

FRANZ GRILLPARZER'S *DER ARME SPIELMANN*:
A SEARCH FOR VALUE AND MEANING IN THE LIFE OF A TRUE ARTIST

By

DARYL A. PONDER-RYNKIEWICZ

A capstone submitted to the

Graduate School-Camden

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of Master of Arts

Graduate Program in Liberal Studies

Written under the direction of

Dr. James Rushing

And approved by

Name of Capstone Director

Camden, New Jersey

May, 2015

CAPSTONE ABSTRACT

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Published in 1847, *Der arme Spielmann* is one of only two prose works of Austrian author and dramatist, Franz Grillparzer. It is a novelle of complex professional and psychological material in an early period of German/Austrian Realism which focuses on an unnamed narrator and a poor (*arm*) street minstrel/musician, the *Spielmann*/Jakob. My careful examination of Grillparzer's novelle will show that although the *Spielmann* appears poor in several senses, he is actually rich, or blessed, in more important senses. He may be contrasted with the narrator, who appears much more successful and sophisticated, but clearly sees the fiddler's spiritual superiority. Grillparzer projects his concerns about his own life and art into both the narrator, with whom he seems to compare his reality, and the *Spielmann*, who seems to have what Grillparzer might have wished for himself. He discovers a side of himself from which he feels separated. The *Spielmann* is poor by worldly standards. Although he has refined speech and a refined look, the *Spielmann* wears threadbare clothes and plays a cracked violin for handouts on the street. As the reader becomes acquainted with the *Spielmann* through the curiosity and questions of the narrator, we learn that the *Spielmann* has almost no material

possessions, no family, and lives in a rented room, separated by a chalk line on the floor from two derelict men. In spite of his circumstances, the *Spielmann* is, in fact, a man content and indeed happy with his life. In the guise of the narrator and the *Spielmann*, Grillparzer seeks to discover what is truly real and important to him and why he thinks he does not have it. There is an answer to this question in the novelle, though we will never be certain that it is sufficient for Grillparzer.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND DEDICATION

With gratitude and appreciation to all those who have assisted, supported, and loved me through a long, but satisfying, process:

My dear Mother, Nelle, my Father, Wade, my sister Debora, her husband, Paul, my big brother, Bobby, family and friends who stood by me, and all those, past and present, at my beloved Alma Mater, Rutgers University, without whose encouragement and constant support, this would not have been possible; and last, but not least, a huge thank you to my mentor and advisor, Dr. James Rushing.

Introduction

Austrian writer Franz Grillparzer's novelle *Der arme Spielmann* has long been considered one of the author's greatest works. One of only two prose works by Grillparzer, it was begun in 1831, completed ten years later, and not published until 1847, and is the only work of Grillparzer's in which the protagonist is an artist. The story takes place in Vienna during the Biedermeier period, a time of relative peace and tranquility, when there was a rather large and growing bourgeoisie. *Kaffeehäuser*, which were proliferating throughout Vienna during Grillparzer's lifetime, were places where one could retreat all day, if so desired, and were a home away from the cold, concrete walls of apartments in which so many Viennese lived, and still do. Viennese coffee house culture can still be experienced today, as I learned during more than three years as a music student in Vienna, spending many hours in *Kaffeehäuser*, like Grillparzer and so many other Viennese. In these coffee houses, there was card-playing, billiards, political and literary talk, and concerts (Beethoven first played his B flat trio with two of his friends in the *Erstes Kaffeehaus*.) One could eat, chat or partake of a *kleiner Brauner* or a *Mélange* or a glass of one the local wines grown and made in the outlying districts such as Grinzing or Semmering while reading the local and international newspapers provided by the café. Around 1847-48 (or a little later), Grillparzer replied to a question as to where he had found the real-life inspiration for the story of the poor fiddler: (Ivask 18)

Quite by accident! For many years, I had been taking my meals at the "Zum Jägerhorn" in the Spiegelgasse. Often, a poor fiddler came there to play. He attracted my attention by the remarkable cleanliness of his shabby clothes, and his clumsy movements were touchingly comical. This old man always expressed gratitude for a gift with a short Latin phrase, which indicated an education and better days in the past. Suddenly he stopped coming and stayed away for a long time. Then the great flood of 1830 came. The Brigittenau, where a popular Saint's day is celebrated each year with a folk festival and much merrymaking, was

stricken hardest of all. I knew the poor fiddler lived there, and as he did not come to play anymore, I assumed that he had died as one of the many flood victims. I was asked to write a story for a pocket-almanac, and so I attempted one in which my poor good friend plays the main part (qtd. in Ivask 18-19).

This is a rather humble start to a story of two people—one, the narrator, a refined Viennese gentleman and dramatist, and the other, an old fiddler, a *Spielmann*, a street player/musician, who gains his attention. The story begins in the *Augarten, Leopoldstadt*, and *Prater* in what is known today as *der zweite Bezirk* (second district) where the present writer lived at one time, and what is, then and now, one of the largest districts in Vienna for the working class. This is the district, which lies by the great Danube River, where we become acquainted with the narrator of *Der arme Spielmann*, who, during a mid-summer *Volkfest*, celebrating the patron saint, Brigitta, is an observer, engaged and enthralled by the flood of people reveling in the festival. Amongst all the throng of festive people and the carnival-like atmosphere, during a full moon in the warm summer month of July, he observes a serene, nicely kempt, elderly, so-called beggar musician—the *armer Spielmann* of the title--and is instantly fascinated with him.

