a variety of lecture programs all over the world. The "Jahrbuch" edited regularly again, publishes scholarly articles, reports on the activities of the society and on presentations of plays by Grillparzer on national and international stages, as well as broadcasts on radio and TV.

CLIFFORD ALBRECHT BERND
(PRESIDENT OF THE GRILLPARZER SOCIETY OF AMERICA)

THE ORIGINS OF THE GRILLPARZER SOCIETY

I

The meaning of a literary legacy, such as that bequeathed to us by Grillparzer, the greatest literary genius of the Austrian Biedermeier, can never be exhausted by studying, however assiduously, the intentions of its author. As that legacy is actualized and revitalized by interpreters in various geographical and historical contexts, it assumes new shades of meaning which never could have been anticipated by the author. We must quickly concede, therefore, the existence of a development in the meaning of an artistic oeuvre within traditions geographically and historically remote from one another. Grillparzer’s literary legacy has been acclaimed as well as disregarded not only in the mainstream of European letters, but also in the ever-flowing tributary of that mainstream on this side of the Atlantic.

This distinctive historicity of both the European and the American Grillparzer choruses should not prevent us, however, from realizing that Grillparzer’s attractors and detractors on both sides of the Atlantic are, after all, but two players in one vast communications system. Together, these two co-players constitute integral parts of a living worldwide dialogue which ceaselessly injects new meaning into the legacy that Grillparzer left to us.

It is at just such a cross-national symposium as this one here in New York that we have the opportunity to become more acutely aware of how the traditions on both sides of the Atlantic have contributed to the living, ever-changing view of Grillparzer. The following survey of the origins of the Grillparzer Society will endeavor to show, therefore, how and why intellectual forces in America have labored to establish and to maintain a concern for Grillparzer. This concern has been molded by historical, academic, and, yes, even political circumstances.

II

The origins of the Grillparzer Society go back at least to the year 1922, when a prominent, but now forgotten, German-American judge in Chicago by the name of Michael Girten became a board member and vice president of the German Federation of Chicago.1 This
organization had been founded for the specific purpose of reviving an American interest in German culture after it had fallen victim to the far-ranging Germanophobia which had seized the United States when war was declared on Germany and Austria-Hungary in 1917. The task of Giter and his fellow board members was not easy. They were exposed to harassment by zealous patriots who continued to stoke the fires of a ferocious anti-German hysteria long after the war had ended.4 But Giter persevered, and his efforts met with their measure of success.

This success was due to his novel approach to restoring the interest in German culture in postbellum America. With the sharp legal mind of an attorney, he realized that the prestige of German culture in the United States prior to World War 1 had largely resulted from the unification of Germany under the Crown of Prussia in 1871, following which Germany experienced massive economic growth and became a world power second only to Great Britain. In the age of that new Prussianized empire, Germany had become the most widely studied foreign language in America’s schools, colleges, and universities.5 But if the interest in German culture in the United States had come to flourish because of the prestige the new Prussianized Germany had acquired, then, as Giter also realized, that same interest abruptly declined when the Prussians became the stock villains in the wave of wartime and postwar anti-German sentiments. Giter, for many years the president of the German Catholic Zentralverein in Chicago, an organization which had always been involved with the curriculum of the city’s German-speaking parochial schools, must have been quite distressed when he read in Chicago’s press that the Democratic nominee for the Office

of the President of the United States in 1920, arguing against religious instruction in the German language, had publicly declared: “If any man […] wants his child indoctrinated with Prussian creeds, let our safeguards be such that he must go elsewhere for it.”

Giter knew, then, that to revive an interest in German culture meant to emphasize those German cultural values which had been downplayed when America’s eyes had focused on Prussian Germany. Featuring prominently among such cultural assets was the literary legacy of the Austrian Grillparzer. It had practically disappeared from the map of German literature after the new Prussian empire of 1871 had bedazzled the imaginations of those living in America. In no history of German literature published in the United States during the last third of the nineteenth century was the name Grillparzer either mentioned at all or, if it did receive token mention, he was hardly taken seriously as a writer. Grillparzer’s intellectual world had been simply too remote from everything Prussia stood for, and nothing could have revealed this more than did the popular Short History of German Literature, published by James Hosmer of Washington University in St. Louis in 1879. Hosmer had gone greatly out of his way to extol the virtues of Prussian Germany in this literary history, but at no place in all of the 568 pages did he ever mention the name Grillparzer.6 German literature had become practically synonymous with Prussian values, and hence, Grillparzer had to be excluded. The learned professor from St. Louis was surely well aware that Grillparzer had always found Prussianism distasteful. Grillparzer, after all, had vented his antipathy many times.

