

The German Library: Volume 56

Volkmar Sander, General Editor

EDITORIAL BOARD

Peter Demetz (Yale University)

Reinhold Grimm (University of California)

Jost Hermand (University of Wisconsin)

Patricia A. Herminhouse (University of Rochester)

Walter Hinderer (Princeton University)

Victor Lange (Princeton University)†

Frank G. Ryder (University of Virginia)†

Wolfgang Schirmacher (The New School for Social Research)

Egon Schwarz (Washington University)

A. Leslie Willson (University of Texas)

SELECTED SHORT
WRITINGS

Karl Kraus
Hermann Broch
Elias Canetti
Robert Walser

Edited by Dirck Linck



continuum

NEW YORK • LONDON

2006

The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc
80 Maiden Lane, New York, NY 10038

The Continuum International Publishing Group Ltd
The Tower Building, 11 York Road, London SE1 7NX

The German Library is published in cooperation with Deutsches Haus,
New York University.

This volume has been supported by Inter Nationes,
and by a grant from the funds of
Stifterverband für die Deutsche Wissenschaft.

Copyright © 2006 by The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc
Introduction © 2006 by Dirck Linck

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a
retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic,
mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the written
permission of the publishers.

Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Selected short writings / Karl Kraus . . . [et al.] ; edited by Dirck Linck.
v. cm.—(The German library ; v. 56)

Contents: Karl Kraus—Hermann Broch—Elias Canetti—Robert Walser.

ISBN-13: 978-0-8264-1800-5 (hardcover : alk. paper)

ISBN-10: 0-8264-1800-7 (hardcover : alk. paper)

ISBN-13: 978-0-8264-1801-2 (pbk. : alk. paper)

ISBN-10: 0-8264-1801-5 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. German literature—20th century—Translations into English.

I. Kraus, Karl, 1874–1936. II. Linck, Dirck, 1961–. III. Series.

PT1113.S45 2006

830.8'0091—dc22

2006010405



Continuum is committed to preserving ancient forests and natural resources.
In keeping with this effort, this book has been printed on 30% postconsumer
waste recycled paper.

Contents

Introduction: Dirck Linck vii

KARL KRAUS

The Cross of Honor 1

Tourist Trips to Hell 4

The Last Days of Mankind (Act V, Scene 53–54) 9

Self-Admiration 19

Aphorisms 24

HERMANN BROCH

The Anarchist 35

Zerline's Tale 95

Studienrat Zacharias's Four Speeches 120

ELIAS CANETTI

The Morning Walk 147

The Secret 166

Confucius the Matchmaker 175

Translated by C. V. Wedgewood

The Survivor 189

Translated by Carol Stewart

The silent house and the empty rooftops 219

the Donkey's concupiscence 222

Translated by Joachim Neugroschel

ROBERT WALSER

Jakob von Gunten 225
Translated by Christopher Middleton

Acknowledgments 323

Introduction

In a series of outstanding works, which thanks to their artistic riches have held their appeal as objects of aesthetic experience, the literature of the *Wiener Moderne* exhibits a notable propensity for social criticism and diagnostics. The editor of this volume of The German Library has taken this propensity as the criterion for his selection. The scope of the material ranges from class conditions under the liberated forces of capitalism, through the phantasmagoria of bourgeois sexuality, to the biopolitics of a state that sought to regulate even the morality of its citizens. As literary texts, the works collected here are not just—like all writings with poetic pretensions—self-presentations; to an immeasurable degree, they also present the thoughts that arose along with them concerning the reduction of the human spirit in the sphere of power. The literary composition of these texts is characterized by an extension into the range of philosophical construction, or theoretical writing, whereby they subscribe to a nonnegotiable idea of humanity to which their authors remain faithful with unfaltering admiration. The organization of the culture-critical text becomes an indispensable form of literary activity.

