

‘Wo Ungesetz gesetzlich überwaltet’: Karl Kraus’s Reading of National Socialism

Ari Linden (University of Kansas)

‘CONTRA-HUMAN’ POLITICS AND THE SATIRIST’S RETREAT

*[. . .] die Demokratisierung Europas ist zugleich eine unfreiwillige Veranstaltung zur
Züchtung von Tyrannen[. . .].*¹

In a letter written to Gershom Scholem in 1920, Walter Benjamin provocatively suggested that the Viennese satirist Karl Kraus was on his way to becoming a ‘great politician’.² Benjamin was presumably referring to Kraus’s radical and paradoxically ‘inhuman’ humanism, which finally, so it seems, assumed political form once the Habsburg Empire had crumbled.³ And indeed, in his essay ‘Brot und Lüge’ (1919) (one of the two specific pieces to which Benjamin is referring in this letter, the other being Kraus’s parodic ‘Volkshymne’), Kraus unambiguously declares: ‘Nur eine Politik, die als Zweck den Menschen und das Leben als Mittel anerkennt, ist brauchbar. Die andere, die den Menschen zum Mittel macht, kann auch das Leben nicht bewirken und muß ihm entgegenwirken.’⁴ While the immediate occasion for this understated critique was the hesitance of the post-war Austrian government to sell off its prized cultural possessions in order to provide nourishment for its starving population, Kraus’s larger point is that a political system

¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Kritische Studienausgabe*, 15 vols., ed. by G. Colli and M. Montinari (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1980), v: p. 183. ² See Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Briefe*, 6 vols., ed. by Christoph Gödde and Henri Lonitz (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1995), II: 120.

² See Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Briefe*, 6 vols., ed. by Christoph Gödde and Henri Lonitz (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1995), II: 120.

³ Benjamin’s 1931 essay on Kraus is divided into three parts, the last of which refers to Kraus as an ‘Unmensch’. See Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 7 vols., ed. by Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1991), II: 358.

⁴ Karl Kraus, ‘Brot und Lüge’, in *Brot und Lüge: Aufsätze, 1919-24* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1991), p. 70.

designed to instrumentalize its own population for a more abstract purpose—be it the notion of culture or the state—has abandoned its primary task and paved the way for a system of victimization: ‘Es ist gar kein Wunder’, Kraus continues, ‘daß die Menschheit immer wieder bereit ist, sich für die Machtlüge ihrer Beherrscher aufzuopfern, da sie selbst zum Opfer ihrer Kulturlüge präpariert hat’ (p. 92).

Kraus’s cynicism was undoubtedly informed by his first-hand experience of Austria’s violent transition from monarchy to republic, and his political disposition would continue to be shaped by the dissolution of democracy a decade and a half after its initial formation. But prior to addressing Kraus’s reading of National Socialism in his posthumously published essay, *Dritte Walpurgisnacht* (1952)—the primary focus of this article—it would help briefly to recount the history of Kraus’s increasingly hostile attitude toward the leading figures of interwar social democracy.⁵ This excursus is meant neither as an *ex post facto* legitimation nor a condemnation of Kraus’s views, but rather as a general explanation for how Kraus came to reject the sphere of ‘bourgeois’ politics altogether, only to then produce a singularly scathing critique of the horrors of Nazism several years before Auschwitz and Stalingrad. What ultimately led Kraus from his status as a ‘great politician’ to his vow of silence upon Hitler’s seizure of power and subsequent support of Engelbert Dollfuss’s *Ständestaat*? Kraus was certainly not acting in the interest of his readership or audience, as his erstwhile devotee Elias Canetti would write in hindsight: ‘Die Enttäuschung über [Kraus] nach den Ereignissen des Februar 1934 war ungeheuer gewesen. Er hatte sich für Dollfuß erklärt, er hatte den Bürgerkrieg auf den Straßen Wiens hingenommen und das Schreckliche gebilligt. Alle, wirklich alle waren von ihm

⁵ Karl Kraus, *Dritte Walpurgisnacht* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1989). Subsequently referred to as *DWN*.

abgefallen.⁶ What happened to Kraus's satire, in other words, under the conditions of social and political dehumanization?

During the immediate post-war years Kraus publicly aligned himself with the Socialists and the First Republic, finding the lingering nostalgia for a monarchy that had plunged its people into an unnecessary war highly suspicious. From the mid-1920s onward, however, it became clear to him that despite the early accomplishments of the *Sozialdemokratische Arbeiterpartei Österreichs* (SDAPÖ), particularly in the realm of 'Bildung',⁷ the party had distanced itself from its revolutionary promises and was becoming more 'bourgeois' in its practices.⁸ This once potentially fruitful alliance was thus short-lived.⁹ Kraus was also critical of the growing complicity of the party with internal threats from the right, and in response to the July Revolt of 1927—which culminated in the death of eighty-five civilians and the wounding of hundreds at the hands of a militarized police force—Kraus took a highly publicized stance against what he perceived to be an authoritarian state developing within the womb of a weakened republic.¹⁰ For Kraus, it was

⁶ See Elias Canetti, *Das Augenspiel: Lebensgeschichte 1931-37* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 2008), pp. 267-68. For a reading of the debate surrounding Kraus's notorious last poem, published in *Die Fackel*, no. 888 (October 1933), 4—along with the subsequent discourse it unleashed regarding the role of satire in the antifascist campaign—see Stephan Braese, *Das teure Experiment: Satire und NS-Faschismus* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1996), pp. 15-26, and Andrew Barker, *Fictions from an Orphan State: Literary Reflections of Austria between Habsburg and Hitler* (Rochester: Camden House, 2012), pp. 113-21.

⁷ On the early successes of the Social Democratic party in Austria, see Anson Rabinbach, *The Crisis of Austrian Socialism: From Red Vienna to Civil War, 1927-34* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), pp. 18-40.

⁸ Alfred Pfabigan's *Karl Kraus und der Sozialismus: Eine politische Biographie* (Vienna: Europa Verlags-AG, 1976) is still arguably the definitive work on Kraus's deteriorating relationship with the Social Democrats, the *Arbeiterbewegung*, and the communists. See Pfabigan, pp. 311-58.

