

THE PUBLIC, THE ARTISTS AND THE FOOL

Karl Kraus

By an artist they understood one of those prigs
who has no time to waste on the likes of such pigs
and has nothing to do with the making of money,
which, you know, after all, is almost too funny,
but instead spends his time in creating and writing,
and helps to kill theirs, or to make it exciting;
and since, by profession, he is really a dreamer
and therefore, unlike them, no diligent schemer,
and is busy with things that are hardly a duty
and neglectful of all but the chase after beauty.
It is clear, he is quicker than they to take fire,
but otherwise, what does it get him? His lyre!
And the public, had they nothing better to do,
why surely, they might become such artists too!
Now let us be honest, for when all is said,

they have hit very neatly the nail on the head,
and if it consisted of sense or sound morals,
they too might be easily crowned with such laurels.
For whoever the middle-class virtues can flout,
shall find welcome today as an artist, no doubt.
So little is needed to gain him admission:
a shirking of work will effect the transition,
and truly—I might almost say: on the spot—,
very readily he may become what he's not;
and where there is nothing, as just compensation
every imbecile waits for an inspiration.
And if it should fail them, without more ado
such artists might be such a public too!
But somewhere is one with a soul he would save,

who labors and sweats like a galley-slave.
He waits upon nothing, but takes it by force
in unvaried diurnal nocturnal course.

And he strives for the word, and all round all is still,
and it comes at his word—by his will, by his will;
and whatever secret his wooing will plumbed,
he succumbed more to it than to him it succumbed,
and not free like the artist has he pursued beauty,
yet unlike the public, feels no sense of duty,
and he wrought for himself to his deep self-mistrust,
and that is his lust, for he must, for he must.
And artists and public are quite of one view:
No, *we* never could be such fools, we two!