friedrich Silcher. For more on this, see Vennemann, 79.

³⁴⁷ Much of Lasker-Schüler’s poetry that she composed around this time also addresses, in one way or another, the sense of self-estrangement and exile that is foregrounded in her literary counterpart in *IchundIch*. See, for example, the poems “Hingabe” and “So lange es ist her,” in Lasker-Schüler, *Werke Band I* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1996), 349, 360.

occasionally chime in with prolix nonsense, though a nonsense that somehow fits within the logic of the drama; the biblical kings Saul, David and Solomon are described as “unheimlich bewegungslos, bunt und angemalt wie die Figuren eines Panoptikums,” suggesting that they, too, are foreigners in their own land.³⁴⁸ We know, however, that we are not dealing with a purely “theatralische Tragödie” as soon as the drama’s critics are comically described as taking their seats with plenty of time, “armverschränkt” (187). The comic undertone is reinforced when the poet speaks to the diegetic audience in doggerel, or comic verse composed in irregular rhythm, which sets it apart from the more serious verse of tragedy, thereby producing a reflection on its dramatic precursor:

Höret, Publikum, die Mordgeschichte –
 Die ich an mir in finsterner Nacht vollbracht!
 Und da die Wahrheit ich berichte, wenn ich dichte,
 Laßt allen Zweifel außer Acht!
 Es handelt sich nicht etwa um - Gesichte,
 Da ich mich teilte in zwei Hälften kurz vor Tageslichte,
 In zwei Teile: IchundIch! (188).

The poet’s division into two parts invokes the drama’s strongest thematic link to the Faustian theme of bearing two souls “in one breast,” the one that longs for infinitude, divine knowledge, and the like, and the one that is bound to the finite, worldly world.³⁴⁹ And yet it is not simply a repetition of the Faust-legend that we encounter in the poet’s “story of murder,” for the violence of the present historical moment is the source of this egoic split, placing the parody that follows in an aesthetically and historically specific relationship to Goethe’s *Faust*, the drama’s primary textual interlocutor. Here, the explicitly female, Jewish poet challenges the male and ostensibly

³⁴⁸ For more on Lasker-Schüler’s aesthetic appropriation of the bible, see Andrea Henneke-Weischer, *Poetisches Judentum: Die Bibel im Werk Else Lasker-Schülers* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald Verlag, 2003). Meir Wiener was one of the earliest contemporary critics of ELS to notice the predominance of what he called her use of “Orientale Tropen”—which he attributed to her Judaism—suggesting that much of her poetry would remain inaccessible to “Okzidentaler Geschmack.” For more, see Wiener, “Else Lasker-Schüler,” in *Juden in der deutschen Literatur: Essays über zeitgenössische Schriftsteller*, ed. Gustav Krojanker (Berlin: Welt-Verlag, 1922), 179-192.

³⁴⁹ The famous line from Goethe’s *Faust* to which the scene above alludes is: “Zwei Seelen wohnen, ach! in meiner Brust, / Die eine will sich von der andern trennen; / Die eine hält, in derber Liebeslust. . . .” See Goethe, *Faust: Der Tragödie Erster Teil* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2000), 33.

most “Germanic” of all literary protagonists by appropriating the role of the Faust figure—all before the actual Faust character makes his appearance in the play.³⁵⁰ *IchundIch* thus begins with an element of usurpation and subversion carried out on multiple levels.

From the first act onwards, when “das eigentliche Spiel beginnt” (189), the Faust/Mephisto dyad constitutes the drama’s primary dialogic pair and, I argue, another iteration of the egoic division of which the poet earlier speaks. Faust and Mephisto are ultimately one and the same character, even physically uniting in one body toward the end of the drama. In this way, their relationship in *IchundIch* serves as an interpretation, critique, or parody of their relationship in *Faust*; perhaps they were always to be understood as one character bearing “two souls.” In the opening act, Faust—who often refers to himself or is referred to as Goethe, suggesting that he has been exiled from his most celebrated creator—tells Mephisto that he has been informed by the latter’s devils that his drama “ersten Teil und auch den Zweiten” has been booed and burned in Weimar “ein für alle Mal,” which Mephisto confirms, adding: “kein Grund zum Grübeln, Doktor Faust, das Testament von ‘Gott’ geschrieben, brannte ebenfalls der erste und der zweite Teil der Bibeln” (190). Mephisto first draws a parallel between the two *Fausts* and the two *Testaments*, the one considered a bible of German culture and the other, the bible proper.³⁵¹ Combined, the two serve as the most referenced works in the entire play. Both sets of books, Mephisto assures in his allusion to the Nazi book burning of 1933, have met the same fate. *IchundIch* thus treats its parody of *Faust* and the bible (but particularly the former) as a rebirth,

³⁵⁰ This scene takes on another dimension when the poet then announces: “An meine teure Mutter <Stern> diese Zeile: / Der Goethehochverehrerin: sie ist / die Pathin meiner beiden Hälftenteile” (188). Lasker-Schüler’s mother, a devotee of Goethe and in this way a metonymy of assimilated German-Jewry’s devotion to the poet, which in turn served as a symbol of its membership in the *Bildungsbürgertum*, makes her way into the drama as a signifier of a cultural phenomenon only now rendered a moment in history.

³⁵¹ Albrecht Schöne has recently cited a former German Federal Minister of the Interior essentially making a similar claim: “In the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung of 19 June 1999, the then minister Otto Schilly wrote that everybody ‘ought to have read two books: the bible and Goethe’s Faust.’” See Schöne, “Faust – today,” in *Goethe’s Faust: Theatre of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 30.

one that entails a sort of killing off of these precursor texts—this is entailed in the poet’s description of her drama as a “Mordgeschichte.” But it seems as if the poet’s Mephisto is also alluding to Goethe’s Mephisto, for whom “alles was entsteht / ist werth dass es zu Grunde geht.”³⁵² In this case, what is worthy of death is the very text that has held such a singular status in the German canon and whose parody is, in this context, expressed as a form of murder. Parody thus serves at once as an act of accumulation or accretion of texts, insofar as it becomes simply another variation on a theme (one version of *Faust* among many), but also an act of reduction and destruction, insofar as it problematizes the relationship between Goethe’s *Faust* and the contemporary historical moment that seeks to appropriate it unaltered and without resistance.³⁵³ *IchundIch* thus also reveals Goethe’s *Faust* as but one iteration among many, and forces it to relinquish its implicit claim to eternity. Structurally speaking, parody in this way challenges the notion of an originary, inimitable text.

One of the ways that the drama’s critical tendency plays out is through the practice of comic, and at times alienating interruption: not a single dramatic mode or technique asserts authority over another, as each character or mode interrupts the next. *IchundIch* thus contains resonances with the nineteenth-century Romantic dramas (specifically Tieck’s *Die verkehrte Welt* and its play-within-a-play structure) and Brechtian epic theater, as well as anticipates Beckett’s post-war theater of the absurd, thus confirming Spies’s argument recapitulated earlier regarding the continuities between *Exilkomödien* and what followed.³⁵⁴ The illusion is always

³⁵² *Faust*, 39.

³⁵³ On the wide-ranging appropriation of Faust during the various epochs in modern German history, Martin Swales writes: “In the 1920s and 1930s that legacy becomes part of Nazi ideology. *Faust* is held to express German titanism and expansionism.” See Swales, “Theatre, meta-theatre, tragedy,” in *Goethe’s Faust*, 206.

³⁵⁴ Markus Hallensleben argues that Lasker-Schüler’s entire oeuvre, and *IchundIch* in particular (which he called “ein radikal politisches Theater”), needs to be situated within the larger context of European avant-garde movements of the thirties, forties and fifties. He writes: “Entsprechend ist auch Lasker-Schülers Stück *IchundIch* (1937/40) anderen europäischen Theaterexperimenten dieser Zeit an die Seite zu stellen und nicht mehr nur allein als Scheitern

interrupted, as demonstrated below, when Faust and Mephisto begin to wax theological about the origins of human nature and end up alluding to (Goethe's) Faust's illicit love:

MEPHISTO. Ich hoffe stark, dass nur vorübergehend dich, der Schöpfung ungeklärtes Überbleibsel lähmt.
FAUST. Ich bin beschämt - -
MEPHISTO. Ich fühle deine Herzensnot und werde mit dir auf der Wange deines Herzens rot.
(schmeichelnd) – wie das Jungfräulein anno 80 beginn ich schämig mit dir, Heinrich, zu erröten
FAUST. Spielt Satan, etwa unzart an auf Margarete?
MEPHISTO. (lügnerisch) Dein Irrtum Faust stimmt mich betreten –
FAUST. (zur Seite für sich) Mein Gott, ich trotzte der Versuchung nicht.
(Fraue Marte Schwertlein tritt in den Raum)
MEPHISTO. (wendet Faust den Rücken) Ich möcht ihm speien ins heilige Angesicht!
- Fraue Marte Schwertlein, lese uns die Seite F. in meiner Buchung.
DIREKTOR REINHARDT. Attention!! Mephisto, Wiederholen Sie noch einmal die letzten Textreihen betont verächtlicher: Ich möcht ihm speien ins heilige Angesicht! etc. (191-192).