⁹ Edward Timms has pointed out that Kraus's critiques were rarely structural. They focused more, rather, on the 'mentality' of the bourgeoisie and on the widespread 'corruption' of the political system than on the deficiencies of social democracy or capitalism as such. For this reason, Kraus became a source of controversy among the hardline communists, with some factions claiming him as an enforcer of the status quo, and some as a true revolutionary. See Edward Timms, *Karl Kraus: Apocalyptic Satirist* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), II: *The Postwar Crisis and the Rise of the Swastika*, pp. 256-57.

¹⁰ For a reading of Kraus's prominent role during the aftermath of July 15, including his public demand that the Viennese police chief, Johann Schober, 'step down', see *Crowds and Democracy: The Idea and Image*

enough that innocent blood had been shed and that neither the rule of democracy nor its staunchest political party was able to do anything to prevent it. Complicity with state violence had become the law. This crisis served as a symptom for Kraus of both the inherent instability of the Republic and the powerlessness of the Social Democrats. Kraus would continue to distance himself from this party (and in some instances, align with the communists), identifying in their leadership a dubious willingness to compromise with the Austrian elite.¹¹

Kraus's final farewell to democracy—and, as some have argued, to politics as such—was most trenchantly formulated in a speech he gave in October 1932, 'Hüben und Drüben', after the National Socialists had gained over 230 seats in the *Reichstag*.¹² Here Kraus deemed the Social Democrats—and the German variant in particular, which still fared worse than its Austrian counterpart—a moral and political failure for their inability to both confront the threat of Nazism and protect Austrian independence. Kraus was enraged by the rhetoric of a 'Schicksalsgemeinschaft', or the notion, championed on both sides of the political spectrum, that Germany and Austria shared a spiritual and thus a political kinship. Any talk of pan-German unity, Kraus felt, would most certainly play into the hands of the National Socialists and was thus a glaring blind spot of the Social Democratic leadership. In the same piece Kraus also denounced communist and Marxist intellectuals—an issue that would constitute much of his last major broadside, 'Wichtiges

of the Masses from Revolution to Fascism (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), pp. 33-37; and Elias Canetti, *Die Fackel im Ohr: Lebensgeschichte 1921–31* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 2005), p. 231.

¹¹ See Kraus, 'Der Hort der Republik', in *Die Stunde des Gerichts: Aufsätze, 1925–28* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1991), p. 293.

¹² For a thorough evaluation of Kraus's departure from democratic politics in the early 1930s, see Werner Anzenberger, *Absage an die Demokratie: Karl Kraus und der Bruch der Österreichischen Verfassung, 1933–34* (Graz: Leykam Verlag, 1997).

von Wichten' (1936)—many of whom had once extolled Kraus as a revolutionary figure.¹³ Their 'Gedankenleben', he insinuated, was reducible to the inscriptions on a beer mug, and by implication, clouded a more objective understanding of the actual threat of Nazism.¹⁴ By this point, 'alles Parteiische' had become '*widermenschlich*',¹⁵ a sentiment that sets the stage for the opening salvo of his polemic:

Und wenn die Welt voll Hakenkreuzler wär'—an deren Erschaffung ja der Sozialdemokratie, hüben und drüben, das Hauptverdienst gebührt—: wir müssen uns endlich klar werden, daß es, seitdem sich Menschheit von Politik betrügen läßt, nie ein größeres Mißlingen gegeben hat als das Tun dieser Partei, und daß die Entehrung sämtlicher Ideale, die sie benützt haben, um mit der Bürgerwelt teilen zu können, vollendet ist. (*Hüben und Drüben*, p. 165)

Combining an allusion to Martin Luther's 'Ein feste Burg' with the now firmly established emblem of the Nazi Party, Kraus insists that the Social Democrats bear much of the responsibility for not preventing the circumstances under which the Nazis came to power.

¹⁶A political system, he suggests, fueled by the betrayal of its *own* ideals, internal corruption, and a sullied relationship to the liberal press had created the conditions for the

¹³ For a recent reading of Kraus's final polemic against primarily his socialist and communist readers, now mostly living and writing in exile, see Gerald Stieg, 'Ein verfrühter Nachruf auf Karl Kraus und seine Folgen', in *Österreichische Satire (1933–2000): Exil—Remigration—Assimilation* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2003), pp. 3-12.

¹⁴ Kraus, *Hüben und Drüben: Aufsätze, 1929–36* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1993), p. 176. For more on Kraus's complicated relationship to the Communist Party during this time of political crisis, see Pfabigan, pp. 333-36.

¹⁵ Emphasis added.

¹⁶ Kraus is clearly alluding to the opening line of the third stanza of Luther's 'Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott' (c. 1529)—'Und wenn die Welt voll Teufel wär'—which would have had immediate resonance with his audience. For more on this, including the history of Kraus's use of Luther's *Kirchenlied*, see Brigitte Stocker, *Rhetorik eines Protagonisten gegen die Zeit: Karl Kraus als Redner in den Vorlesungen, 1919 bis 1932* (Vienna: Lit Verlag, 2013), pp. 108-10.

Machtergreifung. A paradigm shift had long since been set in motion, and Kraus appears unsurprised to see Nazism as its logical endpoint.¹⁷

My larger point is this: as Kraus begins to retreat from the (democratic) political sphere entirely, he identifies *one* aspect of National Socialism as a function or even a product of the social, political, and cultural conditions whence it sprang. The Nazis, he suggests, are the darker underside of an already corrupt and inhuman modernity. However, when Kraus concludes his polemic with a warning about the more hidden dangers of Nazism, he deploys a distinct linguistic register:

Drüben, wo eine Menschenart haust, die die Freiheit nur als das Recht erfaßt hat, einander aufzufressen, und deren Wesen eher die Welt anstecken wird, bevor sich ihr Wahn, daß diese an ihm genesen werde, erfüllt — drüben ist die Hölle ausgespien; hüben, wo das Dasein auf das Problem herabgesetzt ist, wie es zu fristen sei, betrügt man das Volk mit der Erwartung des nationalen Paradieses.

(Hüben und Drüben, p. 187)

Here, Kraus's use of bio-political language ('auffressen', 'anstecken'), combined with references to the otherworldly ('Hölle') yields a different image of the Nazi movement altogether. If the problem with Austria is that the Social Democrats have betrayed the people with their phraseological swill about a common 'national paradise', the Nazis are presented as cannibals who seek to 'infect' everything in their midst with their ideology.¹⁸

On the one hand, then, Kraus could attribute the rise of Nazism to the deceitful power

¹⁷ Kraus had been writing about the dangers of the Swastika since 1921, which he saw as having risen out of, and now hovering above the 'Trümmern des Weltbrands'. See Kraus, *Die Fackel*, no. 557 (1921), 59.

