



Dicta and Contradicta

Karl Kraus, Jonathan McVity

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'A woman is more than just her exterior. The lingerie is also important'. The mission of the press is to spread culture while destroying the attention span. 'Art serves to rinse out our eyes'. Uniquely combining humor with profundity and venom with compassion, "Dicta and Contradicta" is a bonanza of scandalous wit from Vienna's answer to Oscar Wilde. From the decadent turn of the century to the Third Reich, the acerbic satirist Karl Kraus was one of the most famous-and feared-intellectuals in Europe. Through the polemical and satirical magazine "Die Fackel" ("The Torch"), which he founded in 1899, Kraus launched wicked but unrelentingly witty attacks on literary and media corruption, sexual repression and militarism, and the social hypocrisy of fin-de-sicle Vienna. Kraus' barbed aphorisms were an essential part of his running commentary on Viennese culture. These miniature gems, as sharp as diamonds, demonstrate Kraus' highly cultivated wit and his unerring eye for human weakness, flaccidity, and hypocrisy. Kraus shies away from nothing; the salient issues of the day are lined up side by side, as before a firing squad, with such perennial concerns as sexuality, religion, politics, art, war, and literature. By turns antagonistic, pacifistic, realistic, and maddeningly misogynistic, Kraus' aphorisms provide the sting that precedes healing. For "Dicta and Contradicta", originally published in 1909 (with the title "Spruche und Widerspruche") and revised in 1923, Kraus selected nearly 1,000 of the scathing aphorisms that had appeared in "Die Fackel". In this new translation, Jonathan McVity masterfully renders Kraus' multilayered meanings, preserving the clever wordplay of the German in readable colloquial English. He also provides an introductory essay on Kraus' life and milieu and annotations that clarify many of Kraus' literary and sociohistorical allusions.

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