

Einschöpfung: the concept of plagiarism in Karl Kraus

Irene Fantappiè

Only a small part of the notebooks of Karl Kraus conserved in the *Rathaus Bibliothek* of Vienna consist of the Viennese writer's original notes or texts. Much more frequent are newspaper articles that Kraus edited not only through cutting and pasting but also appropriating, cancelling the sentences he found superfluous and adding *a latere* passages to connect the remaining fragments. In addition, a good part of the Krausian archive is constituted of transcriptions. With his minute and nervous handwriting, Kraus copied scenes from Schlegel's translations of Shakespeare's dramas, texts of Offenbach's operettas, writings of Nestroy, Schiller, Goethe. On several occasions, during the more than three-hundred *Vorlesungen* held in the theatres of Vienna, Kraus even presented these texts to the public as his own.

The archive reflects the literary work. In the essays Kraus published in "Die Fackel" in his poems and theatrical *pièces*, other people's writings are qualitatively and quantitatively as significant as his own. The work of Karl Kraus, as is well-known, is to a large degree made up of quoted texts. Furthermore, in "Die Fackel" it is not unusual to find articles signed by Kraus even though he had not written a single word: in the pages of his own journal he reported texts omitting both source and author's name. Of the many hundreds of pages of the theatrical *pièce* *Die letzten Tage der Menschheit*, very few actually come from the pen of Karl Kraus. In the drama entire newspaper articles and long pieces of literary prose appear inserted without any citation at all, with the exception of the warning in the *Vorwort* ("Die unwahrscheinlichsten Gespräche, die hier geführt worden sind wörtlich gesprochen worden"),¹ to the extent it is almost impossible for the reader to recognize the difference between "first" and "second-hand" writing.

¹ Karl Kraus, *Die letzten Tage der Menschheit*, in *Schriften*, edited by Christian Wagenknecht, vol. X (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1986-1994), p. 9.



Criticism has analyzed the strongly inter-textual character of the Krausian oeuvre, emphasizing the centrality of the role played by quotation. One cannot, however, but note that recourse to the concept of quotation, in many of the cases just mentioned, proves to be extremely problematic. In the essay *The Basic Function of Quotation*,² published in the miscellany edited by Roman Jakobson *Sign, Language, Culture*, Stefan Morawski identifies the two fundamental characteristics of quotation as *literalness*, or precise and faithful reproduction, and *discreteness*, the possibility of recognizing the quotation as such within the new context. Both are connected to the legal origins of quotation. Since the beginnings, in fact, the emphasis of the term falls on *auctoritas*: the Latin verb *citare* originally meant “to call”, “to name”, “to call on the witnesses subpoenaed”.³ When a witness is subpoenaed, his or her testimony must be as accurate as possible and must remain directly attributable to him or her; thus the necessity of maintaining the characteristics of *literalness* and *discreteness*. In the majority of cases, however, Kraus does not respect either criteria, as he re-elaborates the quoted material and does not make it identifiable as such. Therefore, in my opinion, it is necessary not to stick to the definition that Kraus gives of himself as “Schöpfer des Zitats”⁴, taking rather into consideration the possibility that the Krausian art of quotation might be inexplicable without recourse to the notion of plagiarism as well (the author understands plagiarism as a “subterfuge” where the “Fremdes” is rendered as “Eigenes”, as opposed to the false where the “Eigenes” is presented as the “Fremdes”).⁵ Acknowledging the lively

² Stefan Morawski, *The Basic Function of Quotation*, in *Sign, Language, Culture*, edited by Julien Algirdas Greimas and Roman Jakobson (Paris: Mouton, 1970), pp. 690 - 705. On citation see also Antoine Compagnon, *La seconde main, ou Le travail de la citation* (Paris: Édition du Seuil, 1979); Michael Worton - Judith Still (edited by), *Intertextuality: Theories and Practice* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990); Mary Orr (edited by), *Intertextuality. Debates and Contexts* (Cambridge: Polity, 2003).

³ See also Andrea Bernardelli, *Intertestualità* (Milan: La Nuova Italia, 2000), p. 45.

⁴ Karl Kraus, *Im dreißigsten Kriegsjahr*, in “Die Fackel”, XXX (1929), nn. 800-805, p. 2.

⁵ Elisabeth Frenzel, *Fälschungen, literarische*, in *Reallexikon der deutschen Literaturgeschichte*, vol. I (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1958), pp. 444-450. On plagiarism in German literature see also the most recent studies resulting from the broad debate: Philipp Theisoh, *Plagiat. Eine unoriginelle Literaturgeschichte* (Stuttgart: Kröner, 2009); *Plagiate. Fälschungen, Imitate und*



debate that has recently surrounded this concept, this essay aims to demonstrate how, for Kraus, plagiarism had an extremely original and different meaning from that which it held for his “maestri”. If, indeed, Kraus elevated plagiarism to the level of art, it is also true that he reinterpreted it to the point of making it substantially explode from within, by assimilating it to literary creation.