¹⁸ Kraus is also referencing Emanuel Geibel's 1861 poem, whose line, 'Am deutschen Wesen mag die Welt genesen', was exploited by the National Socialists. For more on the impact of Geibel's poem within National Socialism, see Peter Staudenmeier, *Between Occultism and Nazism: Anthroposophy and the Politics of Race in the Fascist Era* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2014), pp. 146-48.

politics of the bourgeois class, the political failures of the left, and a desperate populace made ‘dummer’ through the ‘Schaden’ of the First World War (182).¹⁹ On the other hand, however, he identifies something wholly singular in this movement, something that falls outside of any political spectrum or trajectory, a ‘Drang’ that has led to the ‘größten nationalen Bewegung, die diese blutige Erde erlebt hat’ (182). How was Kraus able to reconcile this bifurcated reading of National Socialism?

The remainder of this article will focus on how Kraus’s *Dritte Walpurgisnacht*—and specifically, its multifaceted engagement with Goethe’s *Faust. Der Tragödie zweiter Teil* (1832)—represents anything but the author’s resolute abandonment of the political.²⁰ To the contrary, *DWN* is an attempt to produce what Kraus called a ‘stance’ (*Stand*) against Nazism, as opposed to a ‘position’ (*Stellung*).²¹ Positions were caught in the structural web of the politics that Kraus came to despise; they were deemed useless against a regime that had transitioned from the (merely) ‘counter-human’ sphere of bourgeois party politics to the dehumanizing sphere of totalitarianism. Nazism demanded a critique that, accordingly, moved beyond conventional satire. While *DWN* does not in its entirety constitute a radical break from Kraus’s previous satirical methods—the quotation of Nazi discourse, to be sure, is still its primary mode of attack—it employs intertextuality at its most politically

¹⁹ It would appear that Kraus had been able to predict the Social Democrats’ downfall before even their official leader, Otto Bauer, had done so. Bauer would later reflect that not acting more decisively during the so-called ‘March Crisis’ of 1933 was a mistake. For more on this crisis, see Rabinbach, p. 92.

²⁰ In this sense, I agree with Stocker’s statement, ‘Kraus Verhältnis zur Politik endet nicht 1932, es tritt nur in eine andere Phase ein’. See Stocker, p. 18.

²¹ In *DWN* (and elsewhere) Kraus implies that the distinction between ‘einen Stand suchen’ and ‘eine Stellung nehmen’ goes beyond rhetoric: Kraus suggests that at this historical juncture, what is needed is a more decisive ‘stand’ or ‘stance’. See *DWN*, pp. 14-15. In reference to this text, Werner Kraft also wrote: ‘Die Sprache bei Kraus ist immer bedenkend absolut, auf wechselnde Inhalte, Stand suchend, mutig wechselnd bezogen’. See Kraft, “‘Es war einmal ein Mann . . .’: Über die *Dritte Walpurgisnacht* von Karl Kraus’, *Merkur: Deutsche Zeitschrift für europäisches Denken*, 10.22 (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett Verlag, 1968), p. 927.

charged.²² Its dialogue with Goethe's last drama, I argue, enables Kraus to articulate the tension described above: between the characterization of Nazism as at once a legible product of modernity *and* a civilizational caesura, a volcanic eruption into the political life of a nation whose only precedent was to be found in the literary-mythological imagination. This late text is Kraus's last testament to both the limits and potential of satire under the conditions of total dehumanization.

'FAUSTNATUREN' IN *DRITTE WALPURGISNACHT*

*'Es ist aber nicht die Stufe, die ins dritte Reich führt [...].'*²³

The precise moment when Kraus decided to withhold publishing *DWN* remains unknown.²⁴

He did, however, break his silence vis-à-vis Hitler's assumption of power with the voluminous broadside, 'Warum die Fackel nicht erscheint', which he published in *Die Fackel* in July 1934.²⁵ Directed primarily against the obstinacy of the Social Democrats and containing numerous excerpts from *DWN*, which had been completed in the summer months of 1933, this tirade granted his readers at least some access to a text that was, in the end, written for posterity. Heinrich Fischer, who published the first completed version of *DWN* with Kösel Verlag in 1952, reported Kraus's concerns about this book falling into

²² The most comprehensive readings of *N* are still to be found in Jochen Stremmel, 'Dritte Walpurgisnacht': *Über einen Text von Karl Kraus* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1982), and Kurt Krolop, *Sprachsatire als Zeitsatire bei Karl Kraus. Neun Studien* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1987), pp. 210-51.

²³ Kraus's response to the conservative Austrian writer and theater critic, Mirko Jelusich, who was instrumental in National Socialist cultural politics, when Jelusich claimed that Goethe would have been on the side of National Socialism had he been alive today. Kraus shows that Goethe was a resolute enemy of all forms of 'Nationalhaß'. See *Die Fackel*, no. 873 (1932), 35.

²⁴ Scholars have surmised that the assassination of Theodor Lessing, the German-Jewish philosopher whose monumental 1931 study, *Jüdischer Selbsthaß*, makes reference to Kraus, may have been the decisive event. See Stremmel, pp. 70-71.