Important representatives of this trend toward an anthropologically based literature are the satirist and playwright Karl Kraus (1874–1936), and the epic novelists and essayists Hermann Broch (1886–1951), and Elias Canetti (1905–94), all of Jewish origin and all deeply influenced by experiences of marginalization, which honed their sensitivity to the pitfalls and fault lines in the supposedly stable order into which Europe had settled. These authors were qualified to accuse and entitled to complain. Amid a culture intoxicated with progress, they regarded their works as products of the end of time, paradoxical writings for a world without readers. The

eschatological texts for which these Viennese writers have become famous are about the termination of life in an onrush of violence and mendacity, and as such they describe an era that was slipping into speechless darkness. The tenor of their writings is religious, insofar as they convey the possibility of unredeemable error as a terrifying reality. One example in the current volume is Karl Kraus's "Reklamefahrten zur Hölle" ("Tourist Trips to Hell"). Like so many of the satirical masterpieces by this astute language-critic, this text illustrates the metaphysical dimension of Kraus's commentaries. In it, he arraigns those who exploit the victims of a war that was itself pursued for business ends, accusing them not of a crime, but of a sin, the scale of which precludes all hope of redemption. He speaks as attorney for the victims, a status that justifies and legitimizes the incisiveness of his language.

Thanks to its alliance of throne and altar, the Habsburg monarchy believed itself well prepared for the 20th century, and while it enjoyed the pomp of its self-presentations, with the delusive promise of future greatness, artists were turning their attentions to the outer surface of this immense state, decoding and analyzing the signs of impending collapse, a calamity that would eventually end with the ruin of European civilization in the Nazi death camps. The texts selected for this volume are indebted to a phenomenological preoccupation with the ways in which everyday language and behavior can betray an otherwise imperceptible current of underlying violence. It was this violence, due to come to light on the battlefields of World War I, destroying everything in its path, sparing nothing, which justified Kraus to speak of "the last days of mankind."

Hermann Broch's novels *Die Schlafwandler* ("The Sleepwalkers") and *Die Schuldlosen* ("The Guiltless") bring together character types and voices from German and Austrian history, which Broch uses to illustrate his historical and philosophical reflections on the transformation of the bourgeois order into barbarism. Figures like the commercial clerk August Esch in "*Esch oder die Anarchie*" ("The Anarchist") from the trilogy *Die Schlafwandler*, who loses himself in an irrational cult of sex, the maid Zerline in "*Die Erzählung der Magd Zerline*" ("Zerline's Tale"), who abandons herself to her unbridled passions, or the unprincipled social democrat Zacharias in "*Die vier Reden des Studienrats Zacharias*" ("Studienrats Zacharias's Four Speeches"), whose proto-Fascist

opinions weave the slogans and catchphrases of the age into a single betrayal of language—such figures are all characters from a post-character period. By means of such figures, Broch wanted to depict the "decay of values" that would, he believed, permit the ruthless logic of capitalism to subject all aspects of life to an economic efficiency of benefit only to those who cling to money, while at the same time allowing the most elementary and insidious emotional urges to break free from the control of a capacity for reason that had fallen into disrepute. During his exile in the United States, Broch wrote a series of theoretical texts describing various international legal mechanisms intended to restrain instrumental reason. In his narrative collages, his characters speak as if wanting to warn us about themselves, as if aware that, unless restrained, they would constitute the recruits of the Third Reich.

