

**A
GER**

Day

Ant

De

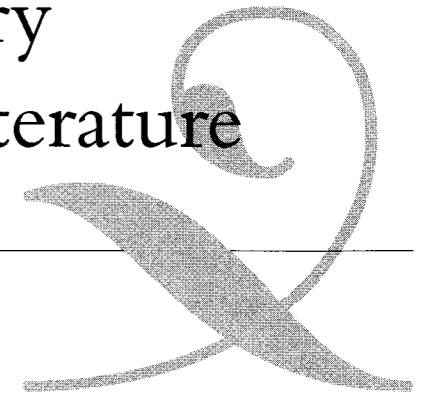
The
m
ha
ce

matically
cal enti
culture
has con
Luthera
printing
soulful
structur
dition
charact

In th
ics cap
some
Germa
offerin
entries
an eve
ical m
logical
ematic
reader
it is t
Hilde
Goeth
stein,
encha
magic
brillia
fictio
refere
ence
cultur

its disparate and unifying themes.

A New History of German Literature



David E. Wellbery

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Judith Ryan

GENERAL EDITOR

Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht

Anton Kaes

Joseph Leo Koerner

Dorothea E. von Mücke

EDITORS

THE BELKNAP PRESS OF
HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, Massachusetts
London, England 2004

Renate Usmiani, "The Invisible Theater: The Rise of Radio Drama in Germany after 1945," *Modern Drama* 13 (1970/71): 259-269.

Bernhard Siegert

☞ 1953, April

Wittgenstein's long-awaited second work, *Philosophical Investigations*, is published

A Ladder Turns into a Fly-bottle

In the spring of 1953, the publication of Wittgenstein's second book was eagerly awaited throughout the philosophical world. There may never have been a philosophical work whose appearance was met with greater anticipation, especially in England, and nowhere more so than in Cambridge, where Wittgenstein lived, taught, and worked for most of the years of the work's gestation and composition. Various preparatory notebooks, studies, and drafts had been circulating since the mid-1930s, often clandestinely, in philosophy departments of the United States and the British Isles. The entire Anglophone philosophical community, aware of the impending arrival of *Philosophical Investigations*, knows that it has been in preparation for twenty-four years, knows that Wittgenstein worked on it ceaselessly for twenty-two of those years (that is, ever since his return to philosophy in 1929, following a decade-long hiatus after the completion of his first book), and knows that for the last two of those years, since the philosopher's death, his translator and editors have labored tirelessly to bring the work out as soon as humanly possible. The initial publication is a bilingual German-English edition.

The task of translation itself is a formidable one. No one is more conscious than the translator—Wittgenstein's student, later a famous philosopher in her own right, Elizabeth Anscombe—of the attention the philosopher lavished on every line of his original German text. Some of the conditions under which the work came into being are themselves already the stuff of legend, such as the author's various abrupt departures, sometimes for months at a time, to isolated locations in Norway, Ireland, and elsewhere, to be alone with his thoughts, in places where he could, without the distracting presence of other people, be free to fashion and refashion each of the sentences that were to make up this book—the book that was to be his life's work.

The author's only previous work, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, is itself a philosophical classic that had given rise to an entire tradition of thought—a tradition that one knows somehow to be a central target of criticism in the later work. Though the influence of that early work had remained strong, by 1953, the unpublished later work managed to exercise a formidable underground influence, despite the absence of any formal publication or definitive expression thereof sanctioned by the author.

At one point, late in *Philosophical Investigations*, we come upon the following remark: "If a lion could talk, we could not understand him." It seemed to some that this remark might serve nicely as a motto for the subsequent reception of

the work: The lion spoke, and indeed we could not understand him. Countless interpretations now abound. The later Wittgenstein is said to be a pragmatist, a realist, an antirealist, a foundationalist, an antifoundationalist, a deconstructionist, a cultural materialist, a relativist, an idealist, a solipsist, an empiricist, a critic of relativism, idealism, solipsism, and empiricism, and so on. There is no consensus regarding a proper understanding of this work. One dimension of this problem pertains to the form of the work—its "peculiar literary character." To what extent should it be taken into account in any attempt to reach such an understanding?