²⁵ For more on the origins of this particular issue of *Die Fackel*, see 'Nachweise, Hinweise' in Kraus, *Hüben und Drüben*, p. 401.

the hands of the Propaganda Minister, who could, Kraus allegedly told Fischer, ‘aus Wut fünfzig Juden von Königsberg in die Stehsärge eines Konzentrationslagers bringen läßt’. Kraus refused to assume responsibility for these potential consequences.²⁶

His reasons, however, were also more politically grounded, as he felt that (conventional) resistance was no longer possible. Indeed, his critique of those on the left, whom he referred to as the ‘falschen Freiheitskämpfer’ (*Hüben und Drüben*, p. 183), was that their attempt to resist Nazism unwittingly made the regime more *legible* and thus necessarily rendered it more innocuous.²⁷ These writers, in his view, were blind to the incommensurability of their words with National Socialism’s current and future deeds. A counterexample to Kraus’s approach would have been Bertolt Brecht’s *Der unaufhaltsame Aufstieg des Arturo Ui* (1941), which, despite its success in deconstructing the more auratic image of Hitler and his party’s rise to power, essentially reduced the Nazis to a group of murderous, capitalist bandits who were in the right place at the right time. Brecht’s play ignored the anti-Semitism and more subconsciously archaic elements of the movement that Kraus could not ignore.²⁸

While Kraus thus recognized the relationship between big capital and the National Socialists, his understanding of the movement was both broader and more specific. In this sense he anticipated certain claims formulated by Hannah Arendt in her comprehensive post-war study, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), in which Arendt distinguishes

²⁶ Kraus then rhetorically asked, ‘Wie könnte ich das verantworten?’ See Heinrich Fischer, ‘Anmerkungen’, in Karl Kraus, *Die Dritte Walpurgisnacht* (Munich: Kösel, 1967), p. 308.

²⁷ Irina Djasemy has similarly argued: ‘Die *Dritte Walpurgisnacht* kann daher als eine Korrektur der zeitgenössischen linken Faschismuskritik angesehen werden’, For more on this, see Djasemy, *Der ‘Produktivgehalt kritischer Zerstörerarbeit’: Kulturkritik bei Karl Kraus und Theodor Adorno* (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 2002), p. 363.

²⁸ See Djasemy, p. 363. For a specific account of Brecht and Kraus’s relationship, and specifically of Brecht’s reaction to Kraus’s controversial poem and political about-turn in 1934, see Braese, pp. 44-55, and Pfabigan, pp. 342-43 and pp. 353-54.

Nazism from Italian fascism and other authoritarian movements that developed over the course of the twentieth century. Often quoting from prominent members of the National Socialist party itself, Arendt argues that while fascist movements spread all across Central and Eastern Europe, Mussolini ‘did not attempt to establish a full-fledged totalitarian regime and contented himself with dictatorship and one-party rule’.²⁹ Arendt then quotes Goebbels on the difference between fascism and National Socialism. Throughout Kraus’s last major essays, ‘Warum die Fackel nicht erscheint’ and ‘Wichtiges von Wichten’, he similarly dismisses the use of the overarching term ‘fascism’, suggesting that it euphemizes and therefore conceals what is actually unfolding in Germany. Addressing this aspect of Kraus’s thought, Gerald Stieg thus writes:

Es ist dies eine eher wenig beachtete Stelle der späten Fackel, in der das zentrale Motiv Kraus’ umspielt wird, daß es aussichtslos sei, den ‘Trotzbuben’, seinem früheren jugendlichen linken Publikum, das politische ABC beizubringen, daß zwischen einer ‘kleinen Diktatur’ und dem Wirken eines ‘Jaguars’, durch das ‘Mord und Raub an Wehrlosen in das System einer neuen Religion gebracht’ (‘Wichtiges von Wichten,’ p. 112) worden sei, ein Wesensunterschied bestehe, der durch den Oberbegriff ‘Faschismus’ bewußt verwischt wurde.³⁰

Again, Kraus demanded a language to articulate those dimensions of the regime that he could intuit but not easily conceptualize; the available linguistic landscape was insufficient.

²⁹ See Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, 1994), pp. 308-309.

³⁰ See Stieg, p. 5.

It was arguably the inadequacies—and complicity—of even the language *critical* of the regime that led Kraus to incorporate Goethe’s *Faust* into *DWN*.³¹ Perhaps Kraus thus identified this drama as that which most profoundly thematized the relationship between word and deed; the Nazis’ deeds, in this case, had surpassed the satirist’s words: ‘Um zu sagen, was geschah, kann es die Sprache nur stammelnd nachsprechen’, Kraus writes toward the beginning of the essay (*DWN*, p. 16).³² There are, to be sure, thematic links between his and Goethe’s text. *Faust II* connects individual desire to political expansion and destruction; it also couples violence, the grotesque, and aggressive sexuality in its portrayal of a collision between the ancient and modern worlds: these are all salient features of Kraus’s text as well, leading some critics to conclude that this bleak vision of humanity binds the two authors.³³ But Goethe’s drama, we should recall, also contains a political satire: the French Revolution hovers in the background, an event that inspired fear and fascination in the poet, as it did in many of his contemporaries. Taken together, Kraus’s complex use of Goethe would represent more than one side of his moral ponderings vis-à-vis the ‘irruption’ of National Socialism, as Edward Timms suggests in his comparison of Kraus’s use of Goethe in *DWN* with his use of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*. Shakespeare, for Timms, still operates within a universe in which characters are aware that they will be judged in moral terms; Goethe entertains the more unsettling idea that nature sanctions all

³¹ Fischer’s succinct explanation for this choice is as follows: ‘es war eine innere Notwendigkeit dieses letzten Werkes, daß die Sprache und der Geist Hitlerdeutschlands unablässig konfrontiert wurden mit den Worten und dem Geist Goethes’. See Fischer, ‘Nachwort’, in *Die Dritte Walpurgisnacht*, p. 306.

³² For a helpful discussion of the way Kraus negotiates the relationship between word (*Wort*) and deed (*Tat*)—and the Nazi ‘Perversion des faustischen Tatbegriffs’—in his eulogy for Adolf Loos, his last poem, and *DWN*, see Anne Peitter, *Komik und Gewalt: Zur literarischen Verarbeitung der beiden Weltkriege und der Shoah* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2007), pp. 146-47.

