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## 60 Minutes in Old Vienna

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# 60 Minutes in Old Vienna

## Sexual Harassment as a Theme in an Enlightened Popular Theater Tradition

The paper you are about to read is highly self-referential. It is itself a good example of the problem which is its underlying subject.

Which is more important, a good world, or good stories? If there were, for example, no sex scandals, would we have to invent them?

If there had been no spicy scandals in Vienna two centuries ago, how would I get you interested in the results of my research into something as obscure as the old Vienna Volkstheater?

I'm not going to answer those questions. In fact, one purpose of this case study from the nearly-forgotten past is to suggest that the social issues involved in it are even more complicated than they look.

By now, most of us have noticed that when the people who bring us the news are trying to present the events of the day in such a way as to make a profit—this is perhaps not an ideal arrangement.

One aspect of the problem is, obviously, that a news medium, when run for profit, will tend to adopt a view of the news that is favorable to the interests of those who are willing and able to pay the most for advertising. Another is, just as obviously, that the temptation is strong for a news medium to give its audience what it wants to hear—or more generally, what will catch, and hold, its attention.

A more subtle, but equally dangerous, problem is that, at least in some cases, it may be possible for someone to “own” the news. If you're a baseball fan, you know the litany: “The descriptions and accounts of this game are the property of Major League Baseball and may not be re-broadcast or reproduced in any form without the express written permission of . . .” Are the Dead

*John Sienicki is an independent scholar trained in philosophy. For the past several years, he and Lisa Feurzeig, of the GVSU Music Department, have been working, as scholars and performers, on rediscovering the rich popular culture of Austria and Germany from the 1700s and early 1800s. This paper was presented as a lecture/performance during the Second Annual GVSU Arts and Humanities Faculty Symposium, November 16, 2000. The play scenes were performed by GVSU students Brian Christian, Jon Duley, Katie Fitch, Aaron Velthouse, and Anne Zimmerman.*

Prince Kaunitz, the villain of the piece. A real-life Don Juan, who had sex with hundreds, perhaps thousands, of young girls, but he had to pay for it.



48

Sea Scrolls private property? If some of the letters in the possession of the Wagner family, such as those from Adolf Hitler, may affect our understanding of history, and seriously affect our willingness to support their Bayreuth opera festival, should the public have the right to read them?

And now that GVSU, like the Olympic Games, has an Official Soft Drink, how far off is the day when some bright young government official (inspired perhaps by Larry Beinhart's novel *American Hero*, which has already inspired the film *Wag the Dog*) will try to rearrange the law so that the national debt can be reduced by auctioning off the exclusive broadcast rights to a war?

But let's not talk about that. An idea, once placed in circulation, can go from outrageous to possible very quickly.

One particularly good place to study problems like these is in the phenomenon of investigative reporting, the idea of which is to expose abuses, presumably so that they can be corrected. But it could be argued that this only works because abuses are fun. For the audience to hear stories about, that is.

Not long ago, I lived in a middle-American town where the local newspaper, when covering a sex-crime story, often would list all of the charges against the accused, in loving detail. Is there really such a thing as "conspiracy to commit oral copulation"? And why do we need to know this?

News media are a fairly recent invention in Austrian history. The Habsburg government closely controlled the dissemination of information until well into the 19th century. There were some brief periods of liberalization, but, before 1848, the government always concluded, rather quickly, that those experiments were failures

But there was, during the final century and a half of those years of rampant absolutism, something of a voice of the people in Vienna, which was, except for a few brief periods of reaction, sanctioned by the government. This peculiar institution was known as Volkstheater—popular theater, theater for the people.

In the 17th century, theatrical entertainments in Vienna were divided along class lines. Large-scale shows, such as operas, were for the aristocracy only. The common people were served by traveling companies of players (and purveyors of alleged medicines, etc.), some of whom were sometimes allowed to perform in some of the city's squares. There were no theater buildings. Performance spaces, for shows of both kinds, were set up when they were needed, and taken down when they weren't.

Then, in the first decade of the 18th century, one traveling troupe changed all that. Josef Anton Stranitzky's company struck such a chord with the Viennese, of all classes, that the government offered him a deal like a present-day sports franchise. If Stranitzky would stay in Vienna, the city would build a permanent theater.

We may compare this, for example, to the recent construction of a \$200 million stadium by the town of Arlington, Texas, for the Texas Rangers baseball team, the front man for which, at the time, was George W. Bush. But Stranitzky earned his deal strictly on talent.

At first, a small sports arena, an indoor ballcourt, was converted into a theater for his company. But that wasn't good enough, and the neighbors complained. So in 1710 the government built the Kärntnertor Theater, next to one of the city's main gates, where Stranitzky's company would be the main attraction until the 1760s.