Giter, consequently, now sought to promote an interest in the “anti-Prussian” Grillparzer. Perhaps he took his lead from a report on “Austria’s Opportunity” published on March 31, 1917, in The New York Evening Post which, due to the widespread war hysteria, had presumably been reprinted in Chicago’s press as well. In that report, Giter could read: “Grillparzer was an Austrian in every fibre, and disliked Prussian arrogance and pedantry intensely.”7 Giter made sure therefore that the Austrian playwright’s works, such as Des Meeres und der Liebe Wellen, Medea, Sappho, Die Ahnfrau, were often and repeated performed at the German theater in postbellum Chicago. This was quite a novelty, for prior to the war, Grillparzer’s plays had been only sporadically included in that theater’s repertoire.8

5 James K. Hosmer: Short History of German Literature, St. Louis, MO: Jones 1879.
6 The secondary literature on Grillparzer refers to the antipathy often, but nowhere with as much detail than by Albert E. Schafer: Grillparzers Verhältnis zur preussisch-deutschen Politik, Nendeln/Liechtenstein: Kraus Reprint 1967 (= Germanistische Studien 69).
Girtgen's effort to liberate German culture from what was then considered the stigma of Prussianism gained new momentum when he was appointed Honorary Consul of the Republic of Austria in Chicago in March 1925, a position which soon led to his higher appointment as Honorary Consul General four years later. Now Girtgen's activity on behalf of a hitherto unknown actualization of Grillparzer in America could go into full swing. By 1929, he persuaded twenty-eight Americans to become members of the Grillparzer-Gesellschaft of Vienna, and by 1931, he succeeded in raising the American membership to forty-one, an astonishing number, considering that it comprised one sixth of all the members of the Grillparzer-Gesellschaft worldwide. Girtgen had truly ushered in a new dawn for the Austrian playwright in the United States.

His success, however, was largely restricted to the circles in which he moved: (1) at the Catholic University of Notre Dame, where he was an active alumnus; (2) at the Pontifical College Josephinum in Columbus, Ohio, where he had close personal contacts; (3) at Chicago's Jesuit Loyola University, where he was a member of the teaching faculty; and (4) in Chicago's Catholic Zentralverein, in which he served as president. Doubtless, too, Girtgen's activity on behalf of Grillparzer in these circles turned out to be all the more persuasive because he enjoyed the personal support of Cardinal Pifili, the Archbishop of Vienna, for whom he had arranged a visit to Chicago in 1926.

Girtgen's success, hence, had liberated a malign German culture by disassociating it from the hated world of Prussia and associating it, instead, with the less despised Austria. Catholic Vienna had displaced Protestant Berlin as the nexus of German culture, and Grillparzer, as the most conspicuous literary representative of Catholic Vienna, deserved, in Girtgen's opinion, the reputation of representing the best that German-language culture had to offer. Grillparzer, therefore, had gained his sudden new appeal because he was a Catholic writer. Others in America, however, particularly those at non-Catholic institutions of learning, were not prepared to vitalize a new, postwar interest in German culture and in Grillparzer by turning to Catholic Vienna for inspiration. For an antidote to the questionable values of Prussianism, they chose, instead, to direct their attention to humanistic Weimar.

III

The chief center for this school of thought was located in the German Department of New York University. Ernst Rose, soon after joining its teaching faculty in 1925, had lost no time in stressing the need to study German culture as something freed from the influence of the former Prussian shadow. In his cultural reader of 1928, he stated the case unequivocally: "Since in many minds 'Berlin' and 'Prussia' still are synonyms for 'Germany,' the authors [Rose and his co-author] have tried to bring out more clearly


11 Ibid., pp. 128-123.
The sustained emphasis on the culture of Weimar at New York University not only led to a deeper study of Goethe and other writers from Weimar, but also to an ingenious preoccupation with men of letters who had never lived in Weimar, yet who, nevertheless, lent themselves to being viewed in the light of Weimar’s humanism. Grillparzer appeared to be the premier writer who could gain most from such a revitalization as a Weimarian. As a consequence, three important doctoral dissertations on Grillparzer became the products of the “Weimar” school at New York University. I use the word “important” intentionally because, judging from the review coverage the published versions of these dissertations received, they must have made quite an impact on German Studies in America at the time. In each of the studies, it is interesting to note, the Austrian playwright was now assigned a place in literary history strictly within the intellectual orbit of the poets from Weimar.