The mounting tension between Faust and Mephisto regarding the former's "Irrtum" with Gretchen is first interrupted by Mephisto's request for the line and then by Reinhardt's explicit demand that Mephisto repeat his line with more vehemence, foregrounding the moment of construction and the artifice of the dialogue. When Mephisto proves himself unable to play the part, Reinhardt interrupts yet again, summoning the actor Karl Hannemann to take Mephisto's "Teufelsbart" and assume the "Bombenrolle" (194).³⁵⁵ Reinhardt, the Austrian-Jewish playwright living in exile, disrupts a dialogue that began long before this drama was conceived (between Faust and Mephisto), suggesting on one level that the Mephisto of old can no longer speak to the current historical moment: Reinhardt urges Mephisto to be angrier at Faust (perhaps to be angrier in general), but he cannot.

The scene dissolves into a series of interruptions and exclamations on the part of the poet, the actors, Reinhardt and the Ritz Brothers, whose nonsense makes explicit the absurdity of the

persönlicher Kunstvorstellungen zu interpretieren." See Hallensleben, *Else Lasker-Schüler: Avantgardismus und Kunstinszenierung* (Tübingen: Francke, 2000), 262.

³⁵⁵ Karl Hannemann (1895-1953) was a German actor popular in Berlin who actually had played the role of Mephisto. ELS also wrote a poem about him in 1924. See Vennemann, 82.

entire scene.³⁵⁶ Reinhardt finally declares Faust and Mephisto to be a “Zwillingspaar,” enabling him to exceed the boundaries of his purely directorial role and offer a critique of both the Faust/Mephisto duality and the question of divided subjectivity as it pertains to the poet.³⁵⁷ Reinhardt’s critique indeed echoes and anticipates readings of the unity of Faust and Mephisto that still circulate today, harking once again back to the Romantic notion of the self-critiquing work of art (Reinhardt functions as both a figure in the drama and the director/interpreter of the drama inside the drama).³⁵⁸ These and similar types of interruptions make clear that all of the texts involved are in constant flux, and what emerges is the constitutive fluidity and instability of each character and each dialogue, both past and present.

Next and related to interruption is the drama’s ample use of intertextuality and quotation, two essential components of any parody. Again I turn to the first act, when Faust “sinkt in die Knie” after asking Mephisto what material he is made of (“aus Menschensalzen nimmermehr”), and recites the following lyric, lamenting the current state of the world:

Es ist ein Weinen in der Welt –
 Als ob der Liebe Gott gestorben wär –
 Und der bleierne Schatten der niederfällt,
 Lastet grabesschwer.

Komm – wir wollen uns näher verbergen –
 Das Leben liegt in aller Herzen
 Wie in Särgen.

³⁵⁶ The Ritz Brothers, always referred to in English, tend to blurt out affirmations of what comes before, which ultimately dissolve into nonsensical repetitions: “Klar!! . . . Klarà! . . . Klarissa!!” (194).

³⁵⁷ It should be noted that much of Lasker-Schüler’s literary output could be said to be addressing the problematic of divided subjectivity (and, on the macro-level, divided humanity), especially in its relation to religious consciousness, which was never far from its poetic counterpart. In the short prose piece “Das Gebet,” for example, ELS writes: “Den Menschen aber brach [der Schöpfer], geschaffen, ins leuchtende Welteden gestellt, in zwei Hälften. Und so drängt es den Menschen, sich immer zu teilen, um sich wiederzufinden . . . Jedes wahre Gebet ist eine Konzentration . . . Ich und Ich. Und aus dieser Selbstverbindung entsteht doppelte Kraft.” See Lasker-Schüler, “Das Gebet,” in *GW II* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1996), 779-783.

³⁵⁸ Rolf-Peter Janz, for example, has recently argued: “While playing the role of Faust’s counterpart, Mephistopheles at the same time is designed as Faust’s alter ego. To be more precise, Mephistopheles nourishes and provokes the evil that is part of Faust’s character. He demonstrates Faust’s own ambivalence. If Mephistopheles is defined as the personification of destruction. . . he also shows Faust’s inclination towards self-destruction.” See Janz, “Mephisto and the modernization of evil,” in *Goethe’s Faust*, 33.

Du wir wollen uns tief küssen –
Es pocht eine Sehnsucht an die Welt –
An der wir sterben müssen (193).

As a historical index, the poem fits within the context of the play and of the character reciting it, comparing the onset of the Third Reich to the weight of a “leaden shadow.” But Faust’s lament is also a verbatim reproduction of a poem by Lasker-Schüler titled “Weltend” from the collection *Der siebente Tag*, her second volume of poetry published in 1905.³⁵⁹ While the poem contains an almost a prophetic quality, this intertextual convergence produces a dialectical image: Faust, the literary figure most rooted in the German tradition, is (once again) brought together with the exiled German-Jewish poetess through an act of ventriloquism in which each figure is reflected and refracted through the other.³⁶⁰ The Faust-legend is being perpetuated through displacement and *reincorporation* into a textual body that is far from “from home,” or through what Andrea Krauß calls “zerbrechende Tradierung” (281), that is: a form of cultural inheritance that can only be perpetuated by breaking from (and in a sense, breaking) the tradition whence it emerges.

Yet Faust’s quotation is not the same as Kraus’s (or any other traditional satirist’s) act of *Einverleibung*, insofar as that which is being quoted is not being unequivocally destroyed nor intended for ridicule. Rather, quotation serves an ambivalent function in this context; it brings together multiple literary and historical figures, sheds critical light on all of them, and once again questions the notion that any one text has a particular origin or a particular destination (i.e., a literary canon). Exile thus enters the text at the supposed origins of the modern German literary tradition, for which *Faust* stands in metonymically. By inserting her words into this tradition’s beginnings, the poet/Lasker-Schüler renders it unstable; Faust takes on yet a new valence when

³⁵⁹ *Der siebente Tag* was initially published with the *Verlag des Vereins der Kunst* in 1905.

³⁶⁰ On the transformation of the Faust figure in *Ich und Ich*, Krauß writes: “Faust selbst, im ganzen ‘stürzt [...] zusamm.’ Tradierete Oppositionen zwischen ‘Herz’ und ‘Hirn’, klassisch gesprochen: zwischen Sinnlichkeit und Vernunft, denen sich ‘alles Eingeweid’ und damit der Körper zugesellt, solche Gegensätze und dabei der Faust in seiner vollen anthropologischen Gestalt verlieren ihren inneren Halt. Verlieren genauer: Grenzen und Struktur.” See Krauß, 184.

he utters Lasker-Schüler's words, revealing himself to be an essentially malleable character, modified with each new literary instantiation. As Martin Swales writes: "the drama is not over and done with; it is not a foregone conclusion. Nor is Goethe's *Faust* ever over and done with. Hence, even in its closure, the defeat of Mephisto, the salvation of Faust is set about with irony and open-endedness."³⁶¹

But it is only in the climactic fourth act that Faust and Mephisto explicitly turn to the subject of exile in their conversation. The two figures are playing a symbolic game of chess against the sound of marching Nazi soldiers faintly in the background. Faust inquires about the "Störenfried aus Braunau," but Mephisto wishes not to be bothered by "Vetter Adolf," whose fate, he assures, is sealed:

FAUST. Das habt Ihr Hoheit, nun von diesem Erdensohn!
MEPHISTO. [Vetter Adolf] spekuliert auf meinen Thron. Doch meine Hand im Spiel, just
meine einzige Passion hier im Exil.
FAUST. Euch Eure Hölle ein Exil??
MEPHISTO. Nur Ewigkeit ist kein Exil. Zu ihr zu finden, Heinrich, durchstreiftest
Du, das – Erdental – nicht immer tugendhaft, doch immer unbefleckt das
Land der – Sünden. (208-209)

Rehashing one of the great Faustian themes—and one intimately related to the way Bronfen reads exile's semantic plane—Mephisto first suggests that the finite world is a place of exile insofar as it bars the individual from the higher truths to be found exclusively in eternity; this predicament describes one of the two souls in Faust's breast. Given, however, that Mephisto discusses hell as a place of exile, the exigency of this historical moment bears on the second interpretation: Hitler is (literally) knocking on hell's door, threatening to turn everywhere that has not been conquered into a potential place of exile. Exile as a specifically poetic condition, irrespective of history, thus confronts the conditions of this particular instantiation thereof. In the same scene, Mephisto goes on to recite Goethe's poem, "Über allen Gipfeln," attributing it to the

³⁶¹ See Swales, 207.

young Faust in one of the several moments of conflation between author and work, which once again conceals and reveals the exile of the work from its very author.³⁶² Faust then counters by reciting “Mein Kaiser, mein Kaiser gefangen,” a poem excerpted from Heinrich Heine’s *Die Grenadiere* (1816), which concerns Napoleon’s capture and the grenadiers’ undying loyalty to their emperor—clearly alluding to the contemporary political situation and its ideological coordinates.

As Mephisto thus invokes the most “German” of all authors, Faust quotes Heine, the first widely recognized and celebrated German-Jewish poet, as well as one of the first renowned German exiles who wrote from abroad (France), only to be interrupted by Reinhardt, who again demands that Faust repeat his lines “etwas empörter: mein Kaiser, mein Kaiser gefangen!!” (210).³⁶³ Articulated in this chain of references and quotations is an emblematic literary-historical portrait of exile, as the significance of exile from the Nazis is brought into dialogue with the specter of exiles past (Faust/Heine/Lasker-Schüler/Reinhardt). Adding yet another layer to this intertextual *mélange*, Mephisto drowns the marching Nazis in a mass of molten lava:

(Mephisto erhebt sich majestätisch. Den Schöpfer nachahmend schlägt er ein Rad durch die weiten heissen Lüfte der Hölle. Es zischt und brodelte. Der Boden Im Park beginnt zu qualmen, sich zu erweichen zur

³⁶² In an illustrative example of how allusions and references circulate in this text, Mephisto inserts the words “kiwitt, kiwitt, kiwitt” into Goethe’s famous poem, which references the Brother’s Grimm’s fairytale, “Von dem Machandelboom” (Vennemann, 86). This fairytale, in turn, has also been rendered “Vom Wacholderbaum,” since *Machandelboom* and *Wacholderbaum* mean the same thing (Juniper tree)—the poet refers to Mephisto in *Ichundlch* as “Wacholderkarl” (194), clearly alluding to the poem/fairytale Mephisto recites, but also to the actor that is supposed to be playing Mephisto (Karl Hannemann). And finally, Goethe took a song from the fairytale and reworked it for *Faust*. In this example it becomes clear what Krauß means when she writes that the various “Stiftungstexte” in *Ichundlch* “erscheinen gleichermaßen als kulturelle Texte und können fortan als zitierbares Material zirkulieren.” See Krauß, 160.