Stranitzky invented a character for himself, taking the name Hanswurst (one of several German words, at the time, for "doofus"), who would be the star of every one of his plays. These plays were not new. Some of the shows were classics of the standard traveling-troupe repertoire, such as, versions of the Faust and Don Juan stories. Others were adaptations of some of those



*One of the earliest contemporary depictions of the great Stranitzky as Hanswurst, emphasizing the famous green hat, and the equally famous backside.*

elaborate plays and operas that the aristocrats were reserving for themselves. But giving Hanswurst a part in the show created quite a different perspective on a familiar story.

We don't know most of what Stranitzky's Hanswurst said and did because most of his lines and actions were not written into the script. The ability to improvise was an essential part of who he was.

Hanswurst is usually a servant. Although he's much more clever than most, he's one of the common people. He represents common sense, in a world that has descended into heroism, vir-

tue, and sundry other theatricalities that ordinary people can't afford to indulge in.

He is also just plain gross and/or obscene. For instance, one of his characteristic moves is to drop his pants—but only when necessary. When Hanswurst moons someone, it's always someone who deserves to be mooned.

In other words, Stranitzky, as Hanswurst, did on stage a lot of things that most people wished they could do in real life but knew they couldn't. The spirit of Vienna lived vicariously through him. And two Kaisers (Josef and Karl, the two sons of Leopold) wisely let it happen.

Stranitzky died a rich man, in 1726. In the next generation, his successor as Hanswurst and as the manager of the company, Gottfried Prehauser, was an accomplished and polished performer. Maybe too polished. But in 1737, Prehauser hired a young actor named Josef Felix von Kurz who knew how to take full advantage of this forum for improvisation as an outlet for social commentary.

At the time, there were no newspapers in Vienna worthy of the name. Under the influence of Kurz's character Bernardon, the theater became the closest thing Vienna had to an editorial page. Kurz was so effective that when Karl's daughter Maria Theresia inherited the government of Austria in 1740, she tried to shut him down. Finally, in 1752, a decree was issued banning all improvisation from the theater.

The playwrights resorted to writing out their plays completely. That is good for scholars since it means there is more of the evidence needed for study after that date, but it put a serious damper on references to current events. Austria's playwrighting genius of the mid-century, Philipp Hafner, wrote a memorable string of plays in the early 1760s, which dramatized, in general terms, some of the main social conflicts of the day. But Hafner died in 1764 at age 29, leaving Maria Theresia and her advisers in full possession of Austria's moral battlefield.

The Pax Theresiana would not last long. You just can't keep a good people down.

In the 1780s, Friedrich Schiller was not yet one of the canonical classics of German literature. He was a young playwright, in his 20s, who was on the run, looking for a safe place to stay, because of the reaction of an influential critic to his first play. This critic was the Duke of his native Württemberg, and the reaction was a few days of imprisonment, with the threat of more if Schiller wrote anything else even remotely like *Die Räuber* (*The Robbers*).

Several of the young men in this play, in the first act, discuss the rigidity of the German sociopolitical system, and conclude that, if they live within the rules, they have little to look forward to in life. So they take their destinies into their own hands, and take to the woods, to live like Robin Hood's merry men, as a band of bandits.

The moral of the story is designed to please those in authority. This experiment in alternative lifestyle ends very badly for these 18th-century gang-bangers. But by then, it's too late. The damage to the morals of the audience has already been done. Soon, in every part of Germany, people were singing the song from Act Four, to the tune of "Gaudeamus Igitur."

Ein freies Leben führen wir  
Ein Leben voller Wonne

A free life we lead  
A life full of bliss

After his escape to Mannheim, Schiller shot back at the Duke of Württemberg with his third play, which Schiller called *Luise Millerin*, but was first performed in 1784 as *Kabale und Liebe*. This was something new. Such a personal attack had not been seen on any German stage in a very long time, if ever. The story is fictional, but the disguise is thin.

Ferdinand, the young son of an influential aristocrat, is wildly in love with Luise, whose station in life is much too low for him. She is the daughter of a musician. Ferdinand's father, who owes his position as a very big fish in a rather small pond to some unspecified dastardly deeds, resorts to every abuse of power at his command in his efforts to separate the lovers, which leads to a Romeo-and-Juliet ending involving poisoned lemonade.

Along the way, in Act Two, a servant delivers a ringing denunciation of one of Duke Carl Eugen's favorite ways of raising money, by conscripting young men into his army and renting them out as mercenaries. For instance, to the British, to be sent to America, so that George Washington and his army could cross the Delaware and slaughter them.

At the end of Act Two, Ferdinand buys some time by threatening to expose his father's crimes. But the threat ultimately does no good. A man like his father is beyond all hope of reform.

Most interesting for our present purpose is a moment in Act Three, when Luise is threatening to take the case over the head of these local despots, to the Duke. Ferdinand's father's sleazy secretary (whose name is Wurm) insinuates to her that the Duke never does anything except for a price, and in this instance, "Die schöne Supplikantin ist Preises genug"—"the beautiful supplicant would be price enough".

Luise probably shouldn't believe anything this Wurm tells her. But she does believe it, presumably because it accords with what she has heard about the Duke from more reliable sources.

