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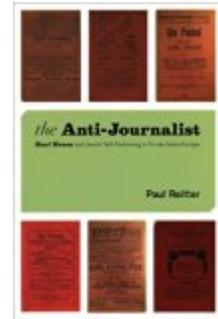
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Paul Reitter. *The Anti-Journalist: Karl Kraus and Jewish Self-Fashioning in Fin-de-siècle Europe*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008. xii + 254 pp. \$35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-226-70970-3.

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Karl Kraus's Jewish Identity Revisited

Karl Kraus, the Austrian Jewish writer and critic, who founded, edited, and wrote for *Die Fackel* (The Torch) from 1899 to 1936, is a complex and contradictory figure. His inaccessibility has led many to be intrigued by his work, while preventing him from achieving his due recognition outside of a small and shrinking circle of scholars. In a new study of Kraus, Paul Reitter addresses and explains this paradox, and applies to Kraus the appellation, the “anti-journalist” (rather than antisemite). In this relatively slim monograph, which is based on his doctoral dissertation, Reitter explores Kraus’s work in the context of the fin-de-siècle discourse on Jews and their proclivity for journalism, particularly feuilletonism, which Reitter defines as “a journalism that addressed all sorts of cultural topics, most often in a conversational and aesthetically engaging manner” (p. 4). Depicted as unoriginal, derivative, and at times even destructive, the feuilleton was attacked as a Jewish form of journalism by antisemites such as Richard Wagner, Heinrich von Treitschke, and Adolf Bartels. Reitter further asserts that the vehemence of the attack on the feuilleton attests to its success and influence (p. 8) and points out that this is the first case of an antisemitic stereotype that invokes the fear of confusion between real German culture and the Jewish imitation of it (p. 9). By looking at the question of the relationship between the discourse about journalism to the creation of the new styles of journalism, Reitter aims to deepen our understanding of the development and significance of Kraus’s journalistic style. More specifically, he states, “I will claim that the most daring

features of the style Kraus called his ‘neuer publizistischer Form’ [new journalistic form] can be read—and in notable cases were essentially read—as being part of a radical enactment of German-Jewish identity” (p. 12).

What makes Reitter’s argument particularly original and compelling, as well as complex and challenging, is his assertion that Kraus’s critique of “Jewish journalism” or feuilletonism, led to his incorporation of Jewish techniques and patterns such as mimesis and quotation, i.e., lack of originality, which in turn made his anti-journalism “the most Jewish writing in the German language” (p. 29). Kraus’s critical attack on the Jews who tried to Germanize their writing, such as Heinrich Heine, led Kraus to fashion a new Jewish identity (pp. 24-25). Reitter’s argument consciously challenges most previous works on Kraus, which focus on Jewish self-hatred; however, what makes it particularly intriguing is Reitter’s resurrection of Walter Benjamin’s, Gershom Scholem’s, and Franz Kafka’s writings on Kraus in which they expressed similar views and admiration for his oeuvre. Rejecting the viewpoint that Kraus was afflicted with Jewish self-hatred as overly simplistic, Reitter suggests that “while Kraus seems to have employed certain grotesque stereotypes because he subscribed to them, he also appropriated antisemitic rhetoric in a willfully contradictory process of self-fashioning” (p. 26).

In the first chapter, Reitter closely examines the texts setting the discourse of the Jewish domination of jour-

nalism and the ills of feuilletonism, in order to better understand the context of Kraus's own criticism. For example, he devotes many pages to a thorough analysis of Moritz Goldstein's 1912 article, "The German-Jewish Parnassus," in which he linked the Jews' success as journalists to their failure to assimilate. As a German Jew, Goldstein ultimately desired a resolution to this dilemma in the form of "a new type of Jew" (p. 48) but contributed to a discourse driven by antisemites and their stereotypes of Jewish journalism. For example, in Richard Wagner's essays on Jews in music, he developed his view that "Jews are at their most un-German where they appear to have integrated into German culture, since their vehicle for integration is opportunistic copying, and the governing principle of German identity is noninstrumental originality" (p. 58).

