

Heidi Tilghman
University of Washington
tilghman@u.washington.edu

Transformed Voices: Karl Kraus and the (Re-)Shaping of Cultural Memory

Viennese Modernism's fascination-some would say obsession-with the past is more than a leitmotiv uniting its writers, painters, composers and intellectuals. In arguably all works stemming from Austria in the years prior to the First World War, the past and its manifestations in the present are the core theme, and the intellectual and artistic impetus to expression.

Karl Kraus heard the past around him in the voices of the actors in the Burgtheater, of the feuilletonists, of the Vienna streets and ghettos, of the countryside, of old teachers and politicians and coffeehouse regulars. His early struggles as a critic can be characterized as a search for a unique voice within this cacophony. But Kraus' eventual solution was less a "unique" style than a recycling of cultural memory in service of satire: Kraus' "voice" is a compendium of voices from his youth that he transforms into the barbed arrows with which he satirizes his own day. He restates or "re-voices" his own memories, bases his contemporary critical/moral stance on them, and, in the process, transforms the cultural memory of his readers at the same time he is working to transform their views of the present and future.

The paper is based on my current book project analyzing Kraus' early works in terms of voice. It will leave aside the theoretical discussion underpinning my thesis in order to concentrate on the development of Kraus' technique of indirect quotation, or ventriloquism, and on the multiple transformations of voice and memory that result.