Elias Canetti moved to Vienna in 1924 and wrote his first works after the fall of the monarchy. In the self-assertive struggles of the Republic, he witnessed the socio-psychological phenomenon of the violent masses, a theme to which he devoted his attention in his monumental study *Masse und Macht* (*Crowds and Power*), and in numerous lesser works. It was something he perceived as the ecstasy of communal experience, whereby the dynamic of the crowd overrode the *principium individuationis*, drawing its deadly energy from the mechanical continuation of violent actions that targeted outsiders and minorities as their first victims. *Die Blendung* (*Auto-da-Fe*), the novel that Canetti wrote in 1930–31, was from the outset interpreted as a parable for the hopeless position of the human spirit in confrontation with this new violence—a violence fed by an atavistic drive in which the consciousness of death was only productive as the will to survive at any cost. In the chapter "*Der Überlebende*" ("The Survivor") in *Masse und Macht*, Canetti describes—albeit without great conviction—the praxis of the artist as a taming of the will to survive. Kien, the protagonist of *Die Blendung* however, sees himself as an anachronism. To an accompaniment of shrill laughter, he allows himself, together with the books that have been his world substitute, to be consumed by fire, which for Canetti is a symbol for the new destructive force that is perfecting total annihilation. In the later tales of the volume "*Die Stimmen von Marrakesch*" ("The Voices of Marrakech"), Canetti contrasts—without a certain exotic whimsicality—the European morbidity

with images of an alternative history of development, which allows the subject to open up emphatically to others, trusting in their similarity.

What Kraus, Broch, and Canetti present in their works is a symptomatology of the epochal violence that was clearing the ground for the terrors of National Socialism. It is no coincidence, therefore, that both Broch and Canetti backed up their literary works with significant theoretical reflections on mass psychology, jurisprudence, and politics, all aimed at the totalitarian disposition of the century. When violence outstrips the human dimension, which provides the measure for all aesthetics, art loses its voice. At that point, the theoretician may take the floor. The texts of this collection are aligned with violence and death. The works themselves are infected with the violence against which they are pitted. They are violent in their incessant efforts to uphold against the demise of life and crimes against the dignity of the creature the eternal moral law in which the will of the Creator can be seen, and which is betrayed by power.

Above and beyond their various ideological and personal differences, these authors are united by the conviction—somewhat remote for contemporary readers—that, even during a crisis, the complex vicissitudes of history can be translated into symmetrical relations between guilt and responsibility, executioners and victims, virtues and vices. In the works presented here, the criteria of intelligibility, of criticism and its truth, of proof and differentiation, remain largely unquestioned. Ideological critique is achieved by means of a cathartic language critique, in which the linguistic idiosyncrasies of the period are artfully turned into a depressing experience for the reader, the intellectual penetration of which facilitates the redeeming distinction between truth and falsity.

The enduring fame of these texts in Germany has to do with the established view that they embody the lofty voice of a truth that is all the more brilliantly vindicated insofar as it was left to great but solitary figures to secure it against the totalitarian power that was imposing form and order. The ethos of these texts is corroborated by the biographies of their authors, people repeatedly abused by state authority, deformed by anti-Semitic persecution and the travails of exile. Against the trend toward collectivization, these men mustered the pathos of the freethinker. In the reception of these

works, there was never anything controversial about relating the insights conveyed through their form to the specific historic realities that they both describe and criticize. In these works, aesthetic experience and moral reflection are conceived as interrelated. The enjoyment in reading Kraus, Broch, and Canetti has invariably consisted not least in being witness to a symbolic victory over indubitable evil, the Protean guises of which always point ultimately to the essence of a single metaphysical evil opposed to the human spirit and to Nature, and that found embodiment in the armies of World War I no less than in those who reported on that war, as well as in the Storm Troopers of fascism. The artwork stood up to this evil as a creation of life and human spirit. The world of the *Wiener Moderne* was Manichean, and at its center stood Karl Kraus.

For 37 years, in 23,000 pages and 415 editions of his periodical *Die Fackel* ("The Torch") Kraus paraded his age before the jury of his language critique in the name of the eternal law. And he passed judgment. Kraus's fame was immense. His social criticism held sway throughout the intellectual circles of Vienna. His admirers included the young and befriended writers Broch and Canetti, who in their reminiscences of Kraus's public appearances evoke the image of an Old Testament prophet liberating the word from enslavement and privileged to address his remarks to the Creator in person.