Meanwhile, back in Austria, Maria Theresa died in 1780, after 40 years of rule, and her son Josef finally got his chance to take over. His taste



One man from the country is more than a match for two city boys, in *Der Tyroler Wastel* (1796).



The new Hanswurst for a somewhat more civilized time. Johann LaRoche as Kaspar, in *Die Schwestern von Prag* (1794). At the end of the play, Kaspar is one of the men who puts on a dress and tries to convince everyone he's the "real" sister from Prague.

in government was somewhat different from his mother's. Just how different is a matter of dispute among historians. But his view of the theater was certainly not hers. During his ten years as the head of the Habsburg family, three theaters were built in the suburban districts of Vienna, just outside the city walls, for the purpose of bringing the Hanswurst tradition, which had in the meantime spread all across the entire German-speaking world, back to its source.

On the other hand, it was also Josef who authorized Austria's first system of secret police. It was important to him to find out what his people were really thinking, by any means necessary.

These theaters were financed not with public money, but by theater men, who were granted licenses by Josef's government, out of their own pockets (and the pockets of their friends, fathers-in-law, etc.). So commercial success would be more of a pressing issue for these entrepreneurs than it had been for Stranitzky and Prehauser.

One of these enterprises, the Theater in the Leopoldstadt, had an actor named Johann LaRoche, whose character Kaspar quickly became so awesomely popular that he was regarded as the embodiment of the spirit of Vienna of his age, just as Stranitzky's Hanswurst had been several decades before. (Käspelerle is, to this day, still a folk hero in Vienna, as the star of puppet shows for children.)

But Kaspar was by no means the whole show. In 1786, the Leopoldstadt added to its permanent staff a playwright from Württemberg who was even younger than Schiller. Karl Friedrich Hensler had studied in at least one German university (the evidence is unclear), and he was well steeped in the dramatic works of Lessing, Goethe, and Schiller.

Either Hensler left home with almost as big a chip on his shoulder as Schiller, or maybe he was just trying to make a name for himself. But in any case, he brought the style of *Kabale und Liebe* to Vienna. In the 1790s, he would find a style of his own, and write some major hit plays. But in his first few years at the Leopoldstadt, he wrote a string of Schilleresque shows that featured honest common people as heroes, battling against the injustices done to them by officials and aristocrats.

Hensler scored his first big success in 1790 by moving the scene of his action to the exotic east, in a mock-heroic comedy called *Das Sonnenfest der Braminen* (*The Sun-Festival of the Brahmins*). The plot turns around the old device (which wasn't so old then) of a maiden, scheduled to be sacrificed to the gods, who doesn't think this is such a great honor.

But there's a twist. According to the customs of this particular land, there is a way out for her. She can choose, instead, to marry the high priest.

Hensler makes quite sure that the audience will notice that this rule gives the high priest quite a bit of leverage when his eye is attracted by a nubile virgin. But the point is not overdone. The girl just says no, preferring to be rescued in most comical fashion through the scheming of her resourceful friends.

In the 1790s, the suburban theaters, following a trail first blazed by Prehauser and Hafner to its logical conclusion, focused more and more on Vienna as the subject of their shows. The term "Lokalstück" came into common use to denote a play about a slice of Viennese life. You won't go far wrong about most of them if you picture them as very much like our modern TV sit-coms.

The word literally means "local-piece." But a Lokal is also a neighborhood bar, the kind of bar that functions as a social center, a clubhouse, the Austrian counterpart of a British pub. So I suppose the most perfect American example of a Lokalstück might be the TV show "Cheers." But the two of these we will look into below were comedies that dealt with serious matters like the way the show "All In The Family" fought against bigotry, through laughter, in the 1970s.

The two most important Lokalstücke of the 1790s were written by the mercurial Emanuel Schikaneder for his Freihaus Theater (also known as the Theater an der Wieden). In his time, he was known in Vienna as much for these two plays as he was for having been the writer and producer of, as we now think of it, Mozart's *Magic Flute*, in 1791. (But outside of Austria, he was known much more for *The Magic Flute*. Lokalstücke generally don't travel well.)

The first of these, entitled *Die Fiaker in Wien* (1792), is now lost. All we know about it is that it was about a Fiaker, a horse-cab driver, whose wife wants to be more than just the wife of a Fiaker, until he catches her at it.

The second was *Der Tyroler Wastel*, first performed in 1796. Wastel is the proverbial "country cousin" from the Alps who comes to Vienna to



*The country cousins dance their way through a proper Viennese drawing-room, in Der Tyroler Wastel.*

visit his brother and to show his new young second wife a good time in the big city. But things in his brother's family are a mess when they get there, so Wastel and Liesel have to use their country common sense to set things right.

Wastel's brother is having problems with his second wife, who is, among other things, playing evil stepmother to Wastel's favorite niece. That woman wants to marry Luise off to an old bookkeeper who has a fair amount of money, but she's really doing it just to make Luise miserable.