Karl Kraus’s most accomplished reflection on the topic of plagiarism is found in a practically unknown essay of 1921, *Vom Plagiat*. The author’s starting point is Alfred Ehrenstein’s accusation of the previous year when he compared Kraus’s poem “Apokalypse” with certain passages from the Apocalypse of St. John in order to demonstrate how the former author had indeed plagiarized the latter. As further proof of Kraus’s improper attitude toward other texts, Ehrenstein – for whom Kraus reserved the rather unfriendly epithet of “Einfallspinsel”⁶ – adopted a line from the poem “Nach zwanzig Jahren” in which the author, listing the themes he confronted in his work, had supposedly “stolen” two lines from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*:

Geschlecht und Lüge, Dummheit, Übelstände,
Tonfall und Phrase, Tinte, Technik, Tod,
Krieg und Gesellschaft, Wucher, Politik,
Der Übermut der Ämter und die Schmach,
die Unwert schweigendem Verdienst erweist,
Kunst und Natur, die Liebe und der Traum –
Vielfacher Antrieb, sei’s woher es sei,
der Schöpfung ihre Ehre zu erstatten!⁷

The fourth and the fifth lines – “Der Übermut der Ämter und die Schmach, / die Unwert schweigendem Verdienst erweist” – are indeed taken from Schlegel’s translation of *Hamlet*, which in English

andere Strategien aus zweiter Hand, edited by Jochen Bung, Malte-Christian Gruber and Sebastian Kühn (Berlin: Trafo, 2011).

⁶ Karl Kraus, *Vom Plagiat*, in “Die Fackel”, XXIII (1921), 572-576, pp. 61-66.

⁷ Karl Kraus, *Vom Plagiat*, cit., p. 61.



reads “The insolence of office, and the spurns / that patient merit of the unworthy takes”. It is undoubtedly plagiarized. We have before us the improper appropriation of another’s words reported without quotation marks or any indication of who the original author may have been, and presented as Kraus’s own.

The two lines belong to one of the most famous monologues of all of literature, “To be or not to be”, and the quoted translation – the Schlegel-Tieck version, one of the touchstones of German culture – was without a doubt the most well-known version of Shakespeare in the Vienna of that time. Kraus knows well that, before a public of literati, the justification would be to remind readers that the two Shakespearean lines were so well-known as to be understood as such *de facto*, even in the absence of an explicit indication or citation of their source. The Viennese writer, however, does not intend to defend himself claiming that he has not committed an act of plagiarism. Kraus’s ultimate aim, on the contrary, is to justify his plagiarism in as much as it is plagiarism. The two Shakespearean lines, in his opinion, are primarily valuable precisely because they are not his own and furthermore, because of the position they occupy.

Shakespeare’s words describe the insolence of official authorities and the disrespect that patient merit receives from lesser individuals. If these words perfectly complete the list of themes of Kraus’s oeuvre, however, it is not thanks to their content; rather, it is because they are not Kraus’s words. The text is important in as much as it is someone else’s. Moreover, the fragment from *Hamlet* in “Nach zwanzig Jahren” has value in the force of its own position. That new, “secondary” position is indeed the result of a repositioning that is the “originale Leistung”⁸ of the author. The act of plagiarizing is a creative act, and it is such when one manages to omit those quotation marks signaling the quotation and thereby to completely appropriate another’s text. That is to say, when one is capable of transforming words like those of Shakespeare, born in a completely different reality, into the form of a meaning to be expressed in the present reality. That “secondary” meaning will nec-

⁸ *Ibid.*



essarily be other than that of the original. Plagiarism, as Kraus intends it, entails a modification of the text even when this text remains the same.

The creative contribution of the plagiaristic author does not consist in a production of words; rather, in that which the Austrian author calls “Einschöpfung”,⁹ which is to say, in an “attainment” of something in order to “insert it” in something else. In effect, it has to do with a spatial movement. The “spatial” perception of language is the key point of Krausian literary production, as is explained in further detail elsewhere,¹⁰ and it is precisely from this idea of language as a “body” that Kraus proposes his re-reading of the idea of plagiarism. Thinking of plagiarism as a creative act is indeed possible only as long as one connects the spatial dimension of the word to its linguistic and literary characterization; in other words, only as long as one considers the deliberate change of position of certain words and the modification of their referential, poetic and meta-linguistic function as two independent variables.

If the function of a text depends on its position within the context, the latter necessarily acquires a crucial importance. It is precisely in this sense that the following brief annotation from Kraus published in “Die Fackel” in 1908 must be interpreted, which, moreover, confirms how plagiarism for Kraus has been an object of reflection from the very beginning of his literary activity: “Es ist unmöglich, einen Schriftsteller, dessen Kunst das Wort ist, zu kopieren oder zu plagieren. Man müßte sich schon die Mühe nehmen, sein ganzes Werk abzuschreiben”.¹¹ Literary writing, according to Kraus, is *in primis* the relation between the text and its context; it follows that in order to plagiarize a writer worthy of the name, it would be necessary to copy his or her entire work. For the same reason, many texts “die” outside of their respective contexts, especially *Witze*, which on the surface appear to be easily gatherable

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Irene Fantappiè, *Karl Kraus e Shakespeare. Recitare, citare, tradurre* (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2012).