The earliest of these dissertations (1934) came from the pen of Harold Lenz. In it he writes:

This study shows Grillparzer in his innermost convictions, at the bottom of his heart, to have been a pantheist and humanist, a devout disciple and original reevaluator of Goethe and Schiller.14

He [Grillparzer] grew away from his Austrian heredity, [and] adopted as nearly as possible the ideals of a humanism represented in its highest form by the Weimar classicists.15

[...] under the [...] influence of Goethe, Grillparzer was a Weimarian classicist in his ideals.16

Grillparzer was a Weimarian humanist.17

In the following year (1935) a second dissertation portraying Grillparzer as a Weimarian in disguise was completed. This study, by Dorothy Lasher-Schliit, was ostensibly addressed to Grillparzer’s attitude toward the Jews, but the author tells us quickly in her preface that how “Grillparzer felt about the Jews is important only in so far as it gives the world an insight into his personality and Weltanschauung.”18 With regard to that Weltanschauung, the author is, like Lenz, at pains to “link him definitely with the humanists at Weimar.”19

The third of the dissertations was completed in 1951 by Gisela Stein. Like her predecessors Lenz and Lasher-Schliit, she, too, followed the example of Schuchard’s personality, wisdom, and teaching, and related Grillparzer to the poetic world of Weimar:

[...] our poet directed his conscious efforts toward Weimar and the spiritual climate of German classicism.20

[...] it becomes immediately apparent how firmly the poet’s views of humanity are embedded in the classical realm of Goethe and Schiller.21

It becomes necessary to affirm Grillparzer’s spiritual affinity with the classical humanism at Weimar.22

The concerted efforts to demonstrate that Grillparzer’s aesthetic beliefs coincided with those that had been prevalent in the earlier classical Weimar of Goethe and Schiller naturally went a far way to placing the Austrian playwright on the map of German literature in America, indeed much more so than had been the case when Girtten had emphasized Grillparzer’s Catholic virtues. Yet, following so late in the perceived intellectual footsteps of Goethe and Schiller, Grillparzer was now made to look more like a skillful imitator of these poetic forebears than like a highly original playwright. In effect, Grillparzer’s own ingenious talent was downgraded, and so we are not surprised when we hear that the erstwhile crosstown competitor of New York University’s professors of German, Columbia University’s Henry Hatfield, bluntly stated that Grillparzer was nothing more than a “respectable second-rater.”23 How else could a colleague at a neighboring university, himself an expert on Weimarian poetics, have reacted to this massive attempt to give the Austrian dramatist respectability by turning him into a belated Weimarian?

IV

Grillparzer’s reputation needed now to be upgraded. It was left for Walter Silz of Princeton University, the foremost Germanist advocate of New Criticism in America, to achieve this in 1954. If Grillparzer were to acquire the true recognition he justly deserved, Silz knew, it would not do to judge him in the light of such extant evidence as his Austrian Catholic heritage or any similarity with the Weimarian poets of the past.

15 Ibid., p. 30.
16 Ibid., p. 4.
17 Ibid., p. 87.
19 Ibid., p. 8.
21 Ibid., p. 6.
22 Ibid., p. 4.
Grillparzer's oeuvre would have to be liberated from its real or perceived cultural context and evaluated, instead, on the basis of the intrinsic evidence of its own artistic achievement. Silz accomplished this by turning to Grillparzer's Der arme Spielmann, a work of prose fiction that had only rarely been taken seriously until Silz decided to analyze it with little regard to setting and even less regard to secondary literature. What emerged with Silz's absorbing interpretation was a sudden new understanding of this work as "pure poetic art." Silz had broken new ground for the study of Grillparzer in the United States. The enthusiasm he displayed for Grillparzer's artistic genius proved immediately infectious. An eager battalion of Grillparzer scholars, foremost of whom was Benno von Wiese, who had just spent a year at Princeton, began to imitate Silz by exploring more of that novella's artistic mysteries, and this, in turn, inspired a multitude of similar exegetical commentaries addressed to Grillparzer's other verbal icons as well.