³³ Stremmel was among the first to comment, for example, how ‘Geld- und Geschlechtsgier’ play significant roles as ‘beherrschende Triebkräfte’ in both Goethe’s and Kraus’s visions of society, and indeed in many sections of *DWN*, Kraus focuses either on the way sexual politics or economic envy informed much of Nazi anti-Semitism. See Stremmel, p. 130.

forms of violence. Macbeth's intentions and ambitions are political, while Faust's are 'existential.' By combining the two literary interlocutors, Timms argues, Kraus is able to weave competing moral, political, and philosophical strands together without ever coming to a resolution.³⁴ My concern, rather, are the various and often ambiguous ways that Goethe alone is employed in the text, and how Kraus repurposes Goethe to engage with, and critique, this most obscene perversion of modern politics. Despite even Kraus's (and Heinrich Fischer's) claims to the contrary, Kraus's use of Goethe must be understood as a political gesture and as part of his strategy to expose the inner workings of the Nazi machine.³⁵

What Kraus called the 'motto' of his essay was only appended to the beginning of the 1989 Suhrkamp edition of *DWN*. It had, however, appeared in 'Warum die Fackel nicht erscheint' and ought to be treated therefore as integral to his literary-political project.³⁶ This motto is comprised of a montage of quotations culled from act I, act IV, and the 'Klassische Walpurgisnacht' (in act II) of Goethe's drama, all juxtaposed next to each other and many of which reappear later on in the essay. Thematically united in their reference to a political, natural, or mythological monstrosity, these quotes are not arranged in any immediately intuitive order. Instead, the kaleidoscopic arrangement of these quotations undermines any attempt to discern in them a coherent narrative, a method I argue to be constitutive of Kraus's critique: Nazism, as Kraus saw it, cannot be easily narrated. The motto's placement in *DWN* prior to Kraus's notorious opening line, 'mir fällt zu Hitler nichts ein'—especially if we are to assume that it was at one point intended to be placed

³⁴ See Timms, pp. 505-507.

³⁵ See Fischer, pp. 305, 308.

³⁶ For more, see the 'Anhang', in *DWN*, pp. 336, 362-63.

there—thus renders the latter highly ironic: much has, in fact, already occurred to Kraus (*DWN*, p. 12).³⁷ Of the motto itself, Kraus writes in ‘Warum die Fackel nicht erscheint’:

Wäre in solchem Motto nicht alles enthalten, mit Zögern und Angehen, Schweigen und Sagen dazu? Aber das deutscheste Ereignis—dem der Superlativ ziemt—ist wunderbarer Weise Zug um Zug im deutschesten Gedicht präformiert. Und was würde aus dieser Fülle von Motiven. (*Hüben und Drüben*, p. 272)

Kraus, I argue, departs from the trite and problematic association of the ‘Faustian’ *character* with the German spirit. More ironically, he suggests that it is the poem itself, with its ambitious scope, unbridled violence, and admixture of the modern and the ancient that has found its true content in the unfolding of this historical moment. The ‘preformation’ of which Kraus speaks must therefore be understood as a correspondence not between fate and character, as it were, but between a formally and politically ambiguous text on the one hand, and its literary legacy in the context of National Socialism on the other.³⁸

What, then, can we make of Kraus’s notion of ‘preformation’? The tenth passage of this opening motto—each of which is visibly bracketed off by a line from the next—is taken from *Faust*, act I, and is set in the throne room of a late medieval or early Renaissance imperial palace, which Goethe later identified as having been modeled after the court of Maximilian I. The Chancellor (along with the entire state council—including Mephistopheles) in Goethe’s drama is addressing the Emperor, informing him of the

³⁷ It may be, as Timms has provocatively suggested, that the ‘nichts’ in this curious phrase is a cipher for the kind of nihilism Kraus associated with the Nazi movement: quite literally, ‘nothing’ would accordingly come to mind in connection to Hitler. See Timms, p. 496.

³⁸ With an eye on its formal qualities, Djassemey has similarly argued: ‘Die Darstellungsform der *Dritte Walpurgisnacht* unterstützt ihren kritischen Gehalt auf allen Ebenen.’ See Djassemey, *Die verfolgende Unschuld: Die Geschichte des autoritären Charakters in der Darstellung von Karl Kraus* (Böhlau: Wien, 2011), p. 256.

instability in his empire and the violence that threatens to be all-consuming. The Emperor is worried about the financial condition of his empire, only to be reassured by Mephisto that money can easily be fabricated to fix the problem; there are clear resonances with the contemporary crisis of inflation in Germany. This scene has been read as an allusion to the conditions in France prior to the revolution, raising the possibility that Kraus identifies an analogy between that revolution and the one from the right to which he currently bears witness.³⁹ Kraus thus appears to be weighing in on a political-philosophical discourse on revolution in times of crisis. But there is more. The excerpt from the Chancellor's speech that he quotes in *DWN* begins right after the curiously omitted lines of Goethe's drama, 'Wenn's fieberhaft durchaus im Staate wüetet, / Und Übel sich in Übel überbrutet',⁴⁰ establishing one of the recurring motifs in Kraus's text. Kraus then quotes:

Wer schaut hinab von diesem hohen Raum
Ins weite Reich, ihm scheint's ein schwerer Traum,
Wo Mißgestalt in Mißgestalten schaltet,
Das Ungesetz gesetzlich überwaltet,
Und eine Welt des Irrtums sich entfaltet. (*DWN*, p. 10)

The isolated words 'Reich' and 'schalten' resonate with the self-perception of the regime (*Drittes Reich*) and with its most effective accomplishment to date, 'co-ordination' (*Gleichschaltungen*), to which Kraus will repeatedly return in his essay. But such analogies do not exhaust the function of this quotation, or of quotation in this text more generally. Less certain is how we are to interpret the 'deformities' that couple with other deformities.

³⁹ See David Constantine, 'Faust, Part II, Act by Act: Composition and Synopsis', in Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust: The Second Part of the Tragedy*, trans. by David Constantine (London: Penguin, 2009), p. lxxx.

⁴⁰ Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Faust. Der Tragödie Zweiter Teil* (Frankfurt: Reclam, 2001), ll. 4780-81, p. 8.

Would pre-Nazi Germany be the first ‘Mißgestalt’ in this formulation, in which case Nazism must be understood as an intensification or culmination of the conditions already in place, rather than an actual revolution, as its exponents insisted on proclaiming? Or is Kraus suggesting that National Socialism functions precisely by begetting more and more destructive manifestations of itself, a process inaugurated by the initial usurpation of law through illegal means? It is likely both, but the ambiguity of the allusion is constitutive to its interpretation.