¹¹ Karl Kraus, *Vorurteile*, in “Die Fackel”, IX (1908), 241, p. 26.



flowers but which rapidly wither when cut and placed in the buttonhole of someone else's jacket:

Wie schal und leer wirken sie aber plötzlich in der andern Umgebung. Nicht wiederzuerkennen! Ein Witz, der als die naturnotwendige Äußerung eines Zorns entstanden ist, hat manchmal das Unglück, so locker zu sitzen, daß ihn jeder abreißen kann, der vorübergeht. Die Blüte läßt sich pflücken und welkt rasch. Ob sie nun ein Leser ins Knopfloch steckt oder ein Literat an seinen blütenleeren Baum. Zwar müßte man besonders eifersüchtig auf solche Blüten sein. Denn das Publikum weiß nur von diesen. Daß ich ein paar üble Dinge berührt und dazu ein paar gute Witze gemacht habe, weiß mancher. Die besseren kann man glücklicherweise nicht zitieren.¹²

It is no accident that Kraus considered the best *Witze* those that were the most difficult to quote or to plagiarize. Already in 1911 he admits that he is not at all surprised that his *Witze* are not funny when quoted by the writer and journalist Max Brod. The value of a text, and therefore also the capacity of a *Witz* to make others laugh, depends, Kraus writes, on the air which the words are forced to breathe, so much so that in a foul atmosphere even a word from Shakespeare would fail. "Er [Max Brod] zitiert schlechte Witze, die ich gemacht habe; mit Recht, sind sie schlecht, wenn sie der Brod zitiert. Denn es kommt auf die Luft an, in der ein Wort atmet, und in schlechter Luft krepirt selbst eines von Shakespeare. Geist auf Brod geschmiert ist Schmalz".¹³ In the wordplay that closes the paragraph, Kraus takes advantage of the two meanings of both *schmieren* (to spread, to taint) and *Schmalz* (lard, sentimentalism), while additionally playing on the assonance of Brod and *Brot* (bread). "Geist auf Brod geschmiert is Schmalz" in any event too enjoys a double meaning: "the spirit, spread on a piece of bread, becomes lard" and "the spirit [of my *Witze*], tainted by Brod, becomes sentimentalism".

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 2-27.

¹³ Karl Kraus, *Selbstanzeige*, in "Die Fackel", XIII (1911), 326-327-328, pp. 35-36.



On the other hand, when Kraus insists on the fact that Brod's work (or that of other authors in general) is a context which makes others' words wither, it is also to point out the difference between his own and other people's writing. Kraus ascribes to his journal "Die Fackel" rather the merit of being a valid context than a valid text, rather a valid container than a valid content. The frequent use of others' material is in fact an exercise in the ability – which Kraus, rightfully, feels to be his own – of inscribing everything within himself, of transforming himself into a spatial entity that concedes the right of citizenship to any and every type of fragment of the real. It is not the pen, but scissors and glue that are Kraus's primary instruments, as is also evidenced by the notebooks conserved in his archive. The basic experience of historical and linguistic reality occurs through *découpage* and *collage*, and it is from them that his writing is born. His duty, he maintains, consists not in saying or expressing, but in repeating ("nicht auszusprechen, nachzusprechen, was ist").¹⁴ It is about a *nachsprechen*, which is not mere transcription as it transforms what it repeats even though keeping it identical to itself; therefore, it can occur via the act of plagiarizing, via quotation or via inter-textual processes hybridizing the first with the second. The latter are by far the most frequent in the writings of Kraus. In order to critically interpret the work of the "Schöpfer des Zitats", it is therefore necessary to take into consideration the concept of plagiarism as well.

When welcoming every type of fragment of reality, Kraus is rather distant from the ludic behavior of the avant-garde. He works with precise satirical or didactic aims. Plagiarism – in its pure or hybrid form with quotations – indeed permits Kraus to appropriate fragments of reality, to make the "Eigenes" the "Fremdes": once inscribed upon the Krausian page, the other's text becomes Kraus's instrument. From this appropriation, Kraus's "cannibal" satire can spring forth, and Benjamin is right when he claims that "Der Satiriker ist die Figur, unter welcher der Menschenfresser von der Zivili-

¹⁴ Karl Kraus, *Erfahrung*, in "Die Fackel", XV (1914), 400-403, p. 46.



sation rezipiert wurde”.¹⁵ With quasi cannibalistic behavior, Kraus’s satire draws strength from the linguistic fragments already existent in the world. Kraus’s “cannibalism” is simultaneously both the strength and the weakness of his writing: asserting himself as the space of existence of the objects of the real, Kraus has the power to condemn to death all of that which he does not manage or desire to assimilate. But if nothing exists outside of Kraus, beyond Kraus nothing exists: Kraus negates the world precisely the moment in which he seems to bid it indiscriminate welcome.

It is necessary to specify that, with the passing of time, the manner in which the Viennese writer takes advantage of this capacity of his changes. In the first two decades of activity, the Krausian context has a destructive effect upon the texts of others: the words testify against their very authors. To cite, in particular, signifies to cite in court.¹⁶ As Canetti writes, “Das Zitat, wie er es gebrauchte, sagte gegen den Zitierten aus, es war oft der eigentliche Höhepunkt, die Vollendung dessen, was der Kommentator gegen jenen vorzubringen hatte. Es war Karl Kraus gegeben, Menschen sozusagen aus ihrem eigenen Mund heraus zu verurteilen”.¹⁷ After the world war, instead, the Krausian “context” also became, above all thanks to the growth of attention dedicated to the activity of translation, an “erwähltes Gefäß”,¹⁸ which protected the material contained from the offenses of the present era in order to conserve them intact for the future.