³⁶³ On ELS’s relationship to Heine—and specifically the connection between Heine’s *Der Rabbi von Bacherach* and her *Der Wunderrabbiner von Barcelona*—Bauschinger writes: “Heine war neben Goethe Else Lasker-Schülers Lieblingsdichter, gleichsam ein Vermächtnis ihrer Mutter. Sicher hat sie [Heines] Romanfragment gekannt. . . Ebenfalls im Alter von elf Jahren hat sie ‘im Styl Heines, den ich bewunderte, gedichtet und das Gedicht dann meiner direct verdutzten mir teuren Mama ins Album schreiben mußte. . . .’” For more, see Bauschinger, 270. It is also worth noting that Heine’s books were among those burned during the Nazi book burning, the very figure that had warned, a century earlier, about the perils of book-burning.

Lavamasse. Es versinken die durch das Tor einmarschierenden Nacisoldaten mit ihrem Anführern bis zu den Köpfen.) (Sie schreien!!) (Die Köpfe der Versinkenden: Heil Hitler! (214).³⁶⁴

Taken as a whole, this scene thus manages to weave in references to Goethe, Heine and the bible (by invoking the ostensibly divine act of drowning the Egyptians in the Red Sea as the ancient Israelites were fleeing Egypt into exile), further underscoring the links among quotation, parody and exile as the narratives of different texts are mixed in with each other. Thus much like the characters that make up the drama (and the poet that has written it), these words and scenes have been exiled from their original context and displaced into a new one. Neither their former homes nor their current ones retain any sense of that familiarity, originality, or authority with which they are otherwise associated, thus producing the conditions of what could be called multidirectional parody.

Referring specifically to Mephisto's imitative act of destruction quoted above, Krauß writes: "In einer eigentümlichen *Imitatio dei* treibt Mephisto die 'Nacisoldaten' zwar nicht ins Meer, sondern höllengerechtere 'Lavamasse', die strukturelle Gestalt dieser Verwandlung von festem Boden zu flüssiger Materie—sie heißt im Dramentext schließlich auch 'Flut'—erscheint hingegen analog" (170-171). The biblical motif is thus not simply reproduced in the drama; the scene reworks the original and makes it more diabolical—the perpetrators of the crime, who are the victims of divine punishment, are no longer drowning in water but in boiling lava—thereby enacting repetition with a subversive difference, insofar as Mephisto has replaced god, but also pointing to the biblical god's equally destructive tendencies and thus highlighting a structural similarity between these two figures (father and prodigal son). Indeed, almost every figure (apart

³⁶⁴ Insofar as this scene conjures images of the armored body of the Nazi soldiers dissolving in a mass of lava and thereby losing the contours of their egos, it invokes an association with Klaus Theweleit's Freudian analysis of the "Angstlust" of the German soldiers during the First World War, when he explicitly discusses the function of lava: "die Möglichkeit der physischen Auflösung, nicht nur der halluzinatorischen, ist hier ganz nahe. Ich-Grenzen, Körpergrenzen – wo sind sie in diesem Vorgang? Gibt es sie noch? Sind Innen und Außen noch unterscheidbar? Birst die Erde, oder birst der Mann selbst durch den Glutstrom seiner inneren Lava infolge einer Trieberuption? Was ist 'Innen' und 'Außen', was 'Subjekt' und 'Objekt' bei folgendem Granateinschlag, was Ursache, was Folge. . . ." See Theweleit, *Männerphantasien 1. Band* (Frankfurt: Verlag Roter Stern, 1974), 304.

from the Nazis, to whom I will soon turn) stands in for another and contains multiple different “Ichs,” be they historical, literary, or biblical. Faust is at once Goethe, Heine, Mephisto, Lasker-Schüler, Aribert Wäscher (the actor playing him), and the “deutscher Dichtersohn”³⁶⁵ whose “German heart” still has sympathy for his fellow countrymen: “Das Jammern der Soldaten, Satanas, mein Herz es kann nicht ertragen” (214).³⁶⁶ Mephisto is not exclusively the “trickster” figure, the tempter and seducer of humanity, nor the pure embodiment of evil (just as he is not merely these things in Goethe’s text either);³⁶⁷ he is also Faust’s alter ego, and, in his conversion to the good, which he demonstrates by thwarting the Nazis’ intentions, he is the drama’s only heroic figure: “Würde 10000 Erdglück geben, / Noch einmal so gottgeboren zu leben, / Inmitten Seiner Engelschaar . . .” he laments (217). The scarecrow that appears in the garden of the eye doctor in the final act goes by many names and is the poet’s last interlocutor. He explicitly represents several historical, literary, and biblical types all collapsed into one character: the anti-Semitic caricature known as “der kleine Cohn,”³⁶⁸ the wandering Jew, Goethe (and some of his literary creations), a journalist, and even the poet Lasker-Schüler, who feels herself to be nothing more than a scarecrow living out her hellish days in exile.³⁶⁹

³⁶⁵ See Bauschinger, *Else Lasker-Schüler: Ihr Werk und Ihre Zeit* (Heidelberg: Lothar Stiehm Verlag, 1980), 288.

³⁶⁶ Aribert Wäscher (1895-1961) was a German actor about whom ELS wrote and published a poem in 1923. See Vennemann, 87.

³⁶⁷ Peter Huber argues that not only does the Mephisto of the ‘Prologue’ (in Goethe’s text) not correspond to the devil of the New Testament but rather to the Old Testament, but that he actually “represents a sphere prior to God but domesticated by him. The Wotan allusion is just one indication of that complex.” See Huber, “Mephisto is the devil – or is he?” in *Goethe’s Faust*, 44-45. I will return to this Wotan allusion and its importance for my reading shortly.

³⁶⁸ The satirical song “Hab’n Sie nicht den kleinen Cohn geseh’n” by Julius Einödshofer “war 1902 in Berlin der Schlager der Saison und gehörte bald zum Repertoire der Drehorgelspieler. Cohn war ein verbreiteter jüdischer Nachname, der ‘kleine Cohn’ war seit Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts eine antisemitische Spottfigur, unter anderem ein populäres Motiv judenfeindlicher Bildpostkarten.” See Vennemann, 83.

³⁶⁹ Quoted in Bodenheimer’s work on ELS’s experience in Palestine is an excerpt from Jacob Lessing’s biography of the poet, who makes a direct analogy between the scarecrow figure and ELS: “. . . im irdischen Jerusalem am Ende ihres letzten Schauspiels fühlt sie sich zur Vogelscheuche hingezogen, die in Palästina hungert. Beide traben durch den Wüstensand wie einst Kinder Israels und haben auch nach jahrtausendlanger Wanderschaft ihr Gelobtes Land noch nicht erreicht.” See Bodenheimer, 131.

Inasmuch as identity as such is rendered unstable in each of one of these manifestations, these characters, as I suggested earlier, can be seen as exiled from themselves; nobody stands on “festem Boden,” and all of their respective identities can be reduced to “flüssiger Materie.” As they ironically quote, make allusions, appropriate texts and become the object of quotation, these figures offer proof of their constitutively divided, un-centered selves. But what is crucial from the aesthetic perspective is that this very divided self (which I am also calling an exiled self) is held up as the drama’s privileged position of subjectivity, indeed the *only* position that can legitimately level any sort of critique, social, political, or literary. Emmerich’s claim that the lyrical ‘I’ could no longer sustain itself in opposition to the Third Reich might explain why Lasker-Schüler chose the dramatic medium to express her form of literary resistance—drama makes it eminently possible to stage characters who are only fully realized, in a sense, through other characters, texts, relations to other historical realities, etc.

Reconciliation, it seems, can only take place in an afterlife (outside of the text), as Faust and Mephisto unite and ascend to heaven at the end of the fourth act:

FAUST. Die Himmel weben, fürsorgliche Engel,
 Um uns – Flügelkleide
 Bald sind wir auf der blauen Weide –
 Und blicken noch auf die von uns verlassene Welt,
 MEPHISTO. Wie man bestattet Dich mein Herzgenoss und mich
 FAUST. Uns beide - stillvereint im Leibe: Ichundich.
 MEPHISTO. Und sich berauscht an unserem edelen versöhnten Leide
 Die Geistlichkeit in ihrer Ursprach althebrit.
 FAUST. Und sind doch mit dem Erdenleben quitt! (227).