A thoughtful reading of Grillparzer's novelle raises many questions concerning the title. The *Spielmann* is a lonely figure and sets himself apart from the other street musicians. He is, as the name describes, a *Spielmann*, a street player, given to playing for his donations at carnivals and festivals, outdoors, not indoors, in more informal settings than formal ones. The word *Spielmann* may be translated in many ways. There is a Grimm fairy tale with *Spielmann* in the title and various translations of the title can differ. For instance, Hunt translates *Der wunderliche Spielmann* as "The Wonderful Musician"; other English translations include: "The Queer Minstrel" by Francis P. Magoun Jr. and Alexander H. Krappe, 1960; "A Miraculous Fiddler" by Ralph Manheim,

1977, and “The Strange Musician” by D.L. Ashliman, 2001. Does it matter what we call this particular *Spielmann*: fiddler, musician, street player? In Grillparzer’s day, *Spielmann* still carried the connotation or even definition of street musician; he/she was not good enough to be a Musico or Virtuoso, according to Adelung (202). So, perhaps, it does matter how we interpret this title. Or, is he all three of these titles? The paradoxical nature of the title poses a dilemma for the reader and raises the question: Who is the *Spielmann*, really? He certainly is a street player; though his stubbornness and isolation from others prevent us from feeling sorry for him, as though he were a beggar. Moreover, his manner is such that one accepts his ways without feeling much pity. He has the presentation of a serious musician. His music stand, his notes, his learned use of language and his ease and composure trigger the narrator’s astonishment, but the lack of skill and ineptness on the violin exhibited by the old man are more the technique of a fiddler on the street. How can he play so badly? Why does he not seem to care or even hear what others hear from his violin? He appears to be a refined and educated man (like the narrator), unlike any street player the narrator has ever seen; and yet, the *Spielmann* cannot hold a tune, or even rhythmically play a simple waltz, requested by a group of young boys. Is the *Spielmann* really a poor player and a poor person as others and the narrator see him? And this raises the question: why did Grillparzer use the word, “*arm/poor*” as the adjective to describe the *Spielmann*? It does not carry the usual definition of the word. I hope to show that although the *Spielmann* appears poor in several senses, he is actually rich, or blessed, in more important senses. For, though the *Spielmann* appears to be mendicant, he is not a beggar; rather, he sees himself as a mendicant of a high order, one who has borne ridicule, humiliation, and loss of worldly

goods and family, but is not the worse for it. The *Spielmann*'s answer may remind one of Jesus's declaration when hanging on the cross: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). For it is the *Spielmann*, who, when speaking of an audience says, "they are disturbed and misled on so many sides" (Stanners 5).

The *Spielmann* may be contrasted with the narrator, who appears much more successful and sophisticated, but clearly sees the fiddler's spiritual superiority. Grillparzer projects his concerns about his own life and art onto both the narrator, with whom he seems to compare his reality, his own struggle between reality and ideology; and with the *Spielmann*, who, in fact, really does have what Grillparzer might have wished for himself: a "Wunschbild" (Silz 75). *Der arme Spielmann* embodies the struggle of an artist who exists on two different planes in his life; one who is creative and strives for perfection and never attains it in the world's terms, and one who suffers terrible realities, injustice, and cruelties and still achieves his own form of perfection.

Grillparzer's Life

Because the *Spielmann's* struggles represent those of Grillparzer himself, understanding the poor musician of the novella requires some knowledge of Grillparzer's life. In the details "of Franz Grillparzer's bleak childhood," we find that he "grew up in the high, bare rooms of a dimly sunless apartment connected with his father's chambers, at the very centre of the old town (Vienna); he stages little plays with his cousins; but every failure he had in his studies led to an implacable veto from his father," who "had no liking for the church ceremonies, so that the boy found no emotional outlet in religious faith. In his depression and 'need for some outside diversion,' he turned to music" (Barea 120-121). Later, Grillparzer moved in a circle of friends, of whom Franz Schubert was a colleague, whose "strongest common bond was not literature, but music, personified in Schubert and his songs" (Barea 142). Though influenced by his father's somewhat lax attitude towards religious orthodoxy, Grillparzer was nonetheless a Catholic. Like Schubert, Grillparzer was anti-clerical, as his father was, and "disliked the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church in Austria," though "this sort of popular Viennese anti-clericalism is not incompatible either with an inbred attachment to the Church or with strong religious feelings" (Barea 142-143). As skeptical as he was of the Church and prone to mockery of the hierarchy, on a trip through Italy in 1819 after his mother's suicide, Grillparzer spent most of his time in Rome, whereupon "he had the occasion to kiss the Pope's slipper and was half amused, half horrified at the ceremony." Later, he remarked: "Had I known the fawning manner in which the kissing is performed, I should have stayed away. Since the feeble man cannot raise his foot, one practically has to lie down on one's belly..." In spite of this rather comical anecdote, given by W. E.

Yates in his *Grillparzer, A Critical Introduction*, Grillparzer remained a Catholic in a very Catholic country; and continued to be bound by the religion and politics of his country and the spiritualism and faith that are so much a part of the religion.