A segment of this passage reappears toward the end of *DWN*, providing a salient example of the two distinct ways in which quotation as such functions in Kraus’s text: as visibly bracketed off from his own words, drawing attention to its status as a separate quotation; and as seamlessly incorporated into Kraus’s monologue, rendering it difficult to determine where the quotation begins and where it ends. When we encounter the Chancellor’s same words later on in the text, they are embedded in one of Kraus’s many discussions about how the new regime has radically distinguished itself from that which it abolished. Here, Kraus expresses astonishment at the transparency of the regime’s shameless nepotism, bribery, and thievery, in contrast to the ‘versteckten Gönnerschaften des frühern Systems’ (even at this juncture Kraus does not absolve social democracy of its complicity). He then expresses a sardonic concern for what he calls the ‘Mehrzahl dienender Glieder [...] die sich ans Totale angeschlossen haben und noch immer sowohl auf die ideelle wie auf die materielle Erfüllung warten’ (*DWN*, p. 298), referring to the promises Hitler has made to the German people regarding their ‘material’ and ‘ideal’ needs, promises that he in no way intends to keep. Kraus finally intervenes:

Da jene Erledigung nicht alle Ansprüche befriedigen kann und mit dem Blutdurst beiweitem noch nicht der Hunger gestillt ist, so gewährt das sichere Bett der Evolution keinen ruhigen Schlaf. Elemente treten auf den Plan. Rütteln an der Illusion, mit der Staat gemacht wurde. Schauen nach, was dahinter steckt. Faustnaturen drohen zu vollenden, wo Ungesetz gesetzlich überwaltet [...]. (*DWN*, p. 299)

The 'secure bed of evolution' is a clear reference to a statement made by Hitler during a speech in 1933 that declared the end of the revolutionary stage of National Socialism: Kraus is highly suspicious of Hitler's promise that power will be seized gradually, and that anyone will be granted a peaceful rest (perhaps also embedding an allusion to Faust's long sleep and eventual awakening with which the second part of the tragedy commences).⁴¹ But then he shifts rhetorical gears, moving from the satirical-analytical moment to the pathos-laden literary allusion and presenting the 'elements' of National Socialism as having emerged from a natural, even mythological underworld. *Faust II* thus functions in these passages in multiple ways. It first enriches Kraus's political critique: that the Nazi state has been produced by a series of illusions, and that its seemingly united front conceals its inner contradictions, are valid political insights, as is the reprisal of the idea initially introduced in the motto that illegality has legally triumphed over, or become the law. But *Faust* also fills a lacuna opened up by the limitations of Kraus's more rational, intelligible critique, insofar as it renders what is unfolding as an 'Elementarereignis' (*DWN*, p. 307),

⁴¹ Kraus here again appears to anticipate another claim made by Arendt regarding the non-teleological aspect of the National Socialist movement. Arendt writes: 'The seizure of power through the means of violence is never an end in itself but only a means to an end [...]. The practical goal of the movement is to organize as many people within its framework and to set up and keep them in motion; a political goal that would constitute the end of the movement simply does not exist.' See Arendt, p. 326.

an irreducible entanglement of drives and desires that cannot be stopped. Indeed, the most frightening aspect of Nazism for Kraus is that behind this illusion lie the ominous, not yet fully realized nor fully defined, ‘Faustnaturen’.⁴² The form of this ‘incommensurable’ poem—Goethe’s own term to describe his literary creation, of which Kraus is certainly aware—has found its incommensurable content.⁴³

The essay immediately launches into another spate of quotations, all deriving from the same dialogue between the Chancellor and the Army Chief, and all of which are interrupted by brief but pertinent Krausian commentaries. The focus has shifted to a discussion of the *Reichstagsbrand* and how this event has inaugurated a new instantiation of violence that is unable to be satiated. Kraus thus transposes this ‘deutsche Gewalt’ onto the Army Chief’s prescient warning to his Emperor:

Wie tobt’s in diesen wilden Tagen!
Ein jeder schlägt und wird erschlagen,
Und für’s Kommando bleibt man taub.
[...]
Der Mietsoldat wird ungeduldig,
Mit Ungestüm verlangt er seinen Lohn,
Und wären wir ihm nichts mehr schuldig,
Er liefe ganz und gar davon.
Verbiете wer, was Alle wollten,
Der hat ins Wespennest gestört;

⁴² For a longer discussion of the term ‘Faustnaturen’ in Kraus’s text—which appears only this one time—and other related references to the ‘Faustian’ in general, see Krolop, pp. 217-22.

⁴³ See Constantine, p. xliii.

Das Reich das sie beschützen sollten,
es liegt geplündert und verheert (*DWN*, p. 299).

Assuming the role of both judge and advocate in a time of utter lawlessness, Kraus uses *Faust* to prophesize the historical trajectory of this regime: the mercenaries are becoming impatient, and their violence increases in direct proportion to the time they are waiting to be paid. But the most visionary moment in the quotation is also the grimmest, insofar as Kraus suggests that interference in this event is futile. What lies ahead, he intuits, is an empire in ruins and a regime exposed in all of its hypocrisy, mendacity, and violence. Kraus's genuine plea to the 'Ausland' finds him returning to the same speech for an answer:

Man läßt ihr Toben wütend hausen
Schon ist die halbe Welt vertan;
Es sind noch Könige da draußen
Doch keiner denkt es ging' ihn irgend an. (*DWN*, p. 300)

While Kraus is addressing the non-German speaking world, he seems to imagine that leaders abroad (the 'Könige da draußen') will have to be forced into a conflict before being convinced that the political upheaval in Germany is worthy of their concern. Again, Kraus has arrived at a sound insight regarding the regime's ability to be kept outside the scope of international concern, but this is in part because he is convinced that he sees something others do not: 'Indessen wogt, in grimmigem Schwalle / Des Aufruhrs wachsendes Gewühl' (*DWN*, p. 299). Through the coded language of *Faust*, Kraus attempts to mediate these more occult and illegible moments within National Socialism to the outside world. *Faust* therefore both furthers Kraus's critical, rational understanding of NS-politics, as well

as *interrupts* this analysis, pointing, if obliquely, to the caesura between the Nazis and what preceded them.

EVOLUTION AND REVOLUTION: GOETHE'S 'KLASSISCHE WALPURGNISNACHT'

It is specifically, however, in Kraus's references to the 'Klassische Walpurgisnacht' of Goethe's drama—the scene that stages a grotesque encounter between antiquity and modernity—that what I have been describing as the legibility and the illegibility of the movement come to a head. Among several other encounters in this scene that make their way into Kraus's text is a debate between two pre-Socratic philosophers, Thales and Anaxagoras, both of whom are trying to convince the Homunculus (who has joined Faust and Mephistopheles on their journey through the underworld) of their respective views on the origins of life and matter.⁴⁴ While Thales promotes a gradualist cosmology—the idea that life had emerged slowly from water ('Im feuchten ist Lebendiges erstanden', [Goethe, l. 7856, p. 94])—Anaxagoras envisions life as the product of a violent, volcanic eruption. This debate, to be sure, had been waged anew in the early nineteenth century under the respective guises of 'Neptunian' and 'Vulcanist' geology; Goethe was more sympathetic to the former, which aligned with his gradualist politics and his fear of revolution.⁴⁵ It would be logical to suggest that this debate contained not only geological implications, but political and philosophical ones as well.