But since this is only the end of their play, the drama resumes without them, now featuring the scarecrow, the journalist Gershon Swet, and the poet without her creation, who all convene in the garden of an eye doctor in Jerusalem during the fifth act.³⁷⁰ The scene alludes to the earlier conversation between Faust and Mephisto, as Jerusalem serves as the city of the poet’s exile,

³⁷⁰ This garden may refer to the actual garden of an eye doctor in Jerusalem, Abraham Albert Ticho (1883-1960), who founded an eye clinic. See Vennemann, 90-91.

while the “garden” assumes the function of an eternal home beyond time and space: precisely that which could *not* be considered a place of exile. What, the scene seems to ask, does it mean to exist both in and out of exile? As mentioned earlier, the scarecrow goes by many different names, many of which derive from the bible or from anti-Semitic epithets that circulated around the early part of the twentieth century: “Zu Feierzeiten: Abraham, Auch Isaak, aus aller Winkel Gartenseiten. Auch Jaakob bei Gelegenheiten. Kommen öfters die Geweretts zur Gewerett - - in ihren Theesalon, rufen sie nach mir: dem kleinen ‘Cohn’ .!!” (230). Yet the multiple identities do not stop there: responding to the scarecrow’s question, “wo warst Du vorher all die Zeit? Wie es noch hell?” (the implied darkness refers to the onset of Nazi rule), the poet says she was invited by Wilhelm Tell to Switzerland (thus referencing Schiller), while the scarecrow tells the poet that he has wandered through the “eastern and western Divan” with “Wolfgang von Goethe,” and that Dorothea (from Goethe’s *Hermann und Dorothea*) would often kiss Goethe at twilight—the texts continue to accumulate into one large, incomplete text without definitive contours and yet each of whose presumed contours is portrayed in critical light by virtue of being displaced into a different context. The scarecrow then begins to sing the opening lines of Book Three of Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*: “Kennst du das Land wo die Cithronen blühn, / Im grünen Laub die Goldorangen glühn? etc etc etc.....” (229), perhaps alluding to the “promised land” of Jerusalem and thus deictically referring to the contemporary historical moment. This montage of characters, plots and historical realities, spliced with phrases in French and English and references to the language of “althebrit” (a language, to be sure, not spoken in the Palestine of Lasker-Schüler), further de-centers all of the texts and places involved from their supposed authors or origins.

That is: if conventional parody merely destabilizes its precursor text, *IchundIch* questions its own mechanism and aim, and the destabilizing text becomes itself destabilized, not identical

to itself. The drama refuses—unlike Kraus’s or Canetti’s work—to assume a particular position without, however, renouncing its critical voice altogether. This explains why the poet and the journalist come to the paradoxical conclusion that there is no conclusion to be drawn.³⁷¹

MR. SWET. . . . Doch nun verehrte Dichterin, glaubt ihr in Eurem grossem Reim das Rätsel dieser Welt gelöst?
DIE DICHTERIN. Nein! Wie meine Hälfte ähnlich schon erwähnte ungeschminkt zur im zweiten Teil, die Wahrheit gänzlich zu beweisen, bin ich bereit auf höheren Geleisen.
MR. SWET. Nie wird auf dieser Welt, das Weltenrätsel ganz gelöst
Im Kreis der Freunde nicht, im Wandel IchundIch, im Tale zwischen Höhen, Und nicht im Arm der Liebsten tanzumdrehen!
DIE DICHTERIN. Da sichs in dieser Welt nicht lösen lässt, Mr. Swet. (233)

Nothing, it seems, can be resolved in “this world,” which is at the same time the world of the drama. Fatigued beyond recovery, the poet dies peacefully at the end of this scene, a death that both anticipates Lasker-Schüler’s actual death and repeats by staging the death that the condition of exile already entails.³⁷² Yet the drama gives way to a *Nachspiel* in which the poet reappears, perhaps in heaven or as a reincarnation of her former self. The epilogue offers one final allusive moment, when a voice “vom Erdensterne nah” reiterates the *Gretchenfrage* by asking: “Glaubst du an Gott?” The poet (who would accordingly be placed in the position of Goethe’s Faust) responds from behind the curtain: “Ich freu mich so, ich freu mich so: Gott ist ‘da’!!” (235), which also reprises Mephisto’s line from a couple of scenes earlier (218). The indexical “da” does not so much confer to this drama a theological meaning as suggest the impossibility for the drama to end in reconciliation.³⁷³ Divine substance, which I understand in this context to be

³⁷¹ Gershon Swet (1893-1968) was until 1933 a foreign correspondent in Berlin and was a journalist from 1935 to 1948 for the Hebrew-language newspaper *Ha’aretz* (Vennemann, 80). On his role in the drama as a counterpoint to the scarecrow, Krauß has written: “Swet repräsentiert vielleicht jene Leser und Zuschauer in Palästina, die im Unterschied zur Vogelscheuche die aus Deutschland mitgebrachten Kulturfragmente, die kulturelle Brüchigkeit nicht mehr entziffern können. Damit aber wandert *zerbrechende Tradierung* in den Horizont palästinensischer Rezipienten ein.” See Krauß, 281.

³⁷² In one of Lasker-Schüler’s last poems, “Ich liege wo am Wegrand”—which also appears in the drama—she writes: “Ich liege wo am Wegrand übermattet - / Und über mir die finstere kalte Nacht - / Und zähl schon zu den Toten längst bestattet,” thereby making an explicit link between death and exile. GW I, 346.

³⁷³ I do not fully agree with Bauschinger’s more theological reading, who argues that “Kunst als Spiel, Künstler und Künstlerin als Kind vor und mit Gott spielend sind zentrale Vorstellungen Else Lasker-Schülers, in welchen Kunst

fullness or completion or even insight into the true source of the historical tragedy, lies, rather, on the other side of the curtain. As Pieper writes:

In *IchundIch* wird die Gottgeborgenheit allerdings als äußerst fragiler, letztlich verlorener Zustand deutlich: Wo Dichtung selbst scheitert, Welttheater auf der Probe steht und die ‘Herzenbühne’ dem Gewicht der Historie nicht standhält, steht die Annahme göttlicher Zuwendung, die Insistenz auf seiner Präsenz, eher im Zeichen der Sehnsucht als der Gewißheit. (175)

If we can speak of the drama’s “failure,” it can only be in the terms of a necessary failure to establish a mode of language, a dramatic technique, or an aesthetic disposition that would be truly adequate to the *Stoff*, to invoke a Krausian term. Historical and literary connections are made (Heine—Lasker-Schüler, Goethe—the poetess, etc.), the entire German literary tradition is rendered questionable vis-à-vis its relationship to the contemporary German landscape, and the scarecrow-like existence of the German-Jewish poet in exile has been explored in myriad ways. But, as the poet and the journalist contend in their closing repartee and as the poet again hints in the epilogue, a final word can only be uttered as one of hope or longing, not of certainty. In this sense only could it be said that reality has exceeded language, which Kraus feared was the case already in 1933.

The poet’s staged death, however, could also be discussed in conjunction with the question of parody and exile. Several of Lasker-Schüler’s poems composed before and during her time in Jerusalem address the themes of exile and homelessness broadly conceived. In “Ich Weiss,” for example, Lasker-Schüler writes, “Mein Odem schwebt über Gottes Fluss - / Ich setze leise meinen Fuß / Auf den Pfad zum ewigen Heime,” implicitly contrasting the eternal home of death to the finite homelessness of life.³⁷⁴ But when these poems appear in *IchundIch*, they are

und Religion zu einer Einheit verschmelzen, zu einer Kunstreligion. Nirgends hat sie es deutlicher gesagt als in ihrem letzten Drama.” The drama seems to suggest, rather, an incompatibility of these two domains of experience, not an undifferentiated immersion of one into the other. See Bauschinger, 425.

³⁷⁴ I would place many of the poems published in *Mein blaues Klavier* (1943) under this category, including “Jerusalem,” “Abendzeit,” and “Die Verscheuchte” (“Ich streife heimatlos zusammen mit dem Wild / Durch bleiche Zeiten träumend – ja ich liebte dich . . .”). See Lasker-Schüler, GW I, 331-353.

no longer identifiable with the poetic ‘I,’ but are, rather, dispersed into the speech of others and often divided between two or more characters—these poems are, once again, exiled from their ostensible origin and reborn in another form: a text never dies but is continuously re-written in accordance with the historical moment. This idea is played out in one of the last exchanges between Mephisto and Faust, when the two protagonists ventriloquize one of Lasker-Schüler’s early poems, “Chaos,” making slight modifications within its new dialogic form:

FAUST. (verbirgt seinen Kopf erschüttert in Mephistos Händen:)

- Ich finde mich nicht wieder
In der fremden ewigen Seligkeit –
Mir ist ich lieg von mir weltenweit –
Zwischen erster Nacht der Urange.
Ich wollte ein Schmerzen rege sich –
Und stürze mich grausam nieder!
Und riss mich je an mich!
Und es lege eine Schöpferlust –
Mich wieder in meine Heimat
Unter der Mutterbrust.

MEPHISTO. Deine Mutterheimat ist seele leer,

Es blühen dort keine Rosen im warmen Oden mehr. (224)

Uncanny in its relevance to the historical moment, the original poem’s differences are minor but substantial: “In der fremden ewigen Seligkeit” was originally “In dieser Todverlassenheit”; “Zwischen erster Nacht” was “Zwischen grauer Nacht”; and “Deine Mutterheimat” was “Meine Mutterheimat.”³⁷⁵ The poem has undergone a transformation and a critique in its dramatic form; Lasker-Schüler has become the object of her own parody, but this parody is not meant to be exclusively critical nor wholly approving. Rather, all possible interpretations of the poem are preserved in its reiteration, and its central themes—*Heimat*, death, pain, fear and even Faustian *Schöpferlust*—are reconfigured by Lasker-Schüler’s Faust and Mephisto against the background of a contemporary historical landscape that, indeed, appears to them both as “seeleleer.”