In the second chapter, Reitter examines Kraus's incorporation of many of the themes of these works on the German-Jewish literati, which had previously been used to demonstrate his self-hatred, within the context described in the first chapter. He suggests that Kraus incorporated themes from antisemitic works as a means of critiquing them, using antisemitic rhetoric ironically. As Shulamit Volkov has demonstrated, antisemitism was an accepted part of German and Austrian culture and anti-Jewish language was often used by those who were not necessarily antisemitic (p. 71).[1] A similar phenomenon played a role in the rhetoric of Jewish antisemitic discourse, Reitter suggests. Thus, a deeper and more rigorous examination of Kraus's work will lead to a more nuanced understanding of it as strategic and symbolic (p. 72). Tracing the development of Kraus's writing from his early essays "Demolished Literature" (1897) and "A Crown for Zion" (1898), through his critiques of Jewish journalism and Vienna's newspaper, the *Neue Freie Presse*, in *Die Fackel*, to the emergence of his "new journalistic form," first expressed in "Heine and the Consequences," (1910), Reitter aims to combine the exploration of Kraus's literary style found in Edward Timms's work on Kraus, and the critique of Kraus's relationship to German-Jewish culture found in the works of Sander Gilman, Jacques Le Rider, and others (p. 95).[2] His comprehensive analysis of "Heine and the Consequences" emphasizes the uniqueness of Kraus's motivations and treatment of Heine compared to those of Heine's antisemitic critics (p. 102).

Another point worth highlighting is the comparison with Kafka taken up by Reitter in the third chapter. This comparison, Reitter hopes, "will help us to situate Kraus's anti-journalism, or rather to re-situate it, within

the world of German-Jewish modernism." Reitter uses Kafka's remark that "no one can speak *Mauscheln* like Kraus," as a starting point to show that Kafka saw Kraus's new journalism as linked to Kraus's critique of German-Jewish literature's striving for originality and authenticity (pp. 109-111). Comparing Kraus's and Kafka's positive assessments of the Yiddish theater, Reitter shows that while Kafka venerated the Yiddish language as possessing a mystical unity, Kraus admired the mimetic talent displayed in the Yiddish theater, which had been the very aspect of Jewish literature condemned by antisemitic discourse (pp. 116-117). This mimetic tendency is what Kafka meant when referring to Kraus's language as *Mauscheln*. The comparison with Kafka illuminates Kraus's major concern in his essays on his own Jewish identity and his ultimate shift to a new mimetic style. Kraus's imitative style was his answer to the acculturated German-Jewish journalists he disdained, his anti-journalism. As Reitter puts it, "Kraus did not fashion himself as possessing the qualities the deracinated Jewish intellectuals supposedly lacked, i.e., the mystical unity and authenticity that some German Jews sought in the culture of *Ostjuden*. Rather, he lionized, and developed an extreme form of, what was commonly regarded as a symbol of German Jewry's 'terrible inner state': journalistic mirroring" (p. 135).

One of the most fascinating and thought-provoking aspects of this work is the apparent irony in the reception of Kraus compared to cultural Zionists, such as Martin Buber. This comes to light most notably in the final chapter on Benjamin's and Scholem's reception of Kraus. Benjamin wrote of Kraus's "hottest prayer for redemption that passes through modern lips." Scholem stated that Kraus found "the most unexpected Jewish provinces in this [German] language" (pp. 137-138). Buber, who embraced Zionism, Jewish observance, and east European Jewish life, was rejected by Scholem and Benjamin, along with expressionism, for his lack of Jewish authenticity. On the other hand, Scholem praised Kraus's use of language, mimesis, use of quotations, and lack of originality, as linked to the Jewish techniques of Middle Ages, i.e., the "musive style" or weaving of biblical verses into poetry (p. 150). Benjamin also linked Kraus to Jewish tradition and law, first in his essay "Karl Kraus" (1928) and again his second "Karl Kraus" essay of 1931. Hence, the project of resurrecting Kraus's Jewish identity is shown to have deep roots in postwar and Weimar Germany.