The use of the instrument of plagiarism on the part of Kraus also feels the effects of this change. With the passing of time, in fact, the object of his acts of plagiarism will more frequently be, and in his final years almost exclusively, the great masters, *in primis* Shake-

¹⁵ Walter Benjamin, *Karl Kraus*, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, edited by Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, vol. III (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1985), p. 341.

¹⁶ See Irene Fantappiè, *Accusativo assoluto. Karl Kraus, la legge e la doppia morale*, in *Karl Kraus, Con le donne monologo spesso. Morale, stampa e vita erotica nella Vienna d’inizio Novecento*, edited by Irene Fantappiè (Rome: Castelvecchi, 2007), pp. 7-34.

¹⁷ Elias Canetti, *Karl Kraus, Schule des Widerstands*, in *Das Gewissen der Worte* (Munich: Hanser, 1974), p. 45.

¹⁸ See “Die Fackel”, XIII (1911), 329-330, p. 24.



speare himself. The importance of the English poet and dramatist for Kraus's oeuvre¹⁹ is difficult to underestimate. It is also a consequence not only of the particular function developed by Shakespeare in the panorama of German literature already from the 18th century onward but the philosophy of language underlying Krausian writings as well. The interest in Shakespeare also depends on historical-political motivations: it widens in fact during the First World War in as much as it is an expression of the urgency of reacting to those "last days of humanity" and gives rise to a wide program of rewriting, the *Theater der Dichtung*, which Kraus undertakes for twenty years and which he considers to be the acme of his own activity as a writer. It is no accident therefore that in the essay *Vom Plagiat*, written when Kraus was working on the *Theater der Dichtung*, he affirms that not even a new Shakespeare would be able to write lines more suitable for Kraus than those Shakespearian ones – as, precisely, they would not be Shakespearian lines. If in Kraus plagiarism has a value, as such this does not mean that it always has a value. Precisely in as much as it shapes art, plagiarism is subordinate to the same critical judgment as is poetry. To those who consider plagiarism *scelus semper et ubique*, Kraus replies that this practice does not infringe upon any rule. The borrowing of a line from Shakespeare or expressions taken from sacred scripture is authorized by whether or not it succeeds, in the same way that a literary text does not have to earn the right to exist but must simply be judged for its worth.

Nun wird es gewiß mehr Leute geben, denen das Zitat bekannt ist – und ich rechne sogar meinen Enthüller dazu –, als solche- und ihnen rechne ich ihn nicht –, die verstehen werden, daß mein Gedanke geradezu von dieser Voraussetzung lebt, also darin seinen Wert hat, daß er ein Plagiat ist. Wäre dies nicht der Fall, so wäre der Gedanke wertlos und ich hätte mir bloß ein Schmuckstück angeeignet, das meinen eigenen Besitz beschämt. Aber der Gedanke beruht nicht in den zwei Zeilen, sondern eben darin, daß sie nicht von mir sind, und in der Stelle, an der sie nun stehen. Natürlich ist

¹⁹ Irene Fantappiè, *Karl Kraus e Shakespeare. Recitare, citare, tradurre*, cit.



die Liste der Plagen und Klagen, die Hamlet aufzählt, ein wichtigeres Werk als die Liste meiner Themen und der Sprachwert der beiden Zeilen nicht zu verkennen. Aber es handelt sich hier nicht um diesen, sondern einzig darum, daß auch hier jedes Thema eine Klage ist und die noch fehlenden zwei: die bedrückende Staatlichkeit und die totschweigende Öffentlichkeit ein Lücke ließen, in die das Zitat einschlüpfen mußte, weil ja ganz sicher ist, daß von keinem Shakespeare hier etwas stärkeres Neues gefunden werden könnte als dieses Shakespeare-Zitat, aber nicht als Inhalt, sondern weil es ein Zitat ist. Der künstlerische Wert dieser Einfügung besteht in der selbstverständlichen Deckung mit den noch zu bezeichnenden Themen und die originale Leistung in der Weglassung der Anführungszeichen. Das Leben, in das die Worte eingesetzt sind, ist von dem Leben, dem sie entnommen sind, so verschieden, daß auch nicht die Spur einer inneren Identität mehr vorhanden ist, und die äußere, also das Plagiat, ist nichts anderes als die Leistung, die es bewirkt hat. Aber wahrscheinlich wird es leichter möglich sein, vor einem intellektuellen Forum mit der Begründung, daß es ja doch ein unverkennbares Zitat ist, von dem Vorwurf der Aneignung freigesprochen zu werden als ihm plausibel zu machen, daß eben diese der originale Wert ist und daß sich die Produktion hier nicht in den Worten, sondern in ihrer Einschöpfung vollzieht. Wie diese den Bestandteil der Sprache, das gegebene Wort, so kann sie auch den Bestandteil des vorhandenen Kunstwerks, der wieder Stoff wurde, betreffen. Ob sie ihn nun in eine solche gedankliche Beziehung bringt, die schon in dem bloßen Ergreifen ihr Leben und ihre Berechtigung bewährt, oder ob sie ihm wie jede Nachdichtung neue Werte abgewinnt, sie wird allemal nur dem verdächtig erscheinen, dessen Respekt vor dem Wort sich bloß der Distanz dazu verdankt und dessen Materialkennerschaft schließlich von deren Wert und von dem Ruhm des Originals abhängt. Die Übernahme der Shakespeare-Stelle ist durch den Einfall, sie zu übernehmen, berechtigt; die Verwendung von Bibelmotiven erst durch die Entscheidung, daß sie gelungen ist – eine Entscheidung, die aber auch jedem andern Gedicht erst den Eigenwert bestimmt. Wer den Wert des Stoffes vor Nachdichtung behütet, ist zu jener