Exile and parody are thus intimately linked in this and related passages, the former providing the formal and historical perspective, the latter, the vessel through which such a

³⁷⁵ See GW I, 39. Lasker-Schüler also reproduces an excerpt of this poem in “Das Gebet.” See GW II, 780.

perspective obtains its aesthetic expression. In next turning to the drama's portrayal of Nazis, I will show how the parody, while still maintaining its constitutive principle of imitating a coded *discourse*, takes on a new valence and, in so doing, connects back to the problem of laughter, satire and the comic.

III. Parody and the Grotesque

Lasker-Schüler once wrote: "Selten versteht jemand politisch zu dichten," a statement that is Adornian in spirit in its realization that to politically poetize is a difficult task requiring conscious construction and attentiveness to form.³⁷⁶ If I have thus hitherto established how parody functions in *IchundIch* in relation to the notion of exile, in what follows I will look precisely at how this parody—in stark contrast to Kraus and Canetti's satire—functions more critically and comically in the drama's portrayal of the Nazis. For the Nazis, which, it should be noted, appear in the text by their actual names (Hitler, Göbbels, Göhring, Himmler, Ribbentrop, Schirach, Ley, etc.), are the drama's only truly comic figures. There is no doubt that they represent—unlike any other characters in the play, including Mephisto—absolute evil; Andrea Parr has called them "die ausnahmslos bösen Nazis, die im Gegensatz zu den übrigen Figuren keine andere 'bessere' Seele haben."³⁷⁷ Their laugh-ability thus initially arises from a structural distinction: whereas all of the other characters can be located both in themselves *and* in another, or in many others, the Nazis in this drama lack any distance to themselves—they do not know the condition of exile. And it is precisely this distinguishing feature that precludes them from being objects of pure ridicule, since, as I have suggested earlier, satire invariably presupposes a form of identification between the satirist and the object of satire, which does not pertain to the poet of this drama. As I will show, these characters are laughable, but they are not necessarily

³⁷⁶ Quoted from Hallensleben, 269.

³⁷⁷ See Parr, *Drama als 'Schreitende Lyrik': Die Dramatikerin Else Lasker-Schüler* (Frankfurt: P. Lang, 1988), 49.

being laughed at. The drama does not satirize the Nazis but parodies their discourse—but in a way that is distinct from what we observed in Canetti.

The Nazis first appear in the second act, “im Speisesaal des Höllenpalastes,” where Mephisto, Faust, Marthe Schwertlein (Margarete’s aunt from *Faust*) and the shoal of Nazi officials have gathered for a meal to discuss the business of war, in a scene reminiscent of the worldly debauchery at “Auerbachs Keller” in *Faust*; parody is here intertwined with what I will soon define as the grotesque. Mephisto tells them that his time in hell is limited and that they are to be quick with their demands:

MEPHISTO. Es ist bei mir am Hofe Sitte, dass jeder Gast geladen oder nicht, sein Business zur Dinnerzeit mit mir beim Glase Wein bespricht. Ich nehme an – es handelt sich um Zölle, meine Herren?
GÖRING TO GÖBBELS LEISE. Von welchen Zöllen spricht das Höllenschwein?
GÖHRING. Hundsfott pst!
MEPHISTO. Ich bitte im Interesse meiner knappen Zeit, die dazu noch sehr spärlich ‘transportiert’ in meine Hölle, ich nehme an, es handelt sich um lieferndes Petroleum frisch von der Quelle hier meine Herren.
DIE VIER GÄSTE: Heil Hitler! Für Germania und für Rom, Excellenz.
FAUST. (Die Herren corrigierend) Hoheit!
DIE VIER GÄSTE. Hoheit! (197).

In a comic moment that exposes ideological inconsistency, Faust reminds the Nazis to refrain from using the Latinate “Excellenz” when praising Hitler’s regime; the Germanic “Hoheit” is the preferred nomenclature. As automata, the Nazis employ a term usually reserved for kings in the context of their “Führer,” hinting at the political and theological anachronism inherent to this aspect of Nazi parlance. “Excellenz” as a term would have been excluded under the auspices of a regime that wished to purge its subjects of any and all foreign elements, and thus that Faust is the only character keen enough to make this correction suggests that he is the only one truly paying attention to the inner logic of this discourse. Such non-reflective speech is further emphasized

later on in the scene as the conversation progresses, in a quasi-prophetic moment when Mephisto declares that Hitler's war will be lost:³⁷⁸

MEPHISTO. . . . Ja meine Herren, vor allzu grossem Siegesdrang, mir bang, verliert Ihr
Führer die geraubte Welt zum Schluss im Kriege.
DIE GÄSTE. (automatisch) Heil Hitler - - - . . .
GÖHRING. (gesättigt) Absurd --! (er schnaubt wie ein Tigertier): Ists erlaubt,?
Verflucht und zugenäht! ich löse meinen Gurt?
GÖHRING SCHWER BETRUNKEN ZU MEPHISTO. Und bittet untertänigst um Petrol!
HESS NÜCHTERN GÖHRING IN DIE REDE FALLEND. Und das Monopol für lieferndes Petrol and
Deutschland, höllennmajestät! Und Rom. (198-199)

The guests appear only to hear that the “Führer” has been mentioned, which immediately and “automatically” precipitates the *Hitlergruss*. Drunk, sneering, quibbling, power-hungry, and nearly indistinguishable from one another, these cartoonish figures exist at the threshold of the human and the animal as they beseech Mephisto for petroleum to aid them in their war effort. And at this point in the drama—before Mephisto's *Bekehrung*—he declares himself to be “mit Herrn Adolf blutsverwandt” (198), further underscoring the non-human element of the Nazis and their non-human discourse.³⁷⁹ These figures are not allegorical types (Canetti), nor are they being directly quoted (Kraus); rather, they are grotesque figures that spew out their lines, often through unintelligible dialect:

GÖBBELS. (in seiner Mundart) Ei fühl meck wohl verdeck em Höllenstaate, wat meenst de Baldur, fiset
Mensch, Eck lott bi öss, den Kohl, on help däm Satan, als sing Vizeking. Den Dolch em Gewande, on
dreh met ömm dat Ding?!
SCHIRACH. Op Adolfs Plan: hat er erst 'usse' Welt in Schoos, dann geht es mank
met Höllendamp op die Hölle wacker los!! (200).

Form and content are perfectly aligned, as the crudity of Hitler's plan to conquer hell once he has taken over the entire world is reflected in the crudity of the dialect used to describe it.

³⁷⁸ On this moment in the drama Hedgepeth writes, denying the charge that Lasker-Schüler was politically unaware or unengaged: “Daß Lasker-Schüler, die angeblich von Politik nicht viel verstanden hatte, 1940 hier prophetisch vom Untergang des Dritten Reichs durch den Eintritt Englands und Amerikas in den Krieg schreibt, ist erstaunlich.” See Hedgepeth, *Überall Blicke Ich nach einem Heimatlichen Boden Aus: Exil im Werk Else Lasker-Schülers* (New York: Lang, 1994), 202.

³⁷⁹ Toward the very beginning of the prologue, the poet declares that she and her readers “würden schliesslich – buchverwandt” (185). This form of repetition with difference—from “buch” to “blut”—sheds light on two competing discourses that emerge in the drama: the spiritual, intellectual or even “elective” affinity implied by “buch,” and the Nazi obsession with blood, as in “Blut und Boden.”

And yet the brutality of the exchange is muted, and what begins to emerge with regard to their character is what Andrea Krauß calls the “entertainment value” of the Nazis: “Denn die kritische Spitze, die diesen Variationen der komischen Form gemeinhin unterstellt wird und die den unernsten Angriff noch legitimieren könnte, bleibt im Drama *IchundIch* aus. Fast gewinnen die ‘Nacis’ im Stück einen gewissen Unterhaltungswert” (244). That is, rather than appearing as an object of pure ridicule, Göbbels’s speech patterns are almost cartoon-like; they serve as a caricature of a caricature with no identifiable original. The critical and even subversive moment thus emerges less explicitly but no less effectively, for through such a presentation, these figures modeled after historical referents are denied what I would call their *actuality*. They have, rather, passed into the ludic realm of the grotesque, which Jonathan Greenberg defines as a “limit-case, in which satiric laughter or indignation becomes difficult to sustain.”³⁸⁰ The crucial difference between satire and the grotesque for Greenberg (and for others) is that while the satirical is coupled with indignant laughter, the grotesque cannot be reduced to this particular affect or disposition: it contains something comical, and yet it is difficult to determine the source of this comedy.³⁸¹ Expanding on a version of the incongruity theory of the comic, Peter Fuß identifies the grotesque as a “Grenzphänomen,” which “markiert die synchronen und diachronen Grenzen einer Kulturformation. Es ist jedoch nicht nur Indikator kultureller Veränderungen, sondern es fungiert . . . als Medium des historischen Wandels und des Epochenwandels.”³⁸² What is comical about the grotesque would, according to this theory, be its irreconcilability with the empirical world; grotesque figures, such as the Nazis in this drama, lie at the border of the mimetic and the

³⁸⁰ See Greenberg, *Modernism, Satire, and the Novel*, 11.

³⁸¹ Dimitri Tschizewskij, for example, argues that in contrast to satire, which always has a specific target and is always preserving a specific norm, “[e]inen ganz anderen Sinn hat die richtige Einschätzung der Groteske, die ja eben keineswegs gegen eine *bestimmte* Seinsform der Natur der Gesellschaft und des individuellen menschlichen Daseins gerichtet ist . . .” See Tschizewskij, “Satire und Groteske,” in *Das Komische*, 278.

