



# The Last Days of Mankind: A Tragedy in Five Acts

*Karl Kraus*

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## **The Last Days of Mankind: A Tragedy in Five Acts** Karl Kraus

Intended for a theatre on Mars, with a cast of nearly five-hundred and running to over two-hundred scenes, Karl Kraus's apocalyptic tragedy *The Last Days of Mankind* is the longest, most elaborate play ever written. It is also a biting satirical commentary on the outbreak and subsequent course of World War I. Karl Kraus (1874-1936) ranks as one of the great satirists of 20th-century literature. In 1899 he established his own journal, *Die Fackel* (The Torch), to drain the marsh of empty phrase-making. His wide-ranging oeuvre comprises essays, short stories, poetry and aphorisms, and culminated in the five-act play presented here. First published in 1920, *The Last Days* employs a collage of modernist techniques to evoke a despairing and darkly comical vision of the Great War from the perspective of Kraus's hometown, Vienna. At its centre Kraus places a cabal of war mongering press barons and self-serving hacks, whose strategies of mass manipulation he holds responsible for the very atrocities they report on in dispatches, editorials and feuilletons. With this translation of the play in its entirety, Patrick Healy completes the work begun in 2014 when he published the first ever English-language version of the Prologue and Act I in the Kraus anthology *In These Great Times: Selected Writings*. The present edition includes an introduction and a glossary of names and relevant terms.

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