It was, at this time, 1819-1820, that Grillparzer, feeling “in discord with the world,” (Thomas 223) became familiar with the writings of Arthur Schopenhauer. Schopenhauer’s strong dislike of his mother and the world, in general, led him to say that “suffering is a condition of genius” (223). As in the case of Grillparzer, Schopenhauer “was starved for the adulation of the public who had failed to recognize him” (232). He did not believe that contentment came from being satisfied with everyday life in the actual world, or there could not have been a Shakespeare or a Goethe who had created their own dreamworlds (223). Though Grillparzer was not an advocate of Schopenhauer and disagreed with most of his basic ideas, he nevertheless took this theory and applied it to *Der arme Spielmann*, and the character of the *Spielmann* who cares nothing of what the world thinks of him. In his notes, Schopenhauer wrote that “the world is my idea. The sun only exists as I see it; the earth exists only as I feel it” (224). Is this not the philosophy, the mantra, by which Jakob lives?

Grillparzer is much like the old musician in that he shares a similar understanding and passion for the arts. As a boy, young Grillparzer studied the violin and piano. He gave up the violin at an early age, but continued with the piano and soon became adept enough to play four-hand piano with his mother, an accomplished pianist from the famous Viennese musical family, Sonnleitner. After the suicide of his mother in 1819, and living with a tyrannical father, who wanted only for his son to pursue a respectable profession in law and philosophy, Grillparzer was never satisfied with his pianistic

partners. He eventually forsook his participation in music and playing the piano for his life as a civil servant and a writer. The unhappiness and frustration which ensued and remained with him all his life spawned the construction of a story, and a character, Jakob, who personally, musically, and spiritually has achieved what Grillparzer thinks he has not.

For certain, Grillparzer's father bears a strong resemblance to the musician's father. To compare, the *Spielmann* tells the narrator, "No doubt, you have heard of *Hofrat*--? The name was that of a well-known political figure who had exercised enormous influence, almost as much as a minister..." "He was my father." "My father was an ambitious and violent man. My brothers lived up to his expectations, but as for me, people used to say I was slow in the uptake. And I was slow" (53). "Music...which is now the joy and staff of my life, was utterly hateful to me then" (55). The *Spielmann*'s worldly undoing was the wrath of his father when he was not excelling in his studies. He missed a Latin word, *Cacchinnum*, while he was reciting for his teacher and his father, and in a moment of violent frenzy, his father scornfully pronounced, "*Ce gueux*" (55) (beggar) to his son and never said another word to him.

Grillparzer's Narrator and the Objective View of the *Spielmann*

Grillparzer is not only found in the character of the musician, but in the narrator as well. When *Der arme Spielmann* begins, we are witnessing the festival through the eyes of the narrator, who is observing, but not really participating. The people are pushing forward, joyously celebrating, crossing the bridge to go to the festival on St. Bridget's Day. It is a hectic atmosphere, where the citizens want to leave the pavement of their city to go outside the boundaries to the *Brigittenau* for a one-day festival. There is an "unwritten pact between vehicle and man, an agreement not to run anyone over, however fast the pace, and not to be run over, however inattentive one may be" (30). The juxtaposition of the narrator, bemused, detached, worldly and clever, and the musician represents a form of "Sturm und Drang". It contrasts the inconspicuous good life of the musician with a melancholy, afflicted, and false life, or reality. Through his attitudes, descriptions, and occasional comments, he becomes a distinct character. His habits and his views on common people, which are revealed through his side remarks, provide a setting and realistic mode for the story. The narrator says, early in the story, "I don't likely miss taking part in this holiday. I am a passionate lover of my fellowmen, and especially of the common people—so much so that even as a dramatist, I find the straightforward, if rowdy, response of the public in a packed theater ten times as interesting and indeed as instructive as the excogitated judgement of some literary matador, crippled in body and soul and bloated like a spider with the blood sucked from authors" (32). When we first meet the old fiddler, we are perhaps more interested in him because the narrator appears to be a patronizing, somewhat pompous bore. However, he manages to maintain the reader's faith in his ability to push the story forward. "A

stranger might find the portents dangerous. But the uproar is one of joy, of pleasure unconfined” (30).

By serving as an onlooker, it is this Viennese gentleman who provides what appears to be an objective and present view of the *Spielmann*, whose Christian name is Jakob. “In truth, no one can understand the lives of the famous unless he has entered into the feelings of the humble” (33). This role as observer balances what, in fact, is the subjective and retrospective view of Jakob. “I had abandoned myself to the drifting throng and was in the middle of the causeway, on classical ground already, ...thus I had time and to spare to watch what was going on by the roadside” (34). The narrator takes on the task of the audience/reader to lead us to an introspective, however potentially misguided, interpretation of the *Spielmann*. “So that the pleasure-hungry crowd should not lack a foretaste of the delights to come, a number of musicians had stationed themselves to the left, on the slope of the raised causeway” (34). He goes on to describe, “a woman harpist with repulsive, glassy eyes, an old cripple with a wooden leg... who labors on a home-made instrument, half zither, half barrel-organ” (36). “And finally—he captured my whole attention—there was an old man of at least seventy, in a threadbare but decent coat of Molton cloth and with a smiling, self-congratulating expression” (36). He introduces us to the musician (*the Spielmann*). “He sawed away at an old, much cracked violin, and beat time not only by lifting and dropping his foot, but by a corresponding movement of his whole body...he was utterly absorbed in his task” (36).