³⁸² Peter Fuß, *Das Groteske: Ein Medium des kulturellen Wandels* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2001), 12.

fantastic. When historically based figures are given grotesque representations, the implication is that the referents themselves cannot be assimilated into any given constellation of rational thought, upon which satire ultimately depends. In a sense, it is as if the actual, historical Nazis are treated as fictional characters.

While it is difficult to isolate the various motifs and themes that overlap in the drama, these grotesque elements are arguably best illustrated through Göbbels's and the others' anti-Semitic language. During the same scene as the one described above, the guests present turn to the topic of Hitler's position towards both Goethe and Christianity:

SCHIRACH. Grosszügig wie der Führer ist! Der Goethe war ihm doch im Grunde zu viel
Christ. Er stellte fest, dass auf "Bestellung" der Prometheus auch entstanden ist.
SATAN ZU FAUST. Ich grabe Dir den Herrmann und die Dorothea aus der Erde aus, bevor Du noch den
Morgen schausst.
GÖBBELS. Die beiden längst Verstorbenen schlecht getauften Juden beide? (total
bezecht) "Und lass sie grasen mit den Lämmern auf der Haide", . . . Weh dem Geschlechte der
Germanen, die verseucht ihr deutsches Blut mit Judensamen, weh dem gesammtnen Judentum!!!
SCHIRACH. Erhebe dich Deutschland Juda verrecke!
ALLES GÄSTE ZUSAMMEN. Weh dem gesammtnen Judentum! Heil Hitler!! (199-200).

There is nothing factually or historically inaccurate about the portrayal of these figures—indeed, in abridged form, the dialogue evinces a keen understanding of the relationship between anti-Christian and anti-Jewish sentiment within Nazi ideology, along with the most virulent strain of racialized anti-Semitism espoused by convinced ideologues. But the drunkenness and repetition of the phrase "weh dem," the slavish praise of the "Führer," combined with the various biblical, Greek, and Goethean allusions and the Nazi mantra "Juda verrecke" give the exchange an air of nonsense and absurdity. More than that: the phrases that are culled from actual Nazi discourse are mixed in with the literary allusions and become, in a sense, indistinguishable from the latter. This is not to say that the drama advances a simple thesis about the continuity or discontinuity between the ideology of German classicism and Nazism; instead, both of these claims are made to look equally suspicious, and what is invoked is only a moment of contemplation regarding this

relationship. History has been translated into a text that is ripe for parody, a move that implicitly responds to Kraus's earlier admonition that any attempt at satirical representation of the Nazis would be deemed a "Fehler des Bildners." Parody, through the use of the grotesque, amounts to both the dissolution and completion of the satirical project.

The "hellish fun" Mephisto (and the poet) has with his Nazis reaches its apex in Göbbel's flirtatious exchanges with Marte Schwerdtlein.³⁸³ Walking around with a clubbed foot much like Mephisto (underscoring their shared features), Göbbels makes his awkward advance: "Scheints tuts wohligen Eurem Gemüt, Madämchen, am Springbrunn in der Morgenstund zu sitzen. Die Amoretten schwitzen vom Wasserschöpfen – schaut nur hin; die Psyche, deren Füße sie benetzen, etwas – glaube ich, zu dünn" (203).³⁸⁴ Their conversation soon turns to "Germanias Gott," whom Marte Schwerdtlein mistakes for Christ only to be corrected by Göbbels: "Als ob Madämchen eben erst zur Welt gekommen ist – / Der olle Jude gilt nicht mehr!" (203-204).³⁸⁵ Germany's new god is named Adolf Hitler, Göbbels proclaims, and the "Führer" sent "der olle Jude" back to Bethlehem where he was born so that he would not bother "us Aryans" anymore. The conversation only becomes laughable, however, when Frau Marte inquires after the early "Aryan god" about whom she claims to know very little:

GÖBBELS. (Er holt ein Bildchen aus dem Portefeuille) Ich trage ihn stets bei mir unsern
Ariergott. Herr Wotan hiess er bei den alten Deutschen. Madämchen schaut Euch einmal an den
Wotan.³⁸⁶

³⁸³ For more on this "grotesque parody" of the "Auerbachs Keller" scene in *Faust*, see Inca Rumold, "The Exiled Poet as 'Scarecrow,'" in *Hitler im Visier*, 108.

³⁸⁴ Perhaps alluding to both Mephisto's flirtation with Marte Schwerdtlein in Goethe's *Faust* as well as Faust's first encounter with Gretchen in the garden, Göbbels is inserted in place of Mephisto. Krauß thus writes: "Mit kindlichem Wortwitz, den grotesken Pferdefuss wohl im genauen Bildsinn genommen, beansprucht [Göbbels] seinerseits die Position des Teufels." See Krauß, 245.

³⁸⁵ There are several allusions to the parallels between Nazi ideology and religious or Christological discourse throughout the drama, such as when Baldur von Schirach detects the end in sight and shouts out in vain: "Adolf, Adolf, warum hast Du mich verlassen?!" (221). For a theoretical approach to Nazism's longing for the renewal of medieval Christianity, see Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean Luc-Nancy, "The Nazi Myth" (trans. Brian Holmes), *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (Winter, 1990), pp. 291-312.

³⁸⁶ As suggested earlier, Huber has made the argument that the inspiration for Goethe's Mephisto was not the devil from either of the two Testaments, but rather the father of the Nordic gods, Wotan, invoked in the scene above. He

FRAU MARTE. (die immer schwerer zu hören im stande) Den Truthahn?
 GÖBBELS. Truthahn – heisasa!!
 FRAU MARTE SCH.. Ein schöner Mann –
 GÖBBELS. Ein schöner Mann, (sarkastisch) ein edles Profil! Heil Hitler!
 FRAUE MARTE: Was war er früher, lieber Herr, bevor er noch als Gott began?
 GÖBBELS. Heisassa! Ein Truthahn! (204).

Krauß has pointed out with regard to this scene, “Komik wirkt ‘Göbbels’ Ausspruch: ‘Truthahn – heisasa!!’ vielleicht deshalb, weil in ihm eine verfremdende Differenz zur vermeintlich gegenstandskonformen Darstellung kenntlich wird” (244). The homophonic similarity of these two unrelated words (Truthahn/Wotan) neutralizes any meaningful semantic distinction between them, rendering both terms nonsensical as they function in this dialogue. This scene does not, therefore, expose Göbbels’s barbarity or Nazi ideology as such, nor does it attempt to distinguish *Sein* from *Schein* (suggesting this is who Göbbels *really* is), as is often the case with modes of satirical representation.³⁸⁷ Rather, it makes the entire god-creating and god-destroying enterprise appear laughable as it is being applied in reference to Germany’s dictator, while at the same time rendering sympathetic the only character who cannot participate in the language of negation and exclusion constitutive of Nazi discourse because she cannot understand it.³⁸⁸ The aging Marte Schwertlein is as bewildered as the audience.

There is a wholly nonsensical nature to the representation of the Nazi figures in this drama from their introduction to their dramatically comic downfall—they scream “Heil Hitler”

draws his evidence from the scene “Witch’s Kitchen” in *Faust Part I*, when the witches inquire about the “pair of ravens,” which, writes Huber, is a feature of Wotan. This is relevant because it adds another potential intertext to the exchange between Göbbels and Marte, one that further complicates the relationship being played out between the Nazis and the German classical tradition. For the more elaborated thesis, see Huber, 43-45.

387 Braese thus writes: “Der Satiriker verspeist seinen Gegner: Die Einverleibung des Gegners erfolgt derart, daß der Einverleibte durch die Züge des Menschenfressers hindurchblickt – doch das ist bereits der Augenblick seines Erlöschens, da die satirische Mimesis unweigerlich Schein von Sein spaltet.” See Braese, 19.

388 This might explain why Bodenheimer calls *Ichundlich* a “Göttliche Komödie,” that is, a comedy seen from the perspective of the gods as opposed to a tragedy seen from the perspective of man. See Bodenheimer, 50. And yet according to Dieter Borchmeyer, “[w]ith a view to its dramatic form, one would be equally, if not more, justified in calling [Goethe’s *Faust*] a *Divina Commedia* after Dante’s great epic poem. Borchmeyer believes there are enough hidden and not so hidden elements in *Faust* to qualify it as a comedy—one, I might add, whose comedic elements are being teased out in Lasker-Schüler’s parody. See Borchmeyer, “*Faust* beyond tragedy: hidden comedy, covert opera,” in *Goethe’s Faust*, 209-224.

while drowning in molten lava—which necessarily precludes them from being assimilated into preconceived images of evil: “das Unsägliche des ‘Nazismus’ konkretisiert sich vielmehr als Leerstelle vernünftiger Argumentation und Kritik und bewahrt dabei den Abstand von tradierten Modellen des ‘Bösen’” (Krauß 246). They have, to once again invoke Bloch, become a “Stück Welttheater,” in which case *IchundIch* would function as one of the early examples of modern “Metatheater,” a theater that is effectively citing itself.³⁸⁹ This is then another way in which Lasker-Schüler’s political parody functions: by sublating the aggressive, subject-insisting element of satire (the subject that incorporates the discourse of its object of ridicule and makes it all too familiar), it mediates its critique by fictionalizing its object rather than attack the historical reality directly, passing over into the realm of the comic-grotesque. Inca Rumold refers to this as the drama’s black humor, “a space and place where the sharp edge of satire turns into the form of a parabolic critique, where the bite of satire dulls into the unbearable pressure of black humor; such a space is without ‘objective correlative’. Thus, this space resembles that of exile. . . .”³⁹⁰ The exilic condition bears on the drama’s portrayal of the Nazis, the only figures that do not know such a condition, the text’s privileged position of critique.