Entscheidung ebenso wenig befugt wie einer, der den Unwert eines Stoffes behauptet.²⁰

Moving on from the conception of plagiarism as a form of art subjected to a judgment of worth, Kraus, on the one hand, strikes back at those who would accuse him of plagiarism that he has not committed and, on the other hand, sympathizes with those writers – like Brecht – who have argued in a similar vein. Little known is a long and clearly hostile review of Krausian writings which appears in the Bolognese newspaper “Il Resto del Carlino” on March 18, 1913 (in fact, earlier than that which is conventionally considered the conclusion *ab quo* of Krausian reviews in Italy, the publication on “Lacerba” in the autumn 1913 issue of *Una scelta di aforismi*, translated by Italo Tavolato):

“It is impossible to ignore: it is in every tobacconist’s little corner, sprouting from every happy person’s pocket and it helps the digestion of every office worker of the capital’s infinite ministries. Let us say that no Viennese writer enjoys the popularity of the man of the torch, but that is to say little. Kraus is like the half of a cigar: something between useless and pleasant. An attitude, something to take after-dinner and a pastime. In the long run it could be intolerable, but it knows how to divide itself up. It divides itself into sips. His journal is grain-like, bijou-like, there is never any danger of losing the thread, and one can always leave the tiny paragraph to come for tomorrow. The worst thing that could possibly happen is to be taken seriously: but this has happened to him only rarely and he has always brilliantly vindicated himself. [...] Kraus is an artist of idleness, a pasta for the jovial man for whom philosophy is more detestable than intestinal inflammation, a man, if God wills, without any principles or faith. His position of privilege, in Vienna, is due to this pleasant chatter, which never exhausts an argument for the pleasure of yet chatting some more”.²¹

²⁰ Karl Kraus, *Vom Plagiat*, cit., pp. 62-63.

²¹ Karl Kraus, *Notizien*, in “Die Fackel”, XV (1913), 372-373 [trans. from Italian added].



The review, upon which Kraus reports and comments in a number of “Die Fackel” printed in April of the same year, contains rather heavy criticism of the Viennese author who is portrayed, on the one hand, as an able hawker – something “between useless and pleasant”, an “artist of idleness” who writes trifles in a tiny, “bijou-like magazine” – and, on the other hand, as “a man, if God wills, without any principles or faith.” Nevertheless, Kraus indifferently liquidates the article and its author, limiting himself to comparing the “Carlino” to the “Kleiner Witzblatt”. However, the following paragraph in which he is accused of plagiarism provokes an entirely different reaction.

“The moral interest toward those things which fall beneath his critical scalpel is superficial and phosphorescent. His pointed wit is mainly directed at the world of asses and simpletons: but interior concern there is none. A large part of that little amount which is serious at the bottom of his aphorisms, even many of his *calembours*, has been stolen from Weininger”.

Das ist stark, bitte. Es ist ein Glück, daß wenigstens die Kalauer, die in den Jahrgängen der Fackel vor dem Auftreten Weiningers vorkamen, als Eigenbau anerkannt bleiben. Wie ich sofort nach dem Erscheinen des Buches Geschlecht und Charakter zu arbeiten begann, stellt sich nunmehr heraus. Ich nahm zunächst die Aphorismen vor. Freilich gibt es in jenem Buch keine Aphorismen. Aber nur die Blindheit meiner deutschen Feinde konnte bisher übersehen, daß ich einfach die Kapitel Weiningers zerstückelt habe. Wie wäre es sonst möglich, daß sie sich entgehen ließen, was jetzt ein Italiener mit Händen greift? Man lese einmal „Sprüche und Widersprüche“ oder „Pro domo et mundo“ ohne Absätze herunter und man wird direkt paff sein. Mit dem Buch „Über die letzten Dinge“ hat mir Weininger schon besser vorgearbeitet: es enthält Aphorismen. Was nun molti meiner calembours anlangt, die ich ihm geraubt habe, so ist dies nach dem Gesagten ohneweiters einleuchtend, wengleich der Umstand, daß die Werke Weiningers keine calembours enthalten, die Untersuchung schwieriger macht als die Feststellung. Aber da



man in Bologna Weininger genau kennt, so ist anzunehmen, daß man dort auch die in Österreich und Deutschland noch nicht bekannten Werke Weiningers kennen dürfte, in denen es bekanntlich von Kalauern wimmelt. [...]