The narrator is fascinated with the *Spielmann* but he is neither sympathetic towards Jakob, nor is he a friend. His few judgements are no-nonsense and without warmth, and his assumptions are purely supposition. “All the other musicians, whose

playing was incomparably more pleasing, relied on their memory, but the old man, in the midst of the throng, had set up a small, easily portable music stand supporting grubby, tattered scores which doubtless contained in perfect order what he rendered in so disordered a fashion.” “It was precisely the unusual nature of his equipment which drew my attention” (36). “The old man and everything about him were just made to excite my anthropological avidity to the utmost: his needy, though distinguished appearance, his unconquerable cheerfulness combined with so much zeal for his art and so much clumsiness, and the fact that he turned homeward at precisely the hour when others of his kind were just starting, ...and finally his few words of Latin, pronounced exactly with the right accentuation and complete fluency” (37). “*Sunt certi denique fines,*” (there is a right way for everything, but nothing should be overdone) says the *Spielmann*, after looking down to find his open hat empty. He picked up his music stand and “clearly amused” walked against the crowd “like someone who is going home” (37). Soon after, and when the *Spielmann* had eluded him, the narrator simply says: “Cheated of my would-be adventure, I had lost all pleasure in the fair” (38).

As the narrator wanders about searching for the *Spielmann*, and just before he decides to head home, he hears “the familiar sound of the old violin.” He goes over to drop a coin in the *Spielmann*’s hat and notices that the fiddler is packing up early; when in fact, he could stay later and make more money. “What’s the explanation?” (40) inquires the narrator.

Thus begins the *Spielmann*’s explanation and his story when he replies: “Pardon me, I don’t know who you are, though you must be a kind of gentleman and a music love” (40). He continues by saying: “I was never given to reveling at night and don’t

think it right to incite others with music and song to such sinful doings. Secondly, one must maintain a certain order in all things...and finally, in the third place...the evening belongs to me and my poor art...I play from my imagination, for myself, without a score...improvising, I believe it is called in music books” (40). Whereupon, the narrator asks the *Spielmann* where he lives and says that he would “very much like to join you at your solitary exercises some time” (41). Here we begin to sense the religiosity of the *Spielmann* and Grillparzer, when the *Spielmann* imploringly replies: “prayer is private, you know” (41). And as he turns over some pages of hand-written music to show the narrator his meticulous copies of famous masters, he explains: “By playing these pieces, I show my veneration for masters and composers long-since dead and rightly held in high regard” (43). He continues to account for his routine days by explaining how he wants to practice for himself, but also for the public who give him offerings, and for which he does not want the offerings to go unrequited. With a smile and some self-satisfaction, the *Spielmann* outlines his day as follows: “my morning hours are allotted exclusively to this *exercitium*:...the first three hours of the day to practice, the middle to earning a living, and the evening to myself and God” (43).

The *Spielmann's* View of Himself: the Spirituality of Music

With this description of his day, the *Spielmann* takes over the telling of his story and calmly begins to relate the absorbing history of a unique person. He tells of how he was rejected by his father, and had to work as a civil servant for no pay; of the unfortunate and separate deaths of his two brothers; how he failed in business and to win the woman he loved, Barbara, and how he is now living in a room with two other men in which he has separated himself by a symbolic chalk-line on the floor. In spite of all this, Jakob does not appear to be unhappy. He eschews any desire to fit into social standards: “the old man is scraping away again, . . . spoiling everyone’s peace and quiet,” says a produce man passing by (45). And then, the narrator shares with us what the old man called “improvising after a fashion” which was for the “benefit of the performer, not of the listener” (46). The *Spielmann's* practicing makes no sense to anyone but him. He experiences what “Stifter calls religion in the garb of aesthetic sensation. What the word, not even that of the Bible, cannot do for man is done for him by art, particularly by music” (Beoschenstein 102).

Music is akin to prayer for Jakob. His trust in a higher form of Spirit is expressed and patiently nurtured through his music and in his daily practicing. Much like the Roman Catholic rosary, Jakob’s day is divided into three sections: *Credo*/Joyful (his practicing); *Ave's*/Sorrowful (earning his meager living, amongst the public); *Gloria Patri*/Glorious (loving God) (qtd. in *The Rosary*). One might say that his little garret room, divided by the chalk line and shared with two dissolute, untidy men is, for Jakob, a Catholic confessional of sorts, where he does penance – his practicing. And here we

have another biblical connection: this one to Christ and the two thieves- the pure and the impure.

Grillparzer was an avid supporter of one side of a much debated question by music critics of his time. The central question was: “whether music was ‘self-sufficient’—that is, merely a coherent assemblage of sounds, and a language unto itself—or, whether it was essential for it to express ideas and feelings—that is to symbolize something other than the musical” (Janik/Toulmin 103). When the narrator makes his visit to the musician in the *Gärtnerstrasse*, Jakob is playing his exercises, indistinguishable to a listener, and consisting to a large extent of runs. Is it an ordered sequence of sound, forming a design? To Jakob’s ears, and in his mind, it is. A listener could regard a sequence of sound as unpleasant, or the sounds themselves as unmusical. “I will spare the reader a description of this infernal concert” (49) relates the narrator; though earlier the narrator relates how “a note, soft, yet firmly struck, swelled and died away, only to rise again to a piercing shrillness. It was always the same note, repeated with a sort of voluptuous insistence” (45-46). Jakob is more interested in the timbre, the quality of the sound, or tone color. “Like the *Spielmann*, the Austrians had a strong appreciation for the pure tone, for music as sensuous gratification and ‘Nervenspiel’.