IV. Laughter in Exile

At the beginning of the final act, which takes place in the “Garten eines Augenarztes in Jerusalem,” a character called “Der Leser” asks the poet: “Verzeiht, geliebte Dichterin, die kurze Frage: Habt Ihr das Schauspiel ganz – allein? gemacht?”, to which the poet responds with the word “Gelacht!” imitating “die donnernde Stimme des Baals” (and thus taking on yet another persona), the Old Testament idol that intervenes at various points in the drama often to opine on the relationship between man and god (228). Curiously, the English translation of this scene

³⁸⁹ For more on this, see Hallensleben, 269.

³⁹⁰ See Rumold, *Hitler im Visier*, 111.

renders the word “gelacht” as “laughable,” giving the impression that the poet finds the question about her authorship ridiculous. But this is not an accurate translation, for it ignores both the significance of the rhyming pair “gemacht” and “gelacht,” as well as the semantic connotation of having *laughed* the play out as opposed to having made or written it. The poet suggests that her drama is comprised of laughter without necessarily being understood as the laughter of pure ridicule, the indignant laughter of the satirist. What, then, is the nature of such laughter?

It is certainly not the laughter of the Nazis. To explain: sitting at the dining table and bickering amongst themselves upon their first interaction with Mephisto in Act Two, one of the devil’s servants reveals himself to be the incarnation of the slave-master that the biblical Moses had killed before fleeing Egypt. In response to this allusion to the Old Testament, the guests begin to laugh “diabolically,” and “Flammen steigen aus den Bechern bis zum Plafond” (200). The Nazis’ laughter is a drunken, devilish laughter with a specific object in mind—the devil’s servant—and the flames that are pouring out of the cups of wine heighten the theatrical effect. Göbbels’s laughter at Frau Marte Schwertlein’s hearing impediment is also referred to as “schallend” (205), a laughter that distracts Faust and Mephisto momentarily from their chess game and again relies on an object of ridicule. On a formal level—and this is one of the main conclusions to be drawn from this analysis—their laughter is more akin to that of the traditional ironist-satirist discussed earlier in this dissertation, since it preserves the structural position of subjective indivisibility and hierarchical superiority that such laughter entails. Their laughter is the Hobbesian laughter that presupposes a sense of superiority and a claim to truth-content that nobody but they alone possess.

The poet’s laughter is further not the laughter *at* the Nazis’ or Hitler’s downfall; even Mephisto refrains from laughing during this rather anticlimactic scene:

MEPHISTO. Ein Spinnweb streift die wahre Gotteswelt von sich die Weltenillusion!

(man hört wehklagen u. fluchen die versinkenden Nacisoldaten)
 Hitler steht gepanzert mit seiner Leibwache und mit Ribbentrop Himmler Rosenberg vor dem
 Höllentor.)
 HITLER. Wo steckt er?!!
 RIBBENTROP UND HIMMLER. Wo steckt der Satanas?
 DER BAAL. Steigt in der Uniform aus Stacheldraht gefälligst, meine Herren, ins
 Luxusbad.
 HITLER ZU ROSENBERG. (bebend ahnungsvoll) Luxusbad? Was meint der wulstige Kerl da oben mit
 Luxusbad, Rosenberg?
 DER BAAL. Heere Adolf sputet Euch und kommt hereinspaziert Der Satanas hat – längst
 kapituliert!³⁹¹
 HITLER. (Größenwahnsinnig prahlend) Hört kapituliert!
 DER BAAL. Das heisst vor Gott dem Herrn der Welt!!
 (Hitler und seine Companen treten durch das Tor; es ergreift sie eine aufstürzende Lavawelle und sie
 versinken rettungslose in den Lavafluten.). (225)

As Mephisto makes his triumphant return to god (his “capitulation” as the Baal calls it, tricking the Nazis—thus retaining the “trickster” nature with which he is often associated), Hitler and his cronies are swallowed up whole, their armored bodies dissolving in a flood of lava.³⁹² In the lava’s destructive-preservative gesture (destroying Hitler while leaving Baal and Mephisto unscathed) and in its upward movement (“aufstürzen”), it approximates the poet’s laughter better than any other representation or phenomenon in the drama: lacking a particular aim or object—it does not specifically attack the Nazis, but rather reduces them to utter nothingness—and without an easily identifiable meaning, the lava resists conceptual interpretation just as the drama refuses to reconcile itself with itself or offer any moral. The poet’s nonsensical laughter opposes itself only to the bitterness of the Nazis’ laughter and their concomitant claim to be the bearers of a truth that is by nature exclusive—nobody else is permitted to partake in *their* laughter.

The poet’s laughter, rather, emanates from a structurally divided subject—IchundIch—and is implicitly deemed to be the only plausible comic response to the Nazis, whose narrative collapses under the pressure of the lava and its own absurd laughability. The poet’s laughter has,

³⁹¹ This line is a reprise from the poet’s spoiler alert in the first act that “Satanas aller Teufel Teufel hat kapituliert! Jawohl! Jedoch vor Gott dem Herrn im – vierten Akt!” (189).

³⁹² See footnote 36.

I conclude, transcended the laughter of satire in the way that it has previously been articulated and has become the laughter of humor, at least as Claire Colebrook understands it:

The language of humour is less oriented to meaning—some sense behind the physical word—precisely because words are repeated as so much automatic or machinic noise In opposition to the thought of a subject that must have preceded the act of speaking or narrating—a subject that can never be located in this world because he is the author of the world—humour shows subjects to be collections of sounds, gestures, body parts and signs devoid of any real sense.³⁹³

In stark contrast to the shrill laughter of the Nazis, which is predicated on the claim to totality and exclusion—precisely the claims that are mirrored in the conventional ironist/satirist—the exilic laughter of this drama is “less oriented to meaning” because the poet is not a stable subject but a “disrupted connection of movements.”³⁹⁴ But this laughter does not amount to resignation in the face of an incomprehensible historical caesura; rather, it signals the refusal to partake in the language of the Nazis, which it cannot directly critique or even mimetically imitate, but only indirectly parody. The poet does not fall silent; she speaks a different language altogether, and this is how she understands “politisch zu dichten.”

³⁹³ See Colebrook, *Irony* (London, New York: Routledge, 2004), 135-137. Colebrook’s theory of humor is explicitly indebted to Deleuze.

³⁹⁴ This might explain Lasker-Schüler’s statement: “Ich kräuselte meine Lippen nie zum Spott.” Quoted in Hedgepeth, 216.

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Hier ist Humor kein Gegensatz zum Krieg. Diesem können die Opfer entrinnen, jenem nicht...Er kann sich neben dem Grauen sehen lassen. Er trifft sie alle, die vom Tod unberührt bleiben. Bei diesem Spaß gibts nichts zu lachen. Aber weiß man das, so darf man es, und das Lachen über die unveränderten Marionetten ihrer Eitelkeit, ihrer Habsucht und ihres niederträchtigen Behagens schlage auf wie eine Blutlache!³⁹⁵

Responding to the political disasters that befell the twentieth century, German-language satire, as I have argued, was forced to confront the problems both immanent and tangential to its very practice: the question of literary authority within the modern, secular plane of immanence; the use of quotation as a form of critique; and the phenomena of laughter and the laughable. The authors and texts that make up this dissertation demonstrate, on the one hand, the effectiveness of modernist (and post-modern) satire in its ability to expose the historical contradictions that lied at the core of the two World Wars; on the other hand, they reveal the ambiguities of this practice in its most devastating articulations. Such ambiguities furthermore challenge those theories of laughter and the comic—from Kant, Freud, Bergson and Plessner up to contemporary theorists such as Simon Critchley and Alenka Zupančič—that aim to provide something like an ontology of these phenomena.³⁹⁶ There is no such thing, I submit, as laughter *as such*; there are, rather, multiple types, some of which reveal its more “demonic,” and some, its more liberating potential. Kraus, Canetti and Lasker-Schüler all enrich and expand the semantic fields of these concepts, complicating the question that Stephan Braese (via Adorno) poses of whether there can be satire after the Holocaust, after, that is, a limit-event of history. There will always be

³⁹⁵ Kraus, F 405, 20, 1915.