In *DWN*, Anaxagoras's words first appear in the motto, when Kraus invokes his ecstatic claim: 'Nicht näher! drohend-mächtige Runde, / Du richtest uns und Land und

⁴⁴ The scene essentially ends with a victorious Thales, insofar as the Homunculus shatters his vial and he is absorbed into the sea in pursuit of human form. See Goethe, ll. 8458-87, pp. 111-12.

⁴⁵ For a brief discussion on Vulcanism and Neptunism in Goethe, see Constantine, pp. xxxiv-xxxv.

Meer zugrunde!’ (*DWN*, p. 10). A parallel is thus drawn between the menacing orb that Anaxagoras believes he has summoned to earth and that will bring only destruction, and the otherworldly eruption that is National Socialism; Thales is nowhere to be found. The actual debate between these two figures intervenes later on in the body of Kraus’s text, when it is embedded in a critical passage combining the ideological misuse of Nietzsche, the notorious Nazi thug Manfred von Killinger, and a harrowing newspaper report on the violence committed against, and the humiliation suffered by communists, socialists, and Jews inside a concentration camp. Such reports, indeed, fill many of the pages of Kraus’s text. It is worth reproducing part of this report to situate the context in which Kraus then turns to the two Greek philosophers:

‘Das Lager war in verschiedene Klassen eingeteilt. Am schlechtesten hatten es die Kommunisten und radikalen Sozialisten in der dritten Klasse. Die Juden wurden zwar von der jüdischen Gemeinde verköstigt, mußten aber die niedrigsten Dienste verrichten, die Klosette reinigen, den SA-Leuten die Stiefel putzen, auf Befehl die Füße küssen oder die Stiefel lecken. Wollten sie nicht, so half der Gummiknüttl. Ich sah, wie ihnen die Haare ausgerissen wurden, daß Stücke der Kopfhaut mitgingen. . . . Viele bekamen Nervenzusammenbrüche, andere wurden krank. . . .’

Nein, das kann kein Philosoph gewollt haben. (*DWN*, pp. 74-75)

The philosopher referred to above is Nietzsche, whom Kraus resolutely denies would have endorsed the Nazi movement. He then quotes a skeptical Anaxagoras: ‘Hast du, o Thales, je in einer Nacht, / Solch einen Berg aus Schlamm hervorgebracht?’, situating the question of the origins of matter in relation to the violence just discussed (*DWN*, p. 75). Essentially

conflating the realms of politics and nature, Kraus invokes the debate that once concerned Goethe over whether nature sanctions or condemns the violence which, in the current context, is being carried out in its name. Timms writes that Kraus ‘had long been aware of the vitalistic strain in German thought, which pictured nature in terms of conquest and violence, not harmony and balance, and his aim is now to bring out the ideological implications of this controversy, which are only hinted at by Goethe’.⁴⁶ Yet while in Goethe’s drama it is clear both who is speaking and whose theory ultimately carries more weight (Thales), in *DWN* neither of these features is clearly demarcated. To clarify, in *Faust II*, it is Thales who first proclaims:

Nie war Natur und ihr lebendiges Fließen
Auf Tag und Nacht und Stunden angewiesen;
Sie bildet regelnd jegliche Gestalt,
Und selbst im Großen ist es nicht Gewalt,

and Anaxagoras who interrupts: ‘Hier aber war’s!’, which inaugurates his own part in the dialogue about the emergence of a mountain through fire (Goethe, ll. 7861-65, p. 94). In *DWN*, by contrast, Kraus conspicuously omits markers of dialogue along with any indication that he is invoking two speakers, in effect inhabiting both positions at once. By converting this erstwhile dialogue into a monologue, Kraus has reproduced the two readings of National Socialism thus far enumerated *in nuce*.

With Thales, he first characterizes the regime as the product of a gradual process, with signs and symptoms that had been legible for decades, thereby aligning himself with a notion of evolutionary politics and cultural development. When Kraus later writes that

⁴⁶ See Timms, pp. 503-504.

National Socialism ‘hat die Presse nicht vernichtet, sondern die Presse hat den Nationalsozialismus erschaffen. Scheinbar nur als Reaktion, in Wahrheit auch als Fortsetzung’ (*DWN*, p. 307), he is explicitly emphasizing the direct continuities between the current regime and the conditions that informed its emergence from the morass of modernity. Kraus here also returns to his more traditional object of ridicule: the press. This would explain why Goebbels, who was trained on the techniques of modern journalism, appears in *DWN* as the Mephisto-esque figure, wielding his black magic (that is, the press and other instruments of modern technology) to stir up a dormant, violent sentiment in the masses.⁴⁷ On the other hand, both the elision of dialogue between the two philosophers as well as the statement that in certain cases, nature simply erupts, are indications of the violent caesura that National Socialism constitutes. Elsewhere Kraus will indeed refer to its unpredictability and ever-shifting form: ‘neue Machtverfügung’, he writes, ‘fordert neue Opfer’ (*DWN*, p. 273). In alluding to a state of permanent revolution and a regime that constantly demands more victims, Kraus speaks with Anaxagoras. Thus we have evolution and revolution *at once*.

It is this constitutive tension in Kraus’s reading that disturbs any attempt to discern a cohesive narrative structure in the text, and thereby in Nazism itself. While Kraus occasionally highlights typical ‘Faustian’ elements within the Nazi regime—including parallels to Faust’s attempt to establish a utopian empire at the end of the drama after having rid the land of unwelcome guests—he never asserts that Faust has been incarnated in the form of the Nazis, or any such similar commonplace.⁴⁸ It would thus be false to

⁴⁷ For a longer discussion of Goebbels’s function in Kraus’s text—and his potential parallel to Mephisto in Goethe’s poem—see Timms, pp. 523-28.