Wer bezweifelt, daß berichten lügen heißt? Aber nun sieht man, daß auch die Literaturkritik, seit sich die Zeitung ihrer bemächtigt hat, auf Gerüchten beruht. Ich soll die Explosion von Schönbrunn erfunden haben. Ich soll die Witze, die Weininger gemacht haben soll, gestohlen haben. Eher könnte ein Methangaswerk explodieren, als daß ich es erfinden würde. Und eher könnte ich es erfinden, als Weiningers Witze plagiierten.²²

Kraus reacts to the accusation of having plagiarized the works of Otto Weininger with extreme harshness, calling attention to the fact that he has been accused of copying *calembours* from a book that does not contain them (the reference is to the famous 1903 tractate *Geschlecht und Charakter*).²³ Kraus proceeds through paradoxes. It is possible, he writes, that in Bologna they are familiar with works of Weininger's that in Austria and in Germany are still unknown. Moreover, that blindness has prevented Germans from noticing something that now, thanks to the Italians, is finally clear: Kraus's wordplays are nothing other than texts from Weininger reduced to fragments. It is sufficient to read the aphorisms of *Pro domo et mundo* or *Sprüche und Widersprüche* one after the other *et voilà*: the reader will find before his or her very eyes a page from Weininger. With a typically Krausian procedure, a broader argument follows to the *per*

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 38-40. [translation from Italian added]

²³ On the other hand, *Geschlecht und Charakter* is a fundamental book for Karl Kraus. As Weininger, Kraus too identifies women and sexuality but does draw any contempt. The pan-sexual woman, an expression of Beauty, is different from the male artist, an expression of Spirit, but is also the necessary compliment: Weininger's error, in Kraus's eyes, is to use ethical-intellectual parameters for a being that asks for aesthetic-hedonistic criteria. See Otto Weininger, *Geschlecht und Charakter* (Vienna: W. Braumüller, 1903); Nike Wagner, *Geist und Geschlecht. Karl Kraus und die Erotik der Wiener Moderne* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1982); Irene Fantappiè, *Accusativo assoluto. Karl Kraus, la legge e la doppia morale*, cit.



absurdum argumentation that highlighted the logical inconsistencies and linguistic faults of the other's text. Kraus observes that, from the time the press had taken possession of literary criticism as well, the latter founds the arguments on chatter and hearsay. It is a corollary of the theories expressed in the well-known *pamphlet* entitled *Heine und die Folgen* (1910) where Kraus flung himself against the overlapping of literature and journalism of which Heine himself was an undisputed model.

A further accusation of plagiarism was directed at Kraus by Alfred Kerr. The enmity between the Austrian writer and German critic arose in the 1920s. Starting in 1921, and particularly after 1925, Kraus published writings in "Die Fackel" in which he attributed to Kerr a number of warmongering poems published between 1914 and 1917 that had been signed with the pseudonym Gottlieb (there were two people hidden behind this pseudonym one of whom was in fact the German critic). Kerr, who at that time was trying to prove himself a pacifist, not only contested the truth of Kraus's affirmations but accused Kraus of plagiarism by taking up Alfred Ehrenstein's aforementioned arguments and adding further proof. In a satire of the critic Ihering, Kraus had written "Wenn es hohl klingt, wo ein Kopf mit einem Buch zusammenstößt, muß es dann immer das Buch gewesen sein?" without making clear that it was in fact a phrase from Lichtenberg. Kraus responds to Kerr in the essay *Wer glaubt ihm* (1928): "at least," he writes, "I have drawn directly from the original, seeing that the familiar *Witz* from Lichtenberg goes 'Wenn ein Buch und ein Kopf zusammenstoßen und es klingt hohl, ist das allemal im Buch?'"²⁴ In any case, Kerr, in his invective, intending to quote Lichtenberg unconsciously manages to cite Kraus instead, rendering himself guilty of an erroneous attribution of a literary text.²⁵ The querulous crossings between Kerr and Kraus would not have legal consequences, but the two turned to face each other just a few

²⁴ Georg Christoph Lichtenberg, *Sudelbücher*, edited by Franz H. Mautner (Frankfurt: Insel, 2002), p. 291.

²⁵ Karl Kraus, *Wer glaubt ihm? Ich treib' aus jeder Stadt hinaus den Schuft*, in "Die Fackel", XXX (1928), 781-786, p. 26.



months thereafter thanks to the theater of Bertolt Brecht. Kerr's anti-Brechtian polemic is well known. On May 3, 1929 the critic published an article in the "Berliner Tageblatt" in which he juxtaposed texts of Gay, Villon and Kipling with the *Dreigroschenoper* and accused Brecht of underhandedly quoting the K.L. Ammer (the pseudonym of Karl Klammer) translation of Villon. Brecht responded:

Eine Berliner Zeitung hat spät, aber doch noch gemerkt, daß in der Kiepenheuerschen Ausgabe der Songs zur „Dreigroschenoper“ eben den Namen Villon der Name des deutschen Übersetzers Ammer fehlt, obwohl von meinen 625 Versen tatsächlich 25 mit der ausgezeichneten Übertragung Ammers identisch sind. Es wird eine Erklärung verlangt. Ich erkläre also wahrheitsgemäß, daß ich die Erwähnung des Namens Ammer leider vergessen habe. Das wiederum erkläre ich mit meiner grundsätzlichen Laxheit in Fragen geistigen Eigentums.²⁶

As for Kraus, he will express his own sympathy for the presumed act of plagiarism in his essay "Kerrs Enthüllung", maintaining that Brecht, in the twenty-five verses copied from the translation of Villon, is in any case as original as Alfred Kerr is unoriginal in his own texts. Kraus's arguments in defense of Brecht echo those used to counter Ehrenstein's accusations, to which Kraus had also dedicated a joke in 1920 within a text entitled *Die Gefährten*: "Daß die hundert Verse der 'Apokalypse', auch wenn nicht ein Wort darin von mir wäre, dennoch von mir wären, darüber werde ich ihn vergebens belehren, so wenig wie ich ihm begreiflich machen würde, daß ein Gedicht, das ein Expressionist schreibt, auch wenn jedes Wort von ihm ist, doch nicht von ihm ist".²⁷ Even if all one-hundred lines of the poem "Apokalypse" were to have been copied from another text, they would nevertheless have to be attributed to Karl Kraus; on the contrary, an Expressionist's poem could not be considered his or her

²⁶ Bertolt Brecht, *Eine Erklärung*, in *Gesammelte Werke in 20 Bänden*, edited by Elisabeth Hauptmann, vol. XVIII (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1967), p. 100.