As for any work on Kraus, this book is demanding, but it is also well worth the effort for what it adds to our understanding of this controversial figure of the fin de

siècle, the Jewish self-hatred debate, and the complexities of German/Austrian Jewish identity which emerge in the chapters on Kafka, Benjamin, and Scholem. The argument unfolds throughout the chapters and common themes are interwoven into the narrative, although a more lucid, concise, and accessible writing style would perhaps make it easier to follow the threads of the argument. The amount of material allocated to footnotes was frustrating at times, and some minor errors in proofreading were noted. I also would have found it useful to have primary sources listed in the bibliography, in addition to the notes.

Regarding Reitter's critique of writers such as Sander Gilman, who focuses more generally on the Jewish self-hatred phenomenon, perhaps this is a case of difference in approach and aims. While Gilman is examining the general cultural phenomenon of Jewish self-hatred, broadly defined, Reitter is focused exclusively on the analysis and contextualization of Kraus's texts. Both the general perspective and the focus on the particular contribute to a fuller understanding of a culture, and the fact that these two foci produce some contradictions is perhaps inevitable and instructive. This is illustrated in other studies of specific turn-of-the-century authors, which reexamine their works by contextualizing them. For example, in her 1994 study of Cesare Lombroso and Matilde Serao, Nancy Harrowitz states "Self-hatred, a term sometimes applied loosely and broadly, in particular in the context of Jewish self-hatred, is too strong a label for these two authors. Its polemical stance tends to obscure the nuances and complexities of that particular psychological and cultural state that we could refer to more accurately in the cases of Lombroso and Serao as self-obliteration and self-betrayal." Harrowitz demonstrates the importance of context, but also warns against "taking contextualization too far and using it as a way to exculpate authors from their prejudices." [3] More recently, Chandak Sengoopta has provided a more nuanced and contextualized reading of Otto Weininger's notorious *Sex and Character: An Investigation of Principles* (1903), arguing that "although *Geschlecht und Charakter* reflected the private fears and dislikes of its author, those anxieties were integrated with and modulated by some of the most important strands of turn-of-the-century intellectual and cultural discourse." [4]

This leads me to another point. The linking of anti-semitism and misogyny was one of the crucial aspects of turn-of-the-century discourse on the Jews, particularly in Vienna. While touched upon in the initial discussion of Adolf Jellinek and Otto Weininger (pp. 35-38), this theme could have been further explored, specifically in relation to how it played out in Kraus's writings. The issue of genre also strikes me as requiring further discussion. There seems to be a conflagration of Austrian and German Jewish culture which needs more sorting out, although this is a common problem in studies of German-Jewish culture. In other words, what aspects of Kraus's critique are specifically determined by the Viennese context, which differed in many ways from that of the German cities? Although these issues could have been explored in more depth, the book contributes to several areas of scholarship, including the literature on Karl Kraus's writings, the discussion of Jewish self-hatred, the stereotypes of the Jewish domination of journalism, and the complication of German and Austrian Jewish identities.

Notes

[1]. Shulamit Volkov, "Antisemitism as a Cultural Code: Reflections on the History and Historiography of Antisemitism in Imperial Germany," *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 23 (1978).

[2]. Edward Timms, *Karl Kraus, Apocalyptic Satirist: Culture and Catastrophe in Habsburg Vienna* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986), and *Karl Kraus, Apocalyptic Satirist: The Post-War Crisis and the Rise of the Swastika* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005); Sander Gilman, *Jewish Self-Hatred: Anti-Semitism and the Hidden Language of the Jews* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986); and Jacques Le Rider, *Modernity and the Crises of Identity: Culture and Society in Fin-de-Siècle Vienna*, trans. Rosemary Morris (New York: Continuum, 1993).

[3]. Nancy A. Harrowitz, *Anti-Semitism, Misogyny, and the Logic of Cultural Difference: Cesare Lombroso and Matilde Serao* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 13, 77.

[4]. Chandak Sengoopta, *Otto Weininger: Sex, Science, and Self in Imperial Vienna* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 3.

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