

Irina Djassemey, *Die Verfolgende Unschuld: Zur Geschichte des autoritären Charakters in der Darstellung von Karl Kraus. Literaturgeschichte in Studien und Quellen Band 17.* Wien, Köln, Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 2011. 264 S.

The late Irina Djassemey's most recent book picks up where her earlier study, *Der "Produktivgehalt Kritischer Zerstörrarbeit": Kulturkritik Bei Karl Kraus und Theodor W. Adorno* (Würzburg, 2002), left off. *Die Verfolgende Unschuld* offers, however, a more concentrated analysis of the various ways the "authoritarian character" finds its literary analog in the oeuvre of the Viennese satirist Karl Kraus. Djassemey's essential thesis is that Kraus's satirical representations during the first third of the twentieth century—of judges, businessmen, journalists, war profiteers, generals, bureaucrats, etc.—anticipate not only the political devolvement of Germany and Austria into fascism, but also the theories of authoritarianism elucidated by figures such as Adorno only after the Second World War. Djassemey furthermore concludes that insofar as Kraus's literary method alludes to the positive exclusively via the representation of the negative, "hat die Kraussche Satire teil an jener negativen Dialektik, die von Adorno in der Philosophie entwickelt wurde" (27).

Beginning with "Der unmündige Bürger (1899-1914): Autoritärer Charakter und Habsburgmonarchie," Djassemey parses the early phase of *Die Fackel*, when Kraus directed his satirical glance at Austria's infamous *Sittlichkeitsgesetze*, revealing the extent to which moral hypocrisy was the guiding force behind the Habsburg legal system with regard to the private lives of its citizens. Djassemey also addresses the contentious question of Kraus's relationship to anti-Semitism. Without excusing Kraus's frequent employment of anti-Semitic tropes, the author is careful to show how Kraus's remarks, on the whole, are to be categorically distinguished from the much cruder anti-Semitism

emerging from rightwing circles, which Kraus rightfully exposed and ridiculed for the irrationally motivated bigotry it was. Djassemly tendentiously concludes that the critical disposition vis-à-vis one's "Eigengruppe" (referring to the fact that Kraus was born a Jew) is to be viewed as one of the distinguishing features of the "Nicht-Autoritären" (102). For a more extensive treatment of Kraus's relationship to German-speaking Jewry, see Paul Reitter's *The Anti-Journalist: Karl Kraus and Jewish Self-Fashioning in Fin-de-Siècle Europe* (Chicago, 2008).

In the titular chapter, "Die verfolgende Unschuld (1914-1918): *Die letzten Tage der Menschheit* und der Erste Weltkrieg," Djassemly analyzes the way Kraus's dramatic satire of the First World War mimetically depicts almost each and every character it ventriloquizes as either drunk on the power he or she exercises (as in the journalist, the war profiteer, or the general), or as forcibly but almost unconsciously subjected to the will of those over which it has no control (the soldier, the patriot). Djassemly convincingly argues that virtually every scene of negativity in the drama is to be read as an example of Kraus's keen sensitivity to the pain and suffering engendered by the war, whose propaganda machine (fueled by the press), he believed, anesthetized both its participants and its observers. But it is Djassemly's reading of Kraus's quasi-fictional, opportunistic industrialist "Wahnschaffe" that shows how Kraus most effectively combined his *Sprachkunst* with his penetrating critique of ideology in order to present one of the most devastating images of the entire business of war.

Chapter 3, "Kasmader und die Demokratie (1919-1932): Widersprüchliche Tendenzen in der Ersten Republik," argues that Kraus's satires during the First Republic primarily aimed at disclosing the glaring *lack* of discrepancy between the ostensibly

distinct power relations underpinning Austria's former monarchy and its current attempt at democracy. Invoking the theories of Adorno and Horkheimer once again, Djassemey shows how Kraus's 1928 polemic against the notorious Chief of Police, Johann Schober, produced a harrowing image of the "potenziell faschistischen Charakters" (201), which would, just a few years later, balloon into the full-fledged, self-declaring fascist.

Djassemey's most original contribution to Kraus scholarship can be found, however, in her last chapter, "Dritte Walpurgisnacht (1933): Vom Potenziellen zum Manifesten Fascismus," in which she offers a reading of Kraus's oft-neglected yet most formally complex work, *Dritte Walpurgisnacht*. Departing from the common sentiment that the work's infamous first line—"Mir fällt zu Hitler nichts ein" (233)—along with Kraus's attendant support for the Dollfuß regime disqualify him as an anti-fascist writer, Djassemey suggests, rather, that this essay produces unparalleled insights into the truly anti-modern, anti-civilizational impulses of Nazism, insights, however, which punctuate *Die Fackel* since the journal's inception in 1899. By artfully combining a form of parataxis, inter-textual allusions to Goethe and Schiller, a portrayal of the monstrosities of anti-Semitic hate crimes, and a montage of actual quotations, this text, writes Djassemey, constitutes one of the very few works capable of accurately deconstructing the "Bestialität" of the Third Reich (242).

Though consistently—if implicitly—appealing to a Kantian notion of reason and human freedom throughout his lifetime, Kraus's only intellectual shortcoming, for Djassemey, was his failure to provide a conceptual apparatus for understanding the social psychology of Nazism and its precursors, which is partially what the author set about to accomplish in her comprehensive study. While it is at times difficult, I would conclude,

to determine where the distinction lies between Kraus's and Djassemey's project (or between her project and Adorno's and Horkheimer's), *Die verfolgende Unschuld* provides a passionately argued, detailed analysis of the relationship between one of the most misunderstood figures of the twentieth century and the canon of thought known as Critical Theory. This text should serve as a valuable resource for scholars of Kraus, of the Frankfurt School and of the Holocaust, and I would also recommend it to anyone interested in theories of fascism, power and authoritarianism in the twentieth century.

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