*A contemporary painting of the notorious Spanish dancer Maria Medina, known in Vienna by her married name, Madame Vigano. "Two or three pages might be compiled of spicy matter upon the beautiful Mme. Vigano's lavish display of the Venus-like graces and charms of her exquisite form" (Thayer's Life of Beethoven, rev. and ed. by Elliott Forbes, Princeton University Press, 1967).*

A plot is set in motion by the good guys to get rid of the Bookkeeper. But Liesel does the job by accident, or maybe we should say by instinct, even before she hears about the plot. She finds this dress lying around the house that she just can't believe. It's described in the stage directions as a "Viganokleid," a dress in the style of the celebrated ballet dancer Madame Vignano, who believed in concealing the beauty of her body as little as possible while on stage. So, of course, Liesel has to try it on.

At that very moment, this being a play, the Bookkeeper shows up to make arrangements for his wedding. He doesn't see very well. Readers should take particular note of the exact nature of the proposition he makes to her.

Fortunately for translation purposes, in Michigan we have a local equivalent of the Tyrol, more or less. Namely, da U.P. So we present a couple of scenes from Act Three of *Da Yooper Wastel*, an adaptation of *Der Tyroler Wastel* into English and Yooper by John Sienicki and Lisa Feurzeig

### Der Tyroler Wastel, a play by Emanuel Schikaneder (1796)

#### Act Three, scenes 23-25

55

*Liesel* (allein). Aber die Wiener Weiber san doch kane Narren, das Ding ist just, als wenn man nichts um den Leib hatt'. Aber a bißl z'lang wär mir der Kittel; wenn's mei wär', den Schlampen schnitt i' gleich um a paar Spane weg.

*Therese* (führt den Buchhalter ein). Belieben der Herr Buchhalter nur hier zu warten, ich werde es sogleich meiner gnädigen Frau melden. (In das Zimmer der Frau ab.)

*Buchhalter* (besieht Liesel mit der Lorgnette).

*Liesel*. Potz Tausend, das ist der alte blinde Herr, der mit mi in Prater g'fahren ist.

*Buchhalter*. Ein allerliebster weiblicher Engel! Mein gnädiges Fräulein—ich habe die Ehre—was Teufel!—Du bist ja —

*Liesel*. Wenn's mi recht anschaut, die Tiroler Liesel!

*Liesel* (alone). Yah, dose Grosse Pointe wimin are no fools, da ding is just like ya had nuttin on. But dis frock would be a bit too long fa me; if it was mine, firs ding I'd cut off a couple pieces a dis stuff.

*Therese* (shows the bookkeeper in). If the Mister Bookkeeper wishes to just wait here, I will announce it to Her Grace My Lady at once.

*Bookkeeper* (inspects Liesel through his lorgnette).

*Liesel*. Holy Mackrel, dat is the blind old genlman who gave me da ride ta Belle Isle.

*Bookkeeper*. A most lovely female angel! My gracious lady—I have the honor—what the devil!—Yes you are—

*Liesel*. When ya look right at me, da Yooper Liesel!

*Bookkeeper*. How came you into the house of my bride?

*Liesel*. I got here on foot.

*Buchhalter.* Wie kommst du in das Haus meiner Braut?

*Liesel.* Auf'n Füßen komm' i her.

*Buchhalter.* Hast du vielleicht Bekanntschaft mit meiner Braut?

*Liesel.* Was? Du willst noch a Braut kriegen?—Jetzt hör auf oder i lach' dir ins Gesicht!

*Buchhalter.* Aber was soll denn das Kleid?

*Liesel.* Das leg' i an, wenn i wieder in Prater geh', daß mi die Mannspersonen immer so anschauen.

*Buchhalter.* Das Mädchen ist auch naiv!—Höre, Kind, hättest du keine Lust, dich mit mir in die Verbindung einzulassen?

*Liesel.* Das versteh' i nit!

*Buchhalter.* Ich will für deine Versorgung besorgt sein.

*Liesel.* Das versteh' i schon wieder nit.

*Buchhalter.* Leben deine Eltern noch?

*Liesel.* Na, aber g'habt hab' i amal ane.

*Buchhalter.* Ledig bist du auch wohl?

*Liesel.* An'bunden bin i nit!

*Buchhalter.* Du suchst allem Vermuten nach Dienste hier in Wien?

*Liesel.* Wie's du halt glaubst!

*Buchhalter.* Arm wirst du vermutlich sein?

*Liesel.* Was a Tiroler Mäd'l braucht!

*Buchhalter.* Mädchen, höre meinen Vorschlag!—Alle Jahr gebe ich dir 400 Gulden, zwei neue Kleider, frei Quartier.—

*Liesel.* Und warum gibst du mi das alles?

*Buchhalter.* Weil ich dich liebe!

*Liesel.* Aber sag' mi, wie's möglich ist, daß du noch verliebt sein kannst?

*Buchhalter* (kniert nieder). Ich bete dich an!

*Liesel.* Ha, ha, ha! Das ist zum Totlachen! (Ins Seitenzimmer ab.)