³⁹⁶ While I am partial to Zupančič’s Hegel-inspired definition of comedy as “not an objection to the universal, but the concrete labor or work of the universal itself,” it still relies on a time-transcending ontology of the comic, irrespective of the contingent historical moment and the ambiguities that inhere in different subcategories of the comic, including satire. See Zupančič, 27. Similarly, when Critchley describes humor as a “form of *liberation or elevation* that expresses something essential” about the human, it is not that he does not account for “reactionary humor”—which he does—but that he does not examine how similar the reactionary and the radical or transgressive can actually appear. See Critchley, 9.

something after the end; the question that concerns me is what the stakes are of such texts beyond the empirical responses they elicit.³⁹⁷

Kraus embodies, according to Benjamin, the historical transition from the Baroque priest to the cannibal-satirist, an image of dialectics at a standstill in terms of theology's relationship to immanent critique. The question that Kraus's work raises is what happens to (literary) authority in a world sealed off from transcendence?³⁹⁸ Kraus's predicament is thus metonymical for one of the fundamental problems plaguing modernity, and the Nörgler best illuminates this predicament: his ability to provide insightful commentary on the contradictions of war and its ideological apparatus is a direct function of his entanglement within the conditions he critiques—he claims to see the war on its own terms. Immanence is not far from implication, and this is the conceit, I would argue, of all forms of dialectical criticism: the critic is forced to *recognize* even the forces most “hostile” to it (Adorno). The Nörgler's lament thus serves as both the apex of the satirical project in the twentieth century and the index of its constitutive instability. Canetti, too, is caught within this dilemma of authority. His drama, even more explicitly than Kraus's, invokes religious figures (i.e., the preacher Brosam) and tropes in order to undermine and criticize them as false prophets, hardly distinct from the political powers that reign over his dramatic world. But what Canetti cannot fully relinquish is his authority as dramatist, pulling the strings of his marionettes (perhaps the same ones Kraus invokes above) and treating his characters indiscriminately as lifeless automata, absent of inner subjectivity and wholly un-free.

³⁹⁷ Braese's concern is also how to understand post-National Socialist satire in the wake of a reunited Germany: “Satire ‘nach Auschwitz’ – besonders in der deutschen Sprache – hat heute jedoch vor allem mit einer neuen elementaren historischen Erfahrung zu tun, aus der es gleichfalls keinen Ausgang gibt, die gar in einem unmittelbaren historischen Bezug zur Erfahrung der Shoah steht: der Wiedervereinigung Deutschlands.” See *Das teure Experiment*, 279.

³⁹⁸ Canetti also recognized this tension between the theological and the secular in Kraus. In an *Aufzeichnung* written in 1974, after writing about the visceral effect of Kraus's “Panzersätze,” Canetti writes: “Das Merkwürdige daran ist, daß er gar nichts Gottähnliches hat, wohl aber das Absolute der Forderung, die einmal eine religiöse war. Das Absolute hat sich verweltlicht und sich der Drohung Gottes bemächtigt, ohne darüber nachzudenken, was es tut: es droht, es züchtigt, es ist unerbittlich.” See Canetti, *Das Geheimherz der Uhr*, 23-24.

Lasker-Schüler, responding to National Socialism in all of its horrors, opts for a different route. Her at times pathos-filled, at times playful use of intertextuality and the position of exile does away with the singular authorial figure, including the “poet” herself, who stages her own death. Lasker-Schüler thus anticipates the postmodern ethos of multidirectional parody, an ethos that renounces the stable position of authority presupposed by Kraus and Canetti. In contrast to the Nörgler, the poet in the drama, while playing two roles, does not lament the loss of her authority, because it is an authority she never claims to possess in the first place.

Kraus’s primary satirical weapon involves consuming the linguistic gestures of others and spewing them back out—*Einverleibung*—in order to trigger their self-destruction by relying on the ostensible transparency of their absurdity. His response to the First World War—which he sees as, first and foremost, waged in language—is to stage his own war of words, replete with the violence that constitutes the war’s substance. But by making all aspects of the war “quotable” (Benjamin), he is necessarily led to self-quotation, undermining his own position as he becomes another “noise” of war. This is precisely what Canetti rejects; his aim is thus to move away from the violence and unwarranted authority he detects in Kraus’s satirical persona, and in response, to make use of the “acoustic mask,” which confines each one of his characters to a limited number of words and phrases. Concentration on the aural (as an inheritance from Kraus)³⁹⁹ remains crucial for Canetti, as does his commitment to a certain type of lethal mimesis—the dialects and phraseology in his drama betray only their violent, unflattering dimensions. But direct quotation yields in *Komödie der Eitelkeit* to typology and allegorical dystopia; the drama contains no characters, only types that serve as functionaries within a social order that has been imposed on them. All elements of subjectivity have been quashed along with the very instrument that itself fosters self-recognition: the mirror. Finally, the quotations that abound in *IchundIch*

³⁹⁹ *Die Fackel* always remained “im Ohr.”

neither unequivocally “save” nor “punish” (Benjamin) as they do in Kraus; they are, rather, woven into a dramatic tapestry that renders ambiguous a literary tradition that has culminated in catastrophe. Lasker-Schüler’s use of Goethe, Faust and Mephisto (et al) is at times parodic, nostalgic, celebratory and critical; and her portrayal of the Nazis is not meant to expose or “unmask” (*Entlarvung*) them as they really are. Having renounced the type of ridicule entailed by pure imitation (Kraus)—a method that suggests recognition on behalf of the poet—*Ich und Ich* critiques more through its grotesque images and its invocation of absurdity.

Regarding the paradox of laughter, Kraus’s is certainly the most tainted. Indeed, he admits as much, linking in the epigraph above his laughter (*Lachen*) to a “puddle of blood” (*Blutlache*), and suggesting that humor and war are not opposites but mutually constitutive of one another, and equally predatory in their search for victims. In *Die letzten Tage*, Kraus situates laughter in relation to his audience, foregrounding the specifically theatrical component of the drama. If the audience *mitlacht*, it is, for Kraus, because it knows itself to be implicated in his critique; but it is also given permission to laugh as long as it is aware of this. Again, the Nörgler demonstrates a key aspect of twentieth-century, German-language satire: in striving to make himself and his work obsolete, he longs for an audience that belongs to a true posterity, and that therefore does not laugh because it does not comprehend the conditions that produce laughability. This audience may or may not ever come about; in quasi-deconstructive terms, the Nörgler longs for a world that lies *outside* the text. The question of laughter for Kraus is tied up with the notion of a beyond that has not yet come to be, and one that is placed consistently into question with each new political catastrophe.

Canetti’s laughter is less pathos-laden than Kraus’s but arguably more cynical. For Canetti, laughter once signaled the imminent triumph of a predator vis-à-vis his prey—an act of

violence (*Macht*) akin to the *Einverleibung* Benjamin identifies in Kraus. It now indexes the renunciation of that violence as it has been subsumed into the fold of civilization. We laugh, in other words, *instead* of attacking: “Der Mensch allein hat es gelernt, den vollkommenen Prozeß der Einverleibung durch einen symbolischen Akt zu ersetzen.”⁴⁰⁰ Thinking laughter in its relation to authority and as it appears in *Komödie*, Canetti implicitly asks who has the *right* to laugh, and over whom, in slight contrast to Kraus, who demands that the right to laugh (at the war) be placed behind the duty to cry. When we are encouraged to laugh by Wenzel Wondrak during the drama’s opening sequence, we are being asked first to distance ourselves *from* (a moment of cognition), and then see ourselves reflected *in* the events about to transpire on stage (what I would call the moment of recognition), distinguishing this process from the intent of Brechtian *Verfremdung*. This process is crucial to another aspect of the project of modernist satire, for without such laughter, we fail to move beyond this entanglement. And yet it is still a violent laughter—this is even more apparent in the final scene of *Die Blendung*⁴⁰¹—betraying authorial complicity just as it implicates the real or imagined audience.

Lasker-Schüler’s drama invokes a different type of laughter altogether, which I see as closer to that which was described by Samuel Beckett as the “mirthless laugh,” the laugh that laughs “at the laugh.”⁴⁰² Hers escapes the bitter and condescending laughter of the Nazis, whose ethos of exclusivity permits of no distance and therefore no self-reflection. These figures (and their actions), the drama concedes, are truly beyond laughable—pointing most profoundly to satire’s aporia in the twentieth century—but their laughter is not. By implication, her laughter is

⁴⁰⁰ Canetti, *Masse und Macht*, 262.

⁴⁰¹ Arguably the most well-known instance of laughter in Canetti’s oeuvre occurs in the last scene of the novel, when Peter Kien, having completed his path toward insanity, laughs hysterically as his library goes up in flames: “Er stellt die Leiter in die Mitte des Zimmers, wo sie früher stand. Er steigt auf die sechste Stufe, bewacht das Feuer und wartet. Als ihn die Flammen endlich erreichen, lacht er so laut, wie er in seinem ganzen Leben nie gelacht hat.” See *Die Blendung*, 510.

⁴⁰² Taken from Beckett’s *Watt* but here quoted from Critchley, preface.

also dismissive of Kraus and Canetti's laughter, since it stands in opposition to nothing but the sense-imposing, demeaning laughter found in the other texts. In this way, the poet's laughter in *IchundIch* is not as implicated in the false universal (i.e., fascism, totalitarian thought) that the other forms of laughter are. This is not to say that Lasker-Schüler's drama finds the solution to the conundrum of satire in times of catastrophe, but it does manage to restore a certain dignity to this expression in its resistance to capitulation.

Satire at its limits depends, problematically, on historical catastrophe—but it also penetrates to its core. To analyze its limits is also to move beyond it and to see it as a proxy for larger literary, political and ethical dilemmas that pertain to the role of the cultural critic in modernity. The modernist satirist, best represented by Kraus, can thus be understood as a case study for the critic precisely because his or her critique is so unambiguous in its aim: we know what is intended to be negated and what is intended to be preserved. In his laughter, the satirist occasionally evokes the figure of the detached, transcendent ironist; in his act of linguistic incorporation, he delves into the thicket of “fallen” language, nearly fusing and becoming indistinguishable from his object of ridicule. In my cautionary and critical readings of these texts, I have attempted to tease out these particular moments, to suggest that these texts—and by extension, related texts and textual practices that transcend both the German context and the historical epoch under analysis—often contain conflicting moments that cannot be reconciled with each other and that often have very different ends. Taking its cues from the authors and theorists in question, this is the critical methodology this dissertation offers.

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