One need only glance at *Philosophical Investigations* to be struck by its idiosyncratic form. Those who have attempted to characterize it tend to resort to terms familiar from literary analysis—as aphoristic, fragmentary, modernist, deconstructive, ironic, and so on. The prose styles of various other authors, such as Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Georg Christoph Lichtenberg, Karl Kraus, Otto Weininger, Oswald Spengler, or Franz Kafka, are invariably invoked for comparison and cited as ostensible influences. However, this approach fails to do justice to the peculiar combination of patience and passion, philosophical meticulousness and ethical fervor that pervades Wittgenstein's work. Karl Kraus, one of Wittgenstein's favorite authors, offers a useful point of departure for discussion of the literary dimension of Wittgenstein's prose: "There are authors in whose work form matches content not merely as clothes do the body but as the soul does the body."

To many of his expositors, Wittgenstein, like Socrates or Pythagoras, seems to call for the sort of treatment that adduces anecdotes and biographical details in an attempt to come to grips with his work. This tendency is due not so much to the way Wittgenstein lived, which indeed caused anecdotes about him to proliferate, but more to the fact that the authors of such accounts take the anecdotes and details in question to illuminate something about Wittgenstein *qua* philosopher. These expositors feel in part encouraged by remarks scattered throughout the philosopher's writings: "You cannot write anything about yourself that is more truthful than you yourself are." "Nothing is so difficult as not deceiving oneself." "If anyone is *unwilling* to descend into himself . . . he will remain superficial in his writing." "Working in philosophy . . . is really more a working on oneself." "That man will be revolutionary who can revolutionize himself." Such remarks—when one comes upon them in the middle of a broader philosophical investigation—may strike one as extraneous. They appear to testify to an ethical struggle accompanying the philosophical one. Many such remarks also attest to the fact that Wittgenstein himself took the relation between these struggles to be internal rather than merely external. By choosing this particular form, Wittgenstein sought to engender such a struggle in his readers as well, that is, to enact, and enable the reader to enact a progression of philosophical experiences that are the way stations along the road to philosophical clarity.

Here is an important parallel between Wittgenstein's early and later work: Both works set out to deepen the reader's philosophical perplexity as an essen-

tial precondition for achieving the sort of clarity to which they wish to lead. Wittgenstein wanted his earlier book, the *Tractatus*, bound together in a single volume with *Philosophical Investigations*. In the Preface to *Philosophical Investigations*, he justifies this idea, stating, "The latter could be seen in the right light only against the background of my old way of thinking." To understand why the later work took the form it did, we need to understand what Wittgenstein sought to retain and what he sought to reject of his earlier conception of philosophy.

What the two apparently discrepant halves of this volume, as originally intended, have in common is their unusual forms. Everything the author says about each one, in the prefaces and elsewhere, suggests that this peculiarity of form is not merely a matter of style—an outer layer of literary ornamentation of which the work can (and perhaps should) be divested without violence to its philosophical content. Commenting on *Tractatus*—but the point applies equally to the *Investigations*—Wittgenstein remarks in a letter to the Austrian publisher Ludwig von Ficker: "The work is strictly philosophical and at the same time literary."

Wittgenstein held Ficker, the editor of the influential Austrian literary periodical *Der Brenner*, in high regard as a discerning publisher of literary works. Knowing that he shared with Ficker an admiration for such writers as Kraus, Rainer Maria Rilke, and Georg Trakl, Wittgenstein suggested that his own work, despite its initial appearance as a mere treatise on logic, had much in common with the writing of these authors. In the same letter, Wittgenstein highlighted the reasons why Ficker should publish the *Tractatus* in a periodical devoted chiefly to literary texts.

Gottlob Frege, the father of modern mathematical logic and the philosopher whom Wittgenstein most admired and whose writings more than any other influenced his early work, was alarmed by Wittgenstein's emphasis on the literary aspect of his work. Responding to Wittgenstein's comments on form in the Preface to the *Tractatus*, Frege wrote: "The pleasure one is to have in reading your book can, therefore, not have its ground in the . . . content, but only in the form. . . . In this way the book becomes really more of an artistic than a scientific [*wissenschaftliche*] achievement; that which is said in it takes second place to how it is said." Frege intended this as an objection, but Wittgenstein did not regard it as such. For Wittgenstein, form and content were intimately related in a fully realized work of philosophy. He remained true to this view as shown in his attitude toward his later work: "Philosophie dürfte man eigentlich nur dichten" (Philosophy should be written only as literature).