*Buchhalter* (allein). Hat mich das Alter wirklich so entstaltet? Ja, der Baum ist alt, das seh' ich an der morschen Rinde—tempi passati! Das Mädchen hat recht, sie, hol' mich der Geier, hat recht!

*Bookkeeper.* Have you perhaps acquaintance with my bride?

*Liesel.* What? Ya think you can catch a bride?—Now stop it or I laugh in yer face!

*Bookkeeper.* But then what is the meaning of this dress?

*Liesel.* O, dat I put on for the nex time I go ta Belle Isle, so the men persons will keep on lookin at me da way dey do.

*Bookkeeper.* The girl is really naive!—Listen, child, have you no desire to enter into a connection with me?

*Liesel.* Dat I don' understan!

*Bookkeeper.* I will take care of taking care of you.

*Liesel.* Dat I really don' understan.

*Bookkeeper.* Are your parents still living?

*Liesel.* Nah, but I had some once.

*Bookkeeper.* You are perhaps unattached?

*Liesel.* I'm not tied up!

*Bookkeeper.* You seek, I assume, a position here in Detroit?

*Liesel.* Like ya wouldn' believe!

*Bookkeeper.* I suppose you're poor?

*Liesel.* Yah, what a Yooper mademoiselle needs!

*Bookkeeper.* Girl, listen to my proposition!—I will give you twelve thousand dollars a year, two new dresses every year, free rent.—

*Liesel.* And why are ya givin me all this?

*Bookkeeper.* Because I love you!

*Liesel.* But tell me, how is it possible that you can still love?

*Bookkeeper* (kneels down). I worship you!

*Liesel.* Ha, ha, ha! I am going to die laughing! (exit into side room)

*Bookkeeper* (alone). Has age really so deformed me? Yes, the tree is old, that I can see from the rotting bark—tempi passati! The girl is right, yes, feed me to the vultures, she's right!

As Dave Barry would say, Schikaneder is not making this up. There is other evidence, as we will see shortly, that such contractual arrangements for sexual services between young girls and well-off older men were fairly common in those days in Vienna. And sometimes the girls got very good deals, such as substantial pensions for life after only a couple of years of "service." Was this illegal, you ask? Apparently not. But it was surely a good idea not to be too public about it.

So why was Schikaneder putting this on stage? Let us back up a minute, historically, and reflect on this.

The Austrian 1780s and '90s and the American 1960s and '70s had much in common. In both, a period when radical thoughts were in the air was succeeded by a time of conservative retrenchment, with the time of the change marked by a change of head of state. In America, the election of Richard Nixon as president in 1968 took most of the remaining wind out of the sails of leftist activism, and delivered the general mood of the country into the hands of the "silent majority."

In Austria, the transition from Josef, who died in 1790, to his brother Leopold was fairly seamless. But Leopold died in 1792, and was succeeded by his son Franz, whose narrow, rigid ideas of morality and autocracy were a throwback to the sterner side of his grandmother, Maria Theresia. I don't think it's unfair to say, as a generalization, that Franz's view of social and political reform was that the personal morality of his subjects was in need of a great deal of reform, but any suggestion that there might be anything wrong with the government was almost treason.

Politics was no longer an option in the suburban theaters, as it had been in the days of Kurz's Bernardon. And with Franz in control, you certainly had to keep your pants up and your fly buttoned.

So there are two possible ways of interpreting the development of the *Lokalstück* as a major genre in the first years of Franz's reign. The issues dealt with in these comedies can easily



Der Tyroler Wastel: *The Bookkeeper* "inspects Liesel through his lorgnette." Obviously the costume designer of this production had a much more modest idea of what a "Viganokleid" should be than Madame Viganò herself did.

be seen as issues of personal morality. The failings that were highlighted in them were failings of individuals, not necessarily of a system—at least if you don't carry the argument too far. Those playwrights who still believed in the role of the Volkstheater as the conscience of Vienna may have been restricting themselves to those aspects of socio-political criticism that Franz would allow, that being somewhat better than nothing.

But on the other hand, they could have been using Schiller's formula. Maybe these playwrights calculated that the only way to get anything like that earthy Hanswurst touch, that sense of common-sense reality, back into the theater while Franz was watching was to portray the Hanswurstian sides of Vienna life as they look when taken to excess, as abuses.

More plainly said, the only way they could get sex back onto the stage, under Franz, was by saying they were against it. But many of Schikaneder's best customers might have been quite dismayed if his play had led to an effective campaign for reform of this particular practice. Schikaneder may have lost a fair amount of sleep trying to estimate the long-term effect of this scene, positive or negative, on his box-office receipts.

But beyond a doubt, the second great writer of Lokalstücke was serious about reform.