Grillparzer wrote of his own susceptibility to the powers of music: ‘...ich darf nur einen Ton hören, ohne noch Melodie zu unterscheiden, so geräth schon mein ganzes Wesen in eine zitternde Bewegung, derer ich nicht Herr werden kann’ [I only need to hear one note, without even recognizing a melody, and my whole being slips into a trembling state of motion, of which I cannot become master] (Stein 23/W II, 7, p.124).

The timbre results from vibrating part of the instrument, such as the string on a violin. The timbre of a violin is quite different than that of the pianoforte or a trumpet. It is obvious to the observer/listener that Jakob takes great delight in sound, for the sake of sound. “The eternal blessing of the note and sound, its miracle-working agreement with the thirsty, yearning ear—he continued more quietly and blushing—that the third note harmonizes with first, the fifth too in the same way, and the *nota sensibilis* climbs up like a fulfilled hope, dissonance is berated as deliberate malice or presumptuous pride...few want to know anything about this. Rather they upset this breathing in and out of the soul by the addition of all too-wordy words... speech is necessary to humans like food, but drink should be kept pure; it comes from God” (Stanners 9). Even Grillparzer, in his *Selbstbiographie*, “tells of how at one period of his life he delighted himself for half-days at a time playing on an old stringless piano, without feeling the lack of physical sound” (Silz 73).

To continue, all music has a regular beat or pulse, usually in two, three, or four; though Jakob’s beat or rhythm, lacking a bar line and accurate rhythm, seems to be ahead of its time. It wasn’t until the twentieth century that composers like Stravinsky and Schoenberg wrote music which sounded as if there was no distinct bar line or rhythm. “Instead of bringing out the sense and rhythm of a piece, he emphasized and prolonged the notes and intervals which struck mellifluously upon the ear, and did not hesitate to repeat them arbitrarily, his face often expressing utter ecstasy as he did so” (49). “An interval is the distance between two sounds. Intervals are measured in two ways: (a) numerically, (b) according to their quality. The quality of an interval depends on the number of semi-tones it has” (Lovelock 65). A semi-tone is a half step instead of a whole

step in music (it is inaccurately sometimes called the black keys on the piano). If there are two successive tones, there is motion and there is design. Together with sound, these tones constitute the true essentials of musical language, and this is quintessentially what Jakob heard that the others could not hear. There are “‘qualifying names’ for intervals, namely: perfect, major, minor, augmented and diminished. Only the unison (single sound), 4th, 5th, and 8th (octave) can be termed perfect” (Lovelock 65). These are the exact tones, but they also include what is called the leading tone (7th), which is not perfect, that Jakob was forever practicing. For Jakob, just the idea of working on a perfect sound for a perfect tone was achievement to his ears. “While at first he had dwelt on the single note with manifest relish, his almost sensual relationship struck me with even greater force. He sounded two notes now successively, now as a chord, haltingly linked them by the intervening scale, emphasized the third, again and again. Then a fifth was added, once with a trembling sound, like quiet weeping, sustained, dying away, then with rushing impetuosity, continually repeated, always the same interval, the same notes” (46). “The old man found a sensuous enjoyment in playing” (49).

For Jakob, his earthly salvation is the instrument he gave up as a youngster. When all seemed lost to Jakob, he rediscovered his old violin; and the very thing he hated to play and practice became, for him, a connection from his past to his present and will be a connection to his future for those closest to him. The daily task for the *Spielmann* is to practice his music to make his music; or, as Schoepenhauer said, “to stand before it, like a great man, and wait patiently till it deigns to speak” (Bettelheim 148). Together, it is Jakob’s certain belief in a higher order, a spiritual sense of life which brings together the so-called dissonances in his music with the consonance of the divine: “they play

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Sebastian Bach, but no one plays (the music) of the dear God” (9). In answer to the narrator’s curiosity about the *Spielmann*’s story, Jakob replies: “But God will provide, he knows” (51).

In the article, “Jakob: Musik, Einsamkeit und Religion in *‘Der arme Spielman,’*” the author, Rocio Martinez Climent, contends that Jakob plays his violin to “love God,” but later on says: “the art world is not compatible with that of faith” (9). I disagree with this premise. And according to Herman Boeschstein, the *Spielmann* “hears a harmony from above, a divine manifestation of cosmic order and joyfulness... Such little skill as he has can serve as a spring-board to an art beyond all human perfection; it is as if the spheres were performing for him, showering him with their harmonies” (Boeschstein 102). In the Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:2), there is a variation on the term ‘poor,’ when Jesus preaches, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for they shall inherit the Kingdom of God.” To give and not receive, to ignore pride, to embrace poverty of spirit and to acknowledge the strength and power of God, constitutes the kingdom of heaven. This is the *Spielmann*’s purpose, his strength, his reward, his purity of heart, and the reason he is content with his situation in life. Furthermore, Immanuel Kant, whom Grillparzer recognized “as the cornerstone of classical moderation,” (Stein 17), states in his essay *The Victory Of The Good Over The Evil Principle, And The Founding Of A Kingdom Of God On Earth*, for man “To become *free*, ‘to be freed from bondage under the law of sin, to live for righteousness’¹---this is the highest prize he can win” (Kant 85). Indeed, in the introduction to the story, the author intimates through the narrator this “setting free of desire.” (Stanners 2) He describes the festival after the full moon in July,

¹ [CF. Romans VI, 18: “Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness”]

as an “Eldorado, a paradise which unfortunately, or fortunately, as one takes it, only lasts ‘till the following day, then disappears, like the summer-night’s dream, and stays only in the memory, and in hope” (2). He goes as far as to say, they (the crowd at the festival) “feel part of a whole, in which Godliness lies—as one such, each folk celebration is to me a real celebration of the soul, a pilgrimage, a devotion” (2-3).