Nevertheless, commentators on Wittgenstein's work still generally adopt an exegetical procedure that implicitly regards the form of the work as merely an optional decorative feature. In other words, their expository practice appears to presuppose that there is no great difficulty in prying the philosophical jewels loose from their setting. When such exegetes claim that Wittgenstein makes his points indirectly rather than directly, or that he communicates his

meaning by attempting to say what he cannot say, they construe the absence of what is said to be due to an obstacle that prevents the author from expressing what he wants to be able to express. They seldom fail to pay homage to the remarkable style of both works. But to be fully entitled to the claim that Wittgenstein is a great writer, one must be able to make out how his finely crafted work serves—rather than frustrates—his philosophical ends.

Throughout his life, Wittgenstein selected works of poetry and literature—not to mention the Grimms' fairy tales and Hollywood westerns—as instances of ethical reflection. He regarded these works as exemplary achievements of both literary craft and ethical thought, as if each of these forms presupposed the other. Tolstoy's story "How Much Land Does a Man Need?" is a literary work that Wittgenstein held in particular esteem on these grounds, even though it contains virtually no overt ethical theorizing. In contrast, it was precisely those among Tolstoy's literary works that most extensively indulge in ethical remarks, such as his novel *Resurrection*, which Wittgenstein deplored most. Wittgenstein saw the ethical as contained in what is uttered or written without ever being itself that which is uttered or written. If we try to pry it loose from its life setting, it will get lost.

What is the form of the *Tractatus*? Here is Wittgenstein's description in the work itself: "My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them—as steps—to climb out through them, on them, over them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.)" The book takes the form of a ladder—a ladder we are to ascend and then throw away. This revelation comes at the conclusion of the work—in its penultimate section—and thus comprises a part of the book that Wittgenstein enjoins Ficker to read as an instance of a moment when the ethical point of the text receives comparatively immediate expression. Here, at the end of his book, Wittgenstein does not speak of the reader coming to understand the sentences contained in it; rather he speaks of the reader coming to understand him, the author of the book. We are told that the author's propositions serve as elucidations by our coming to recognize them as nonsensical. Wittgenstein does not ask his reader to grasp the thoughts which his nonsensical propositions seek to convey. One does not reach the end by arriving at the last page, but by arriving at a certain point in an activity—the point when the elucidation has served its purpose and the illusion of sense is exploded from within. The sign that we have understood the author of the work is that we can throw away the ladder on which we have ascended. This is to say, we have finished the work, and the work is finished with us, when we are able to throw away the sentences in the body of the work—sentences about "the limits of language" and the supposedly ineffable things that lie beyond them. What we need to do is allow ourselves, and our relation to our desires, to be transformed through engagement with Wittgenstein's work.

In *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein makes a similar point. Just as he emphasized that the *Tractatus* was not a "Lehrbuch" (a presentation of philo-

sophical doctrine), he remarks in *Investigations*: "My aim is: to teach you to pass from a piece of disguised nonsense to something that is patent nonsense." This is a crucial moment of continuity in his conception of philosophical authorship as he passes from his early to his later work. It is this conception of philosophical method, as a means for effecting a transition from latent to undisguised emptiness, that is a common source of the widely different forms of the two halves of Wittgenstein's envisioned volume.

The methodological assumption underlying this conception of authorship is nicely summarized in a remark found in a 1931 manuscript by Wittgenstein: "In philosophy we are deceived by an illusion. But this—an illusion—is also something, and I must at some time place it completely and clearly before my eyes, before I can say it is only an illusion." In *Investigations*, however, he no longer seeks to place the illusion clearly before the reader's eyes by presenting him with a ladder to ascend and then throw away. Now the trope of the ladder gives way to that of the fly-bottle: "What is your aim in philosophy? To show the fly the way out of the fly-bottle." Wittgenstein comes to regard his earlier self as possessed by a false sense of freedom from philosophical bewitchment, while remaining trapped in the fly-bottle of philosophy. His primary designation, both early and late, for those debilitating forms of reflection that enslave our ability for thought and hold us intellectually captive to forms of nonsense that we mistake for sense, is "metaphysics." His primary designation for those liberating forms of reflection that enable us to overcome such forms of enslavement is "philosophy." Armed with this terminology, we can put his central later criticism of his early work as follows: His early work sought to practice a method of philosophy that had metaphysical thinking built into its very conception of philosophical method.