²⁷ Karl Kraus, *Die Gefährten*, in "Die Fackel", XXII (1920), 552-553, p. 11.



own even if he or she were to have written each and every word. In any event, Kraus maintains, the attempt to make people like Ehrenstein understand something similar is in vain.

With his theory of plagiarism Kraus reassumes some issues already present in his cultural panorama but adds new accents. Speaking of the writer, Goethe had stated: “Warum soll er sich scheuen, Blumen zu nehmen, wo er sie findet?”²⁸ The difference between these arguments and Krausian theory is in the fact that Kraus, moving from his conception of language as a “body”, expresses himself in favor of plagiarism placing the accent not on practice in itself but rather on the modification of the text that it presumes. Heine had written: “Der Dichter darf überall zugreifen, wo er Material zu seinen Werken findet, und selbst ganze Säulen mit ausgemeißelten Kapitälern darf er sich zueignen, wenn nur der Tempel herrlich ist, den er damit stützt”.²⁹ For Kraus too the beauty of the subsequent construction supported by others’ “columns” is the condition *sine qua non* of plagiarism; one must not forget, however, that, if in Heine these same “columns” remain identical to themselves, the Krausian reflection on the theme concentrates itself completely on the creative contribution of the “second” author.

It is in order to stress how his own acts of plagiarism are the fruit of his own “originale Leistung” that Kraus makes sure to dedicate certain reflections to the choice of which text to plagiarize. This process is itself a creative act. The poem “Gebet an die Sonne von Gibeon” is indebted, Kraus writes, to the Book of Joshua, but the object of the act of plagiarism is not Luther’s canonical translation; rather, it is that of Leander van Eß. Kraus juxtaposes the two versions to the poem itself in order not to highlight the act of having

²⁸ Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Begegnungen und Gespräche*, edited by Renate Grumach, vol. XIV (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2001) [Gespräch mit Kanzler von Müller, December 17, 1824]. Heine instead had written: “Der Dichter darf überall zugreifen, wo er Material zu seinen Werken findet, und selbst ganze Säulen mit ausgemeißelten Kapitälern darf er sich zueignen, wenn nur der Tempel herrlich ist, den er damit stützt”. Heinrich Heine, *Über die französische Bühne und andere Schriften zum Theater*, in *Sämtliche Schriften*, edited by Klaus Briegleb, vol. III (Munich: Hanser, 1976), p. 319.

²⁹ Heinrich Heine, *Über die französische Bühne und andere Schriften zum Theater*, in *Sämtliche Schriften*, edited by Klaus Briegleb, vol. III (Munich: Hanser, 1976), p. 319.



plagiarized but to underline that this latter work derives from a critical perspective and from an intentional choice:

Da das Buch Josua gegen mein “Gebet an die Sonne von Gibeon” bis heute unbeschützt geblieben ist, mag es dankenswert sein, selbst auf jene Quelle zu verweisen, bei deren Benützung ich mich wieder weniger an Luther als an Leander van Eß gehalten habe. Die Stelle vom Geschrei ist aus den Abschnitten 5, 10, 16, und 20 des VI. Cap. bezogen. Die Gegenüberstellung soll noch nicht mein Plagiat aufzeigen, sondern nur, daß ich den Lärm von dort genommen habe, wo er lebendiger ist als im berichthaften „Feldgeschrei“ und daß er dort fast schon den Dialekt meiner Verkürzung hat.

(5) Und wenn man des Halljahrs Horn bläset, und tönet, daß ihr die Posaunen höret, so soll das ganze Volk ein großes Feldgeschrei machen; so werden der Stadt Mauern umfallen, und das Volk soll hinein fallen, ein Jeglicher stracks vor sich.	Und es soll geschehen, wann man das Jobelhorn bläst, wann ihr den Schall der Trompete höret; so soll das ganze Volk ein großes Geschrei erheben; dann wird die Mauer der Stadt umstürzen an ihrer Stelle; und das Volk soll hinaufsteigen, Jeder vor sich hin.
(10) Josua aber gebot dem Volk, und sprach: Ihr sollt kein Feldgeschrei machen, noch eure Stimme hören lassen, noch ein Wort aus eurem Munde gehen, bis auf den Tag, wann ich zu euch sagen werde: Machet ein Feldgeschrei; so machet dann ein Feldgeschrei.	Und dem Volke gebot Josua, und sprach: Ihr sollet kein Geschrei erheben und nicht hören lassen eure Stimme; kein Wort soll aus eurem Munde gehen, bis zu dem Tage, wo ich euch sagen werde: Erhebet Geschrei! dann erhebet Geschrei.
(16) Und am siebenten Mal, da die Priester die Posaunen bliesen, sprach Josua zum Volk: Machet ein Feldgeschrei, denn der Herr hat euch die Stadt gegeben.	Und es geschah beim siebenten Male, wie die Priester in die Trompeten stießen, da sprach Josua zu dem Volke: Erhebet Geschrei! denn der Herr hat euch die Stadt gegeben.