Jakob disclaims pride and greed; his spirit is rich in self-abnegation; he adores order and cleanliness. When the narrator comes to the *Spielmann’s* room for the first time, he observes: “by the window a small table with music paper and writing materials, and in the window a few pots of flowers. The middle of the room was marked by a chalk line from wall to wall. One could hardly imagine a sharper contrast between dirt and cleanliness than the aspect of the nearer and farther sides of the chalk line, this equator of a miniature world” (48-49). “Contrary to the ideals of proud humanism, spirituality is a state of ‘blessed neediness’, of being ‘poor in spirit’” (qtd. in Hebrew for Christians). However humble the *Spielmann’s* artistic zeal and his ideals, they are in honor of his truth and commitment to God. Upon listening to Jakob’s cacophonous practicing, the narrator can stand no more and drops his hat in order to stop the musical spell in which the *Spielmann* has placed himself. “It’s nice here,” the narrator says with embarrassed relief. “Disorder is banished. It retreats toward the door, even though it has not yet quite crossed the threshold” (50). “The old man had placed his music stand close to the line, and there he stood, fully and neatly dressed, and practiced” (49).

In order to move the story forward, the narrator continues to contribute to the telling of the story and provides some distance needed, without unnecessary romanticism. With no romantic ideals; no mention of Vienna’s splendor and beauty, the reader is not

distracted. Walter Silz states, “There is nothing here of the false ‘romantic’ picture of the Vienna of gaiety and music and gracious idleness which the ‘movies’ of our own curiously sentimental age have fabricated” (Silz 71). Though Grillparzer underplays the romantic setting of Vienna, he is very much a product of Biedermeier Viennese culture, and the colloquialism and mantra which to this day is a mainstay of the working class and bourgeoisie: *Alles ist in Ordnung* (everything should be in order, in its place). As the *Spielmann* says: “one must maintain a certain order in all things” (40). Thus, in spite of a life which appears to be one of misfortune, deprivation and misery, it is a life full of purpose, rich with routine and reward. What is highly esteemed in the world is of little value to Jakob. He refuses to play popular waltzes just for money, and plays only the “old masters to enlighten the masses”; and though he is laughed at and scorned and has nothing much materialistically other than his broken-down violin, he is content with his life. Kant says in summarizing the characteristics of one who has attained the Kingdom of God: “His needs are but few and his frame of mind in providing for them is temperate and tranquil. He is poor (or considers himself so) only in his anxiety lest other men consider him poor and despise him on that account” (Kant 85).

John M. Ellis states that, “In the narrator’s description of the July ‘Volkfest’ in Vienna, the rather self-conscious reference to the ‘Volk,’ with the immediately following introduction of class-awareness in the word, ‘vornehm,’ distances the narrator from the people rather than shows his feelings for them...” This distance created by the author through the character of the narrator keeps the reader at a distance from the musician and his unrequited musical passion. This has the effect of keeping the story moving without bogging down in the character of the fiddler. It also strikes at the idea that the narrator is

a representative of life and reality. He is that part of the author and reader which is also observing this eccentric musician and making judgments (like the narrator) on this man's life.

Grillparzer exposes his life of personal and professional frustration and unhappiness and his desire to attain what he does not have and what he has not yet achieved: faith, harmony, and oneness with himself, as personified by the *Spielmann*. Indeed, the narrator "trembled with longing for the explanation" over the "poor, yet noble image, his unconquerable cheerfulness, so much enthusiasm for his art" of the *Spielmann*" (Stanners 3). Grillparzer never refers to the musician as a fool, nor is his intent to make the *Spielmann* appear to be a fool; yet, it is Grillparzer's descriptions and insinuations that might cause a careless reader to have that perception. According to Swales, the narrator knows "that to adopt Jakob's perspective fully is to negate the meaningfulness of life in the physical world, of family, of art created with material things." It is the specifically artistic aspect of the *Spielmann's* dilemma that is pertinent to the narrator's own situation" (129). Grillparzer is looking much deeper into this character, and underneath this character's seeming inability to deal with the world's reality are his ideals and dedication. The *Spielmann* does not internalize the important events in his life; rather, he turns inward towards his music and his faith. Integrity is obtained from his art, and sustained through his faith. In a statement shortly before his death (January 1, 1871), Grillparzer wrote: "Ich fange an religiös zu werden, der Glaube wie der Unglaube sind beweislos, bleiben wir bei ersterem, er tut uns wohl." [I'm starting to become more religious. Belief and disbelief are equally unprovable; let's stay with the form, it's good for us.] This "shows that he was cognizant of the limitations of

man and that he did not seek ultimate evidence but preferred faith to rational proof” (Stein 15).