The title of one of the Leopoldstadt's new plays in 1801, *Der Zwirnhändler aus Oberösterreich*,

seemed to promise a very silly evening. Linz, the capital city of Oberösterreich (Upper Austria), which is the province up the Danube from Vienna, was important to the Viennese theater, as a source of country bumpkins. People from Oberösterreich have comical names, like Schicklgruber. (A century later, there would still be country bumpkins from Linz in Vienna, such as, the one whose father had changed that family name to Hitler.) And the profession of *Zwirnhändler* was a respectable one—a *Zwirnhändler*, literally a "string merchant," is a seller of materials that can be woven into cloth—but it certainly sounds funny with that "zw" in it.

But no. This show was only a comedy, legally, because it doesn't end tragically. What humor there is in it is more cynical than amusing.

However, audiences loved it. It quickly became a classic, as did its author, whoever he was. His name was withheld when he began his second career as a writer because he had a day job as a government official.

Eventually it was revealed that his name was Ferdinand Kringsteiner. He was certainly the best Viennese playwright of his decade. At the end of that decade, he died, much too young, of the *Wiener Krankheit*—the "Vienna sickness," lung disease—like Philipp Hafner, and Kaiser Josef, and so many others.

In the *Zwirnhändler* we find sexual harassment, in something close to its modern form, almost two centuries before the term became popular. The difference is that the harassment occurs by proxy, because women did not work in government offices in old Vienna. (Not even under Maria Theresia.) Franz Trommer's fiancée didn't have to put up with lewd comments all day on the job. It's not Josephine's own career that is at stake, but that of her future husband. But the core of the idea of sexual harassment in its most blatant form—sex as a condition of advancement—is laid out in no uncertain terms.

**Der Zwirnhändler aus Oberösterreich**  
*a play by Ferdinand Kringsteiner (1801) Act Two, scenes 4-5*

*Schwenkheim.* Was steht zu Diensten, lieber Vetter?

*Franz.* Ich komme um ihre Fürsprache zu bitten, im Betreff der erledigten Stelle. Ich diene 10 Jahre, kenne das Geschäft, auch trifft mich die Reihe, somit glaub ich allerdings Ansprüche zu haben.

*Schwenkh.* Alles ganz gut! aber es giebt noch mehr gediente Leute, auch kömmts nicht allein auf mich an, was ich beytragen kann—Sie haben ja eine Geliebte?

*Franz.* Ja, erhalt ich die Stelle, so hab ich Hoffnung, sie zum Weibe zu bekommen.

*Schwenkh.* (höhnisch) Ja, muß es denn geheurathet seyn?

*Franz.* Ich bin nicht aus der großen Welt, sonst würd ich mich mit Buhldirnen abgeben, oder Mädchen und Weibern Schlingen legen—so find ich nach vollendeten Geschäft nur Erholung im häuslichen Glück.

*Schwenkh.* Sie können um die Stelle anhalten.

*Franz.* Und wenn Gerechtigkeit handelt, bin ich meiner Sache gewiß.

*Schwenkh.* Gerechtigkeit? Unter meine Leitung gehn keine Ungerechtigkeiten vor.

*Franz.* Freylich, es geschieht Alles von Rechtswegen.

*Schwenkh.* (leise) Bube! (laut) Wissen sie was, die Männer, sehen sie, können eine Bitte nicht so gründlich unterstützen, als die Weiber—Schicken Sie mir ihre Geliebte, ich will sie meinen Kollegen vorstellen, vielleicht kann es ihnen glücken—

*Franz.* Herr Rath! um einen solchen Preis erkauf ich keine Beförderungen.

*Schwenkheim.* How can I be of service, dear cousin?

*Franz.* I come to ask you to speak for me, with regard to the vacant position. I have served ten years, I know the business, and besides it is my turn, so I believe I certainly have claims on it.

*Schwenkh.* All very good! but there are people who have served longer, and besides, I can assist, but it is not up to me alone—You do have a girl friend?

*Franz.* Yes. If I obtain the position, I have hopes that she will become my wife.

*Schwenkh.* (mockingly) So, must there then be a marriage?

*Franz.* I am not from the world of the great ones. If I were, I would go around with mistresses, or lay traps for girls and women—but after business is done I find refreshment only in domestic bliss.

*Schwenkh.* There are ways you can apply for this position.

*Franz.* And if justice rules here, I am certain of my cause.

*Schwenkh.* Justice? Under my management no injustices happen.

*Franz.* Of course, everything is according to the law.

*Schwenkh.* (aside) You little jerk! (aloud) You know something, a man, you see, can not support a petition with everything he has, as a woman can—Send your girl friend to me, I will introduce her to my colleagues, perhaps that will bring you success—

*Franz.* Mr. Councillor! for such a price I will buy no advancement.

*Schwenkh.* It never happens any other way—one must observe certain modern maxims—

*Schwenkh.* Es geht nun einmal nicht anders—man muß gewisse moderne Maximen beobachten—

*Franz.* Die ich wohl hier am besten lernen könnte?