<p>(20) Da machte das Volk ein Feldgeschrei, und bliesen die Posaunen. Denn als das Volk den Hall der Posaunen hörte, machte es ein großes Feldgeschrei. Und die Mauern fielen um, und das Volk erstieg die Stadt, ein Jeglicher stracks vor sich. Also gewannen sie die Stadt.</p>	<p>Da erhob das Volk Geschrei, und man stieß in die Trompeten. Und es geschah, wie das Volk den Schall der Trompeten hörte, erhob es ein großes Geschrei; und es fiel die Mauer auf ihrer Stelle; und das Volk stieg hinauf in die Stadt, ein Jeder vor sich hin, und sie nahmen die Stadt ein.</p>
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Das Geschrei ist in die folgenden Strophen übernommen:

Und der eifrige Gott, welcher am siebenten Tag
der Zerstörung nicht ruht, hieß sie vollenden, bis
sie der besiegten Welt den Fuß auf den Nacken gesetzt
und ein Geschrei erheben gedurft.

Denn es ward ihnen gesagt, nicht zu erheben so lang
Geschrei, bis ihnen gesagt, daß sei erheben Geschrei,
dieses hielten sie ein, dann aber gingen sie hin,
Geschrei zu erheben wie ihnen gesagt.³⁰

That within Krausian writings the concept of plagiarism is a necessary complement to that of quotation is evidenced also by the fact that the use of quotation in itself does not necessarily have a value; indeed, it is often the instrument of the transformation of “ideas” into “expressions”. On the occasion of the 1909 celebrations of Schiller, Kraus wrote an invective against those who would utilize an author’s quotations in order to support their own banality. The idea dies within the expression, or rather, the idea dies if the process of quotation does not alter the object but turns it into mere decoration. Here the echo of the Krausian polemic against ornament resounds, whether in the form of his satires against the rich scenography of Reinhardt or in his writings supporting his friend the architect Adolf

³⁰ Karl Kraus, *Vom Plagiat*, cit., pp. 65-66.



Loos, author of *Ornament und Verbrechen*. In *Vom Plagiat* Kraus writes that if his act of plagiarizing Shakespeare were not involve a variation, then it would be only the misappropriation of a “Schmuckstück”;³¹ in the same manner, in *Schrecken der Unsterblichkeit* he affirms that only when in Germany Schiller stops fulfilling the function of being a decoration for the heater, will he be able to truly return to his homeland with all of his revolutionary potential.

Wie sagt doch Schiller... “Alle jene, die so anfangen, wenn sie zur Quelle ihre Banalität führen wollen, müssen erst vom Schauplatz des deutschen Geisteslebens weggeputzt werden, ehe wir uns überhaupt wieder in ein Verhältnis zu Schiller setzen lassen. Was sie an ihm anbetungswürdig finden, sind Ideen, die als Phrasen gestorben sind, wenn sie nicht als Phrasen geboren wurden. Wenn seines Geistes Blut in ihnen lebte, so gerann es und taugte nicht zum Lebenssaft nachkommender Geister. Von einer Gebärde der Verzückung, die wir als Erbe bewahren, würde unsere Kultur auf die Dauer ein klägliches Dasein führen. Was die Schillerfeier der Jugend einimpfen wollen, kann in Wahrheit nicht das sein, was wir ihm zu danken haben. Schlimm stünde es um Deutschland, wenn wir mit diesem Schutt einer zu den Sternen emporgereckten Voraussetzungslosigkeit, wenn wir mit den Trümmern dieser baufälligen Wolkenkratzer der Empfindung durch die Jahrhunderte wirtschaften wollten. Wenn nur erst Schiller als Ofenschmuck des deutschen Heims entfernt ist, kann er noch als Revolutionär in das deutsche Heim zurückkehren.”³²

Plagiarism in Kraus is therefore an art of “saying something second-hand” which does not mean only saying something a second time: translated and inscribed within the Krausian page, the other’s text acquires a new meaning and new life. The literary oeuvre of Kraus is, from this point of view, a perfect equivalent to his notebooks conserved in Vienna: the fragment can be eliminated at a stroke of the pen or it can be repeated, quoted, even plagiarized,

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

³² Karl Kraus, *Schrecken der Unsterblichkeit*, in “Die Fackel”, XI (1909), 291, p. 24.



and, proceeding in this manner, brought once more back to light, both different and identical to itself. Everything, in Kraus, plays within the dynamic between destruction and resurrection, both of which are subjected to the judicial function assumed by the author. In effect, Kraus establishes a “court of the word” which, depending on the cases, cancels or repeats the text in order to either condemn it or save it. Therefore, for Kraus as *Allmensch* and *Unmensch*,³³ writing is an exercise of judgment. On the other hand, wrote Benjamin, “Man versteht nichts von diesem Manne, solange man nicht erkennt, daß mit Notwendigkeit alles, ausnahmslos alles, Sprache und Sache, für ihn sich in der Sphäre des Rechts abspielt”.³⁴ Court and law: the apocalypse so often invoked, indeed, leads to catharsis only when it implies absolution or condemnation and therefore that practice of judgment which, within the field of literary production, can also be expressed through the act of plagiarism.

³³ See *ibid.*

³⁴ Walter Benjamin, *op. cit.*, p. 342.