



Cocaine: Selected Writings

Walter Rheiner

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“What was it that distorted the faces across from him at the table, which had just been smiling? What did they mean, the squinting glances these people gave him and then tellingly and disapprovingly shared amongst each other? See? They even crouched together now, and began to whisper ... He listened intently ... and there you had it! Clearly, someone had spoken the word, the fatal word that towered over the firmament of his nights and slowly cut him into pieces, a remorseless machine even in its sound: ‘Co-caine! ... Co-caine!’ Bit by bit it cut him up, until someday soon he would be pulverised entirely.” Walter Rheiner remains virtually unknown in the English-speaking world, despite a small but remarkable oeuvre which explores typical Expressionist themes - including metropolitan estrangement, intoxication and the horrors of trench warfare - in a manner every bit as daring and poignant as the work of better known contemporaries such as Trakl or Heym. Rheiner’s was a short-lived career; most of his output was originally published between 1917-1918. An (unsuccessful) attempt to escape active service in World War I by posing as a drug addict marked the onset of his lifelong dependency on cocaine and, later, morphine. In the hallucinatory novella *Cocaine*, Rheiner provides the reader with an arresting close-up of Berlin’s underbelly during the war years. The demise of the novella’s plagued protagonist Tobias would foreshadow the author’s own tragic end; he died at the age of 30 from an overdose of morphine. This bilingual edition, the first to present Rheiner in English translation, includes all of his known prose works as well as a small but representative sample of his poetry.

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