Unquestionably, Silz had succeeded in giving Grillparzer a new recognition as an artistic master. He introduced an innovative and busy concern for Grillparzer's art on American university campuses, to such an extent, indeed, that by 1966, Norbert Fuerst of Indiana University could take the amazing step of subsuming the whole of German literature from 1820 to 1850 under the rubric The Age of Grillparzer. Imagine, Grillparzer's stature had now risen to such heights in the United States that he was considered to be the representative of an entire epoch in German literature! Grillparzer's fortunes in America had certainly gone from "rags to riches" in the intervening eighty-seven years since James Hensler had published his heavy tome on the history of German literature and never once found it necessary to mention the Austrian playwright's name.


A new and auspicious age for Grillparzer criticism on this side of the Atlantic had now begun. The steps taken in order to raise the Austrian's banner were, of course, many and varied, but the most decisive thrusts forward came, this writer believes, when (1) Michael Girten called attention to Grillparzer in order to combat the stigma of Prussianism, (2) the sages at New York University then sought to brighten Grillparzer's star with a concerted effort to associate him with the luminaries of Weimar, and (3) Walter Silz tore asunder the bonds of the cultural matrices that had prevented critics from appreciating Grillparzer's individual works as examples of impressive literary art.

It remained for Konrad Schaum of Notre Dame University, a vigorous interpreter of Grillparzer's fiction, to take two further steps to advance the poet's cause in the United States. First, he organized a public discussion of it at the convention of the Modern Language Association of America in 1977 in Chicago. The forum was not only well attended, but proved to be very exciting. In the session it became quickly apparent that the surge of intrinsic formal analyses of Grillparzer's art works, which Silz's investigation of Der arme Spielmann had inaugurated, was beginning to be viewed with skepticism by a younger generation which had grown impatient with aesthetic interpretations that seemed, by now, all too remote from the contexts of everyday life. Concomitantly, however, older colleagues at this symposium in Chicago, led by the outspoken Heinrich Henle of Yale University, were just as adamant in their refusal to concede that formal criticism of Grillparzer's oeuvre had lost its value. The fascination for Grillparzer in America has now become a source of controversy.

Realizing that the debate would not easily die down, Konrad Schaum then felt the time had arrived for the establishment of a permanent agency which would make it possible for the dialogue on Grillparzer to continue in future symposia and publication initiatives. Thus began the Grillparzer Society in 1984, with Konrad Schaum as its first president.

Das erste nachhaltige Interesse an Grillparzer in den USA zeigte sich 1922, als ein deutschamerikanischer Richter namens Michael Girten energische Schritte unternehmte, Freunde für die im ersten Weltkrieg diffamierte deutsche Kultur zu gewinnen. Er lenkte immer entschiedener die Aufmerksamkeit der Amerikaner auf die deutschsprachige Kultur des katholischen Österreich als Gegengewicht zu der im Krieg verschmälerten Kultur des von Preußen dominierten Deutschland. Dadurch gelang es ihm, bei den Amerikanern ein bemerkenswertes Interesse an Grillparzer zu wecken.


Mit diesem Symposium ist es der Grillparzer-Gesellschaft gelungen, unterstützt von ihren amerikanischen Mitgliedern (Grillparzer-Society) und in Kooperation mit der City University New York (CUNY) sowie dem Österreichischen Kulturinstitut, eine überregionale wissenschaftliche Aktivität zu setzen. Willkommener Nebeneffekt dabei war, daß die teils als Vortragende, teils als Begleitpersonen angereisten Mitglieder der Wiener Grillparzer-Gesellschaft etliche Mitglieder ihres amerikanischen Zweiges, die sie bisher nur durch wissenschaftliche Korrespondenz kannten, endlich auch persönlich kennenlernen konnten.

Die Tagung wurde am 27. März 1999 um 10 Uhr mit drei Begrüßungsreden eröffnet, die von den „Hausherren“, dem Dekan der Division of Arts and Humanities, Prof. Raymond Erickson (Queens College, CUNY), Frau Prof. Tamara S. Evans (Gradual School and University Center, CUNY) und Vizedirektor Mag. Peter Mikl (Austrian Cultural Institute, New York) gehalten wurden. Sie werden im folgenden wiedergegeben:
The Other Vienna

The Culture of Biedermeier Austria

Österreichisches Biedermeier in Literatur, Musik, Kunst und Kulturgeschichte

Österreichisch-amerikanisches Symposium,
veranstaltet von der Grillparzer-Gesellschaft (Wien) und der Grillparzer Society of America, der City University of New York (CUNY) und dem Österreichischen Kulturinstitut New York
vom 25. bis 27. 3. 1999 in New York City

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Moritz von Schwind, Tanzende Personen vor dem Schloss Atzenbrugg, Albertina, Wien

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