If we look at Grillparzer, the man, we see someone who, at this stage in his life, has been denied recognition, has given up on marriage, rejected the idea of presenting his works in the theater, and therefore has withdrawn, artistically, into himself. The combined characters of the narrator and *Spielmann* present a psychological look into the mind and feelings of the author. The subjectivity of the work reminds one of an almost “Freudian” interpretation throughout the work, a look deep inside the author’s inner thoughts. It is as though Grillparzer has written this work as a vehicle for analyzing his own life and finding some meaning. When speaking of Grillparzer and *Der arme Spielmann*, Boeschstein quotes J. P. Stern as writing, “the innermost character of the man, and the true meaning of his experience of life, are disclosed more fully and directly than in any of his dramas” (101). It is the *Spielmann* who goes back to his garret after taking in his “meagre earnings” and returns to “a life of his own, to an inner happiness issuing from a strong and serene heart” (101).

The lack of romantic imagery and unsentimental realism enhances this story and gives it particular appeal. In spite of all the deep emotional issues in the novelle, as in Büchner’s “Lenz,” Grillparzer rebels against romanticism and idealism of the time and takes a realistic approach to the *Spielmann*. *Der arme Spielmann* is an early example of Realism, and goes beyond an honest and objective look at the apparent everyday life of a character. By searching, as Grillparzer has, beneath the surface of the character’s life, the author has revealed something very different and shown the discrepancy between appearances and a more fundamental reality.

Like Büchner, Grillparzer sees humankind almost as puppets on a stage. He plays the part of the narrator, the dramatist, in his observations of the *Spielmann* and the crowd at the festival. The Shakespearian concept from “As You Like It” that “all the world’s a stage” furthers the realism for the narrator and Grillparzer in the story. “As though from some vast Plutarch which has escaped from the bounds of the book and lies in an open scroll before me, I read the collective biographies of men unknown to fame,” comments the narrator (33). The musician, much like Büchner’s character, *Woyzeck*, is at the mercy of events which he seems to have no desire to control. Upon the death of his father, the *Spielmann*, after a fit of high fever, says: “I had been unable to speak to him anymore, unable to beg his forgiveness for all the distress I had caused him, unable to thank him for the indulgence I had not deserved—yes, indulgence, because he meant well, and I hope to meet him again in the hereafter, when we shall be judged by our intentions and not by our works” (77). This element of realism is as dramatic and close to the audience/reader as any of Grillparzer’s dramas.

Grillparzer summarizes the lifetime of the *Spielmann* by using several techniques. He progressively presents the past while advancing the present. He begins the story in the middle, or even near to the end, just before the final catastrophe, avoids opportunities to create extensive dramatization, and purposefully guides the reader’s feelings away from sympathy. This realism dramatically heightens the fact of *Jakob*’s so-called isolation by understating the tragedy of major events in his life. For example, the death of the *Spielmann*’s father is almost anti-climactic; *Jakob*’s unrequited love is not portrayed in any colorful or romantic sense. There is no mention of his childhood, except for the violin, or of his mother or friends.

The last component to this realism lies in the psychology of the old musician as he reveals it in the accounts of his own life. *Jakob* has no need to adjust himself to the ways of the world. He is relentlessly stubborn about his art, claiming that the public does not appreciate his abilities and knowledge, for music is his chosen form of language. Because the narrator is so interested in him and asks his story, Jakob has the opportunity to tell it. Otherwise, he does not feel bound to explain or defend himself to anyone. Jakob's place as an artist/musician in the human situation is somewhat unique. He must earn a meager living, as all musicians do, in one form or another, but he chooses to play the famous composers on the street, not in a concert hall. Late in the story, Jakob tells the narrator, "I was well aware that the famous virtuosi, for whom, of course, I could not pretend to be a match, also accepted pay for their performances, and a lot of pay at times" (100).

Conclusion: Understanding the *Spielmann*; Blessed are the poor in spirit

What Grillparzer is saying to us is that he, not Jakob, lacks faith in the good and natural qualities of humanity. There is something present in the opening pages of the novelle which forces the reader to keep faith in the ability of the author. The narrator is, like life, frequently insensitive and impartial in his dealings with the fiddler, though he has a keen interest and curiosity as to how a man who can speak Latin and have such a refined appearance, has fallen into something which has the guise of a beggar. His assumptions, as we find out, are purely supposition and reflect an ignorance that is present in the real world. However, that something in the beginning is the effect that Grillparzer achieves “with singular skill,” for Grillparzer “does not comment on the *Spielmann*’s story at all nor interpret for us the incidents related” (Bennett/Watson 155).