Kraus left behind an unparalleled—and superhuman—corpus of work. No writer since Goethe had enriched the German language with comparable beauty, complexity, and power. No one remained more faithful to the ideal of language, and no one defended it with greater subtlety or polemic skill against those who treated it as a means to an end, forcing it into the Procrustean bed of communication. Kraus wrestled with powerful opponents: the state, the military, the press. He fought them by repeating what they said. He accused them with their own words. In his satires, of which selected extracts appear in this collection, he lifted individual figures of speech out of the bewildering torrent of social discourse—yet not at random. He made those idioms audible by forcing their deceptive intonations into consciousness, by allowing the age in which he lived to speak against itself. In his finished products, constructed from pathos-laden formulae and expressions, Kraus discovered the defects of thought. The presentation of quotations induced the reader to shift the expectation of revelations away from the author

and onto the quoted material. Kraus delegated the satirical work to the reader, whom he guided by means of his choice of quotations. His play *Die letzten Tage der Menschheit* (*The Last Days of Man-kind*), in which he himself appears in the mask of the "Grumbler," is to this day an antidote to seduction by the *Vaterland*. In the estimation of its readers, this work retains an undiminished vitality as the most incisive condemnation of war in German literature. Despite massive obstruction by the censor, Kraus's play defends life and honor against the military, and amid the universal euphoria of violence he follows the blood trail of patriotic lies in the press and politics through to the remotest field hospital in Herzegovina. The monologue of the "Grumbler" included in this collection binds together the various intentions of this play, and delivers them as a bill of indictment, composed by the "Grumbler" as the spokesman of a creation soiled in blood and printer's ink, which Karl Kraus avenges with the devastating pen of the satirist.

In the course of the modern period, the greatness of this literature also became its burden. Along with the criteria of great literature written by a self-confident subject, the criterion of greatness itself succumbed to questioning, as something measured according to the patriarchal order that this literature itself opposed. For this reason, the collection concludes with a text by the Swiss writer Robert Walser (1878–1956). As a contemporary of Kraus, Broch, and Canetti, Walser cultivated a "small" literature, which overcame the stable relations between repression and revolt that constituted the literature of the *Wiener Moderne*. As ethical reflections, the writings of Kraus, Canetti, and Broch confront their age with the hardened certainties of moral principles, thus producing a trait of violence in themselves. Robert Walser, who in 1929 finally sought refuge in a sanatorium, employed a more modest literary form to describe a social *object* that seeks and finds its scandalous pleasures in being moved by society. Typical of this perspective is the novel *Jakob von Gunten* (1909), which is set in a school for servants. For Walser this is a paradise. He depicts the servants' desire to serve as a subversive strategy adopted by the object. It is a strategy that undermines the order of the male economy, which presupposes that everyone longs to be master and no one a servant. Walser's works celebrate this longing to be an automaton served by others and deriving pleasure from passivity, a pleasure that blunts

the violent edge of power relations. In this way, Walser turns his back on the field of tyranny and places himself in opposition to the heroism of the era, which even an artist-priest like Kraus facilitated by refining their forms of self-presentation. By means of thematic devices that invert subjectivity to objectivity, Walser offends not only against the image of the artist intervening in time, but also against the norms of his own gender, which sanction the desire for passivity. In his prose sketches and novellas, now counted among the most important works of 20th century German literature, Robert Walser undermines the hero's delusion of omnipotence, parrying the martial body of the master with the body of the servant, which owes its form not to close encounters with death, but to the cunning of the slave to exploit the freedoms available. The servant settles into his place in the hierarchy, repeating and accumulating the experiences of his marginality, until ultimately the process releases a joy of existence that makes him master of his life. By opting for the modest and radically unbelligerent life, a form of life well served by the smaller literary form in which it is presented, Walser brings about shifts in the symbolic order, thereby altering it in accordance with the very law to which the Viennese social critics felt themselves committed. It may well be that among the works presented here those of Robert Walser are the most courageous.

D.L.

Translated by Peter Cripps