*Schwenkh.* Junger Mann! mit der Dreustigkeit werden sie nicht reusiren—davor steh ich—

*Franz.* Nicht? wirklich nicht? Nun gut— das sah ich voraus. Sie zwingen mich also, mein Recht anderwärts zu suchen. Ich ruhe nicht, und sollt ich bis vor dem Fürsten kommen. Ich will ihm die Rotte entlarven, die die Gewalt, die er ihr gab, so schändlich mißbraucht—ich will ihm Dinge entdecken, wozu sie wahrlich nicht lachen werden.

*Schwenkh.* (verlegen) Moderieren sie sich—

*Franz.* (in der Folge immer heftiger) O daß ich laut genug rufen könnte, die ganze Welt sollt es wissen, daß sie ein Nichtswürdiger sind. Ich habe Beweise, das Geschrey der Unterdrückten, das Jammern der Betrogenen wird mich unterstützen, und ich will ihnen eine Musik vorspielen, worüber sie die Sinne verlieren werden. Wer brachte den Sekretär Werner vom Brod, als sein Weib ehrlich genug war, ihren teuflischen Vorschlägen zu widerstehn? wer verhält ihm zur Vestung? wer machte die Kinder zu trostlosen Waisen? Ha, es würkt! Herr Rath, ich erhalte, was mir vor Gott und der Welt gebührt, oder sie üben an mir den letzten Bubenstreich aus! (schnell ab)

*Schwenkh.* Das giebt heute einen heißen Tag! Impertinenzen von allen Seiten! aber ich will den Burschen demüthigen, daß er in Zukunft einen Mann meines Gleichen gewiß mit den sekanten Wahrheiten verschont.—Verklagen willst du mich? Gute Junge! Eh ich stürze, ist dein Glück schon in Trümmern.

*Franz.* Which I presume I could best learn here?

*Schwenkh.* Young man! with impudence you will get nowhere—I would stay far away from—

*Franz.* Nowhere? really nowhere? OK—I expected that. So you force me to look elsewhere for my rights. I will not rest, even if I am brought up before the Prince. I will unmask for him the gang that misuses so scandalously the power he gave them—I will reveal things to him that you truly won't be able to laugh off.

*Schwenkh.* (unsure of himself) Moderate yourself—

*Franz.* (more and more vehement as he goes on) Oh, if I could call out loud enough, the whole world would know that you are a worthless villain. I have evidence, the cries of the oppressed, the despair of the victimized will support me, I will play you a tune that will make you lose your senses. Who was it who took away the livelihood of Secretary Werner, when his wife was honorable enough to resist your devilish proposals? Who drove him into jail? Who made his children desperate orphans? Ha, it's working! Mr. Councillor, I will get what, before God and the world, I am entitled to, or the dirty trick you use on me will be your last! (exits quickly)

*Schwenkh.* We're having a hot day today! Impertinence from all sides! but I will humble that young fellow, so that in the future he will spare men of my standing the annoyance of his little truths.—Denounce me, will you? Oh, my good youth! Long before I fall, your luck will be in ruins.



*Ferdinand Raimund (1790-1836), perhaps Vienna's greatest comic actor, as he looked in real life, but apotheosized and romanticized by a typically 19th-century background.*

We learn later on in the story, by the way, that Josephine can take care of herself quite well. And the *Zwirnhändler*, who is Franz's rich uncle, is the exact opposite of a bumpkin. He is a good and wise man who makes everything come out right—that is to say, as right as possible under the circumstances—at the end.

Did Kringsteiner's pleas for reform have the desired effect? I don't know what the effect of his plays was on the conduct of one set of his colleagues, government officials. But the theater scene certainly wasn't cleaned up. On the contrary.

In the 1810s, one of the artistic highlights of Vienna was the *Kinderballett*, the children's ballet company directed by Friedrich Horschelt, who had a touch of genius in him. Horschelt's shows at the Theater an der Wien, the fancy showplace Schikaneder had built to replace the *Freihaus Theater*, were one unqualified success after another, artistically and commercially.

But in 1821 the company was disbanded, at the request of Kaiser Franz's government. It seems that too many men had been using the *Kinderballett* as a hunting ground, for fresh young sexual talent.

And just before that, in 1820, there had been a big scene at the Leopoldstadt that wasn't in the script. Ferdinand Raimund, one of the greatest of all Volkstheater actors, and soon to become one of its greatest playwrights as well, married one of his best partners, the actress Louise Gleich. But the happiness of their marriage was doomed even before it started, as Raimund apparently found out some things about Louise Gleich



Der Tyroler Wastel: Beware of Wastel's hearty handshake!

62

just before the ceremony such as that after their engagement, Louise had become involved in a sexual relationship with a very prominent aristocrat, Prince Alois Wenzel Kaunitz, the grandson of Maria Theresia's famous minister of foreign affairs. They went through with the ceremony, but Raimund may have slept more nights with Louise before they were married than after. The two of them continued to play together on the stage of the Leopoldstadt for a while, but after they were legally separated (there being no divorce in Catholic Austria) in 1822, Louise soon went her own way.

These two scandals turned out to be closely related. Later in 1822, Kaunitz was arrested, and his entire way of life was investigated by the police and the courts.