Maintained throughout the story by the subjectiveness of its presentation is the author’s respect for Jakob’s values. There is no attempt to discredit his vocation of music; his abilities as a man and as a performer come under speculation and criticism, but not his profession. His devotion to art and tone appears to be his sole value to society, but it is not portrayed as something romantic or idealistic. Grillparzer has uniquely been able to portray an artist and at the same time dispel many of the stereotypes and ideals of the artist’s life by separating the man from his art. The *Spielmann* obtains and retains his integrity as a person through his faith in who he really is; not through or from anyone or anything else. In 1836, Grillparzer praised Kant for his “‘eternally true’ definition of the beautiful which can be found only in striving devoid of utilitarian interest” (Stein 17). Jakob is the image of a man dedicated to music and to something which, for him, transcends the world. For Jakob, his world is fixed and clearly defined, like the chalk

line he drew on the floor in his shared room; there is meaning to his life. As mentioned earlier, Jakob's little attic room serves for more than just living quarters and a place to practice his violin. For Jakob, his room is a refuge, a place of prayer, akin to a Catholic confessional. Isn't this the point in this novelle? Hasn't Grillparzer gone into his "*Kämmerlein*" to pray, to confess, not about who he is; but rather, who he truly would like to be?

In Swales's chapter on *Der arme Spielmann*, he claims that the novelle is "disturbing...that we, its readers, may be tempted to relate to the *Spielmann* in the way that...the narrator, in spite of himself does..." "this central relationship of association and disassociation, of affinity and detachment, is perhaps put most succinctly, and with desperately appropriate ambiguity, by Franz Kafka in the *Briefe an Milena*" (Swales 131). Kafka sent the story to Milena, saying: "I am sending you *Der arme Spielmann* today, not because it has great meaning for me—it did once have it, years ago. I send it because he is so Viennese, so unmusical, so heartbreaking..." (qtd. in Swales 131). In a Hegelian moment, Grillparzer goes beyond this obvious conclusion. He is pronouncing that "not only has everything an opposite, but everything *is its own opposite!* The truth lies on both sides of every question. The truth *is* either side" (Thomas/ Hegel 210). It is this unity, born out of strife and persecution that awaits the *Spielmann*, and of which he has known most of his life. "The concord of love that has risen out of the discord of hatred, the precept of denial that is translated into the principle of affirmation, has been awarded to a spirit who has died in order to live!" (Thomas/Hegel 210)

When W. E. Yates says: "the pathos of Jakob's failure lies in the disparity between his intentions and his achievements," (Yates 78), I disagree. His intentions and

his achievements are one and the same. In the finale, Jakob, safe in his garret attic room, selflessly goes into the flood waters of the *Leopoldstadt* to save the children. “He lugged and carried and dragged them to safety” (104). And, as if that was not enough, the ‘poor’, gentle fiddler grabs an axe and returns to the raging waters to break open the cupboard containing some paper money and account books for his *Hausbesorgerin*/landlady. This is a man who has lost most everything in life; but nevertheless, what he has left to give is himself. From this loving gesture, the *Spielmann* caught a chill and soon after died. In the end, he gave all he had to give: his life for his fellow man. “...we helped to our utmost and suffered more than he did himself” (Stanners 17). “For he made music, that is with his voice, beat time, and gave lessons,” said the old gardener’s wife and landlady, just before the *Spielmann* dies. She remarks to the narrator, “You’ve come to do us the honor,” when she sees that he has come to the *Gärtnerstrasse* to survey the area and the “black-garbed undertaker’s men [who] were lined up for a funeral ...” (103). She goes on to say, “He’s playing his fiddle among the angels, who can’t have been more angelic than he was on earth” (103).

Even at the end, after the devastating flood of the *Leopoldstadt*, the death and desolation, and the demise of the *Spielmann*, there is an unusual combination of religious sentimentality and psychological realism when the narrator says: “A few days later—it was Sunday—I went, at the prompting of my psychological curiosity...” (106). Still, in the guise of an observer and seemingly not emotionally involved, the narrator has gone to the house of Jakob’s unrequited love with the hope that he can purchase the *Spielmann*’s violin. There, “hanging on the wall, beside the mirror, in symmetry with a crucifix” (108) was Jakob’s violin. The narrator is explicitly denied and is told, “the fiddle belongs

to our Jakob” (108). The violin is taken down, dusted off, and put in a drawer. What remains are the crucifix and the mirror.

As the medieval writer *Jacobus de Voragine* wrote: “As the sun permeates glass without violating it, so Mary became a mother without losing her virginity. She is called a mirror because of her representation of things, for as all things are reflected from a mirror, so in the blessed Virgin, as in the mirror of God, ought all to see their impurities and spots, and purify them and correct them: for the proud, beholding her humility see their blemishes, the avaricious see theirs in her poverty...” (qtd. in *Signs and Symbols*)

The last image we have of the true side, the artistic and spiritual side of Jakob, is his only worldly possession, his violin, together with the crucifix, (his faith and blessedness in spite of his suffering), and the mirror, his eternal purity.

Grillparzer has created a complex story of his inner life with a character at the helm of his emulation; who is, albeit, of a simple and modest nature. And perhaps, with the composition of *Der arme Spielmann*, Grillparzer has revealed to us, in his reflection in the mirror/novelle, a clearer vision of who he is. Walter Silz says: “Jakob has from the beginning what Medea prays for in vain: ‘Lass uns die Götter bitten um ein einfach Herz;’ and he achieves early what Rustan declares to be the only possible happiness on earth: ‘des Innern stiller Frieden/ Und die schuldbefreite Brust.’” (the silent peace within/and the guilt/blame-free breast); [from Grillparzer’s drama, “Der Traum ein Leben”] (Silz 78).

“Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted” (Luke 18:14). And because of this, the character of the *Spielmann* stays

with us after he dies and the story ends. What emerges from his death, and his life, are his pure intentions, his richness of heart.

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