The more he scrutinized his earlier work, the more such moments of metaphysical insistence—moments in which a philosophical requirement is laid down—came to light. It is important to realize that, at the time when he was writing the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein would not have regarded these metaphysical commitments as metaphysical. Hence the following thought dominates his later methods of philosophy: "The decisive moment in the [philosophical] conjuring trick [is] the very one that we thought quite innocent." Much of his later writing seeks to pinpoint the occurrence of each of these moments in his earlier writing. The earlier Wittgenstein was concerned with clarifying propositions and adopting and applying a perspicuous form of notation that would avoid "the fundamental confusions of which the whole of philosophy is full" by furnishing an absolutely clear way of expressing thoughts. To the later Wittgenstein, the very hankering for such a mode of expression appears in itself the expression of the metaphysical spirit par excellence. This profound break with his earlier thought is, nevertheless, folded into a fundamental continuity of his philosophy. Early and late, Wittgenstein sought to find a way of doing philosophy without advancing philosophical theses, which would, nevertheless, enable the reader to pass from a state of philosophical perplexity to a state of complete clarity in which philosophical problems are completely

erased. Yet, later he came to realize that his earlier method of clarification embodied an entire metaphysics of language, which illustrated that the most crucial moments in "the philosophical conjuring trick" are those that are apt to appear as most innocent.

It turned out to be much more difficult to avoid laying down requirements in philosophy than his earlier self had imagined. Hence, an approach to philosophical problems entirely different from his early work needed to be developed. Most of all, the later work required a different form of writing—one that would mirror the reader's own philosophical temptation in a such a way as to move from the trivially true to the merely apparently deep, from the ordinary expression of thought to metaphysical assertion, from sense to nonsense, from language at work to language on holiday.

See also 1815, 1902, 1910, 1918, 1963

Bibliography: Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, bilingual edition, trans. C. K. Ogden (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1922). ———, *Philosophical Investigations*, bilingual edition, ed. G. E. M. Anscombe and R. Rhees, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford, U.K.: Blackwell, 1972). ———, *Culture and Value*, bilingual edition, ed. G. H. von Wright, trans. Peter Winch (Oxford, U.K.: Blackwell, 1980). ———, *Briefe an Ludwig von Ficker*, ed. G. H. von Wright (Salzburg: Otto Müller, 1969). Stanley Cavell, "Declining Decline: Wittgenstein as a Philosopher of Culture," in *This New Yet Unapproachable America* (Albuquerque, N.M.: Living Batch Press, 1989). Cora Diamond, *The Realistic Spirit* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991). Norman Malcolm, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 1984). Ray Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius* (New York: Free Press, 1990).

James Conant

1958

Günter Grass wins the Group 47 Prize for two chapters from his novel in progress, *Die Blechtrommel*

Politics and Literature

Fourteen years had passed since the defeat and collapse of the Nazi regime when Günter Grass's novel *Die Blechtrommel* (*The Tin Drum*) appeared to spectacular success in 1959. But the past still cast a dark shadow over German life and politics. In the West, the conservative government of Konrad Adenauer had provided the country with continuity and political stability since the founding of the Federal Republic in 1949; yet, the chancellor was frequently criticized by the right as well as the left. Some of his appointments to political office often struck observers as influenced by a desire to rehabilitate former Nazis, and his decision to yield to the pressure of the Western Powers and rearm the country was regarded by the Socialists, the university community, and some of the churches as opening the door to a return of the militarism that had played such a baleful role in German history, while also making all prospects for the reunification of the country more difficult. The currency reform of 1948 had sparked a remarkable economic recovery, but one