⁴⁸ See Goethe, ll. 11511–603, pp. 201-04. And indeed, the first line from *Faust* that Kraus quotes in his text are Mephisto’s ominous words: ‘Nach überstandener Gewalt versöhnt ein schöner Aufenthalt’, which, in

conclude, as Joachim Stremmel observed decades ago, that Faust represents anything unambiguously symbolic in Kraus's text.⁴⁹ Kraus refuses to contribute to the myth-making that was so central to the party's identity; if anything, he is contributing to the project of de-mythologization. Thus in addition to the thematic overlaps between these two texts, the quotations from *Faust* serve a structural function in *DWN*: they blend in with, but also interrupt Nazi discourse, similar to the way Kraus understands National Socialism as both connected to the past and as being severed from it. Invoking Jean-Luc Nancy, we might say that Kraus's kaleidoscopic use of *Faust* continually interrupts the attempt on the part of the Nazis to create and perpetuate their myth.⁵⁰ Kraus's various deployments of *Faust* evince the immanent tensions and inconsistencies that inform National Socialism, tensions that can also be identified in Goethe's drama. If Ernst Osterkamp has argued that in *Faust II*, 'humour, satire, and irony become the means to integrate ugliness into the art', it would appear that Kraus has absorbed these insights into his own rendering of a third *Walpurgisnacht*.⁵¹ *DWN* reads *Faust II* as part political satire and part grotesque encounter between the ancient and modern worlds. Set against the background of the Third

Goethe's drama, precedes the murder of the hospitable elderly couple, Philemon and Baucis, by the rowdies Haltefest, Habebald, and Raufebold. This couple's small hut had been the only obstacle preventing Faust from solidifying his empire. See *DWN*, p. 16.

⁴⁹ Stremmel concludes, for example: 'Damit jedoch, daß Kraus die Problematik der Faust-Figur nicht als die der "deutschen Seele," des "deutschen Wesens" auszugeben vermag, entgeht er zugleich der Gefahr, den Nationalsozialismus zu mythologisieren'. See Stremmel, p. 140. While this is not the proper forum to launch into a full-fledged discussion about *Faust*'s appropriation by the National Socialists or fascist ideologues in the early decades of the twentieth century, Kraus is certainly challenging the crude usage of Goethe's *Faust* to support 'Aryan' or German supremacy. For recent work on this vexed discourse, see Inez Hedges, *Framing Faust: Twentieth Century Cultural Struggles* (Illinois: Southern Illinois University, 2005), pp. 44-71.

⁵⁰ For Nancy, the 'Nazi myth' represents the fundamental myth of modernity, while literature operates according to the logic of 'interruption', upending the very foundations upon which myth rests. See Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, ed. by Peter Connor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), pp. 46-48.

⁵¹ See Ernst Osterkamp, 'Re-defining Classicism: Antiquity in *Faust II* under the Sign of Medusa', in *Goethe's Faust: Theatre of Modernity*, ed. by Hans Schulte, John Noyes, and Pia Kleber (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 156-73.

Reich, such competing modes and temporalities can only, Kraus implies, yield further iterations of violence.

‘INS TOTENREICH GESTOSSEN’: NAZISM AS SPECTER?

By turning to Goethe’s ‘incommensurate’ drama, Kraus refines his insights into the substance of Nazism while pointing to where sound political critique and satire have nothing left to offer. Nazism, Kraus implies, can neither be wholly reduced to the reigning ideologies and political systems of its time, nor be rendered fully incomprehensible and therefore consigned to the realm of mythology. Both its continuity and its singularity need to be excavated, even if this leads Kraus to an abyss where the rational edge of satire is blunted into submission. Like Arendt’s *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (coincidentally first published one year before *DWN*), which sought to show what the Nazi regime shared with earlier or contemporaneous political models, and where it radically departed, *DWN* treats Nazism as something distinct from bourgeois party politics while also showing how some of its most seemingly substantial differences were, in fact, differences in quantity rather than quality: the transition from the corrupt word to the violent deed was, for Kraus, not radical in the least. That satire under the sign of dehumanization—and this still includes, for Kraus, satire of National Socialist *discourse*—does not fail entirely, seems to be one of Kraus’s fundamental insights.⁵² But where it does reach its limits, it must, in effect, become something else.

Just before Mephistopheles, Faust, and the Homunculus depart on their journey to the underworld of the *Walpurgisnacht*, the great tempter declares: ‘Am Ende hängen wir

⁵² For particularly illuminating discussions of the role of language and linguistic corruption in Kraus’s essay, see Djassem, ‘*Die Zerstörerarbeit*’, pp. 363-75, and Peitter, pp. 143-57.

doch ab / Von Kreaturen, die wir machten' (*DWN*, p. 305). Kraus's invocation of this line toward the end of his essay would seem to suggest that he viewed the Nazi regime, inhuman in its appearance, as ultimately a human invention, a creature of our own making. As such, it would eventually collapse as a result of its own internal unsustainability, and the senseless suffering of the individual would continue only until 'die guten Geister einer Menschenwelt aufleben zur Tat der Vergeltung' (*DWN*, p. 327). This desperate appeal for a dormant humanity to be awoken from its slumber and avenge the deeds of National Socialism is followed by one final passage from Goethe. Kraus quotes from a scene in the fourth act in which the Emperor is addressing Faust, pleading for the downfall of the recently arisen 'Anti-Emperor' (*Gegenkaiser*) and the restoration of his empire:

Sei das Gespenst, das gegen uns erstanden,
Sich Kaiser nennt und Herr von unsern Landen,
Des Heeres Herzog, Lehnsherr unsrer Großen,
Mit eigener Faust ins Totenreich gestoßen! (*DWN*, p. 327)

The Anti-Emperor, it appears, only calls himself an emperor; in truth he is no more than a specter that has risen up against his people. Kraus's analysis of the situation taking shape in Germany and Austria may have been premature, and his politics after 1933 were shortsighted, perhaps motivated more by fear than by a comprehensive understanding of the situation. But this passage nonetheless evinces an unexpected, if naïve optimism on the satirist's part that after the deluge of violence and destruction, which he determined to be the core of this movement—and Auschwitz is all but named in the essay—there will be an end to the need for the satirist's voice, along with the inhumanity that has occasioned its necessity.