Kaunitz had, over the previous 30 years or so, signed an unbelievable number of young women to sexual contracts of exactly the kind depicted in *Der Tyroler Wastel*. And part of his defense was that it was wrong to single him out because several of his friends among the rich and famous were doing much the same.

The findings were staggering, but one big problem with the case was that Kaunitz had broken no law. He didn't rape or abduct anyone. Statutory rape was not yet a concept in Vienna. The terms of each contract had been fulfilled by both parties. So it was decided that most of the records of the case would be sealed to protect both the innocent and the guilty, and Kaunitz was strongly advised to leave the Habsburg lands and never come back.

These records became unsealed after World War II, at which point scholars learned the extent to which the theater world of Vienna had been involved with Kaunitz. Many of his young women had been recruited from the Kinderballett. And every actress Raimund ever had any sort of fling with was in Kaunitz's catalogue—including, obviously, Louise Gleich.

In fact, there were letters in the files that showed that Louise's father, Josef Alois Gleich, who was himself one of the great playwrights of the Volkstheater, had carried on negotiations



The great Therese Krones (left) as Luise and Raimund (right) as her father, in Adolf Bäuerle's 1827 parody of *Kabale und Liebe*. Ferdinand's father has come to take him home. The names in Schiller's play have not been changed to protect the innocent.

with Kaunitz for several years about leasing his daughter. Like many Viennese in the years during and following the Napoleonic Wars, the elder Gleich apparently was, more than once, in desperate need of money to pay off his debts.

In 1821, before the Kaunitz case broke, Gleich made some more money from the interest of others in his daughter's sex life, with one of his most successful plays, *Der Eheteufel auf Reisen* (*The Marriage-Devil On Tour*). It was a series of comic sketches of marriages gone spectacularly wrong. Raimund and Louise starred in it, of course.

After 1822, no one wrote a play about Kaunitz. They weren't going to touch that subject any more.

But a few years later, in 1827, when Raimund was at the height of his fame, another of the great men of the Volkstheater, Adolf Bäuerle, closed the circle of this paper with a virtuoso writing



Raimund in his first great role, as the street fiddler Adam Kratzerl in *Die Musikanten am Hohen Markt* (1815), written for him by his future father-in-law, Josef Alois Gleich. He would take up the violin again in Bäuerle's version of *Kabale und Liebe*, when Raimund would be asked to play the part of, so to speak, his own father-in-law

performance, an elaborate parody of Schiller's *Kabale und Liebe*. The theater fans of Vienna were reminded, several times, that the names of Raimund and his bride were, in fact, Ferdinand and Louise. The part of Luise's father was played by Raimund himself, who could afford to look back and laugh, since he was now happily living with the true love of his life, who was not an actress. Bäuerle works into the plot elements that are recognizably taken from Raimund's roles in a couple of Gleich's most famous plays.

That's the case study. There's the evidence. I'm not going to draw any conclusions. It's all too complicated for me.

One long-term effect of these plays was that they virtually disappeared. After it faded out, and was eclipsed by operetta, in the course of the 19th century, the Vienna Volkstheater tradition did not become an important page in history books. There must be something about this style that many people don't want to remember.

As for long-term effect on the sexual habits of the Viennese, it seems as if every year or so, these days, there's another big story about another big bust by the police, as they uncover another ring of men who have been importing young girls from Eastern Europe to serve the sexual desires of their more prosperous neighbors in the West.

And as for the question of why these sex scenes were written, and why they were produced, and why audiences paid money to see them, my most perceptive Viennese informant once informed me, in his most cynical Kringsteiner manner, that there is no word in Austrian German for "conflict of interest."

### A Note on Sources

The majority of the plays referred to in this paper have never been translated into English. The exceptions are Schiller's *Die Räuber* and *Luise Millerin/Kabale und Liebe*, and Schikaneder's *Die Zauberflöte*, which have been translated many times into many languages. But the Vienna Volkstheater tradition is, at present, almost entirely unavailable to readers of any language other than German.

For readers of German, there are modern editions of all but one of these plays.

A facsimile of a 1790 printing of Hensler's *Sonnenfest* can be found in Thomas Bauman (ed.), *German Opera 1770-1800*, vol. 22: *Librettos V* (New York and London, Garland, 1986).

Schikaneder's *Tyroler Wastel* is reprinted in Volume I of the seven-volume set *Alt-Wiener Volkstheater* (Wien, Teschen, and Leipzig, Karl Prochaska, 1917), edited by Otto Rommel.

Geich's *Eheteufel* appears in *Besserungsstücke, zweiter Teil* (1939), the fifth of the six volumes of *Barocktradition im österreichisch-bayrischen Volkstheater* (Leipzig, Reclam, 1935-39), also edited by Rommel.

The source for most of Bäuerle's *Kabale und Liebe* (the only surviving manuscript is not quite complete) is Jürgen Hein (ed.), *Parodien des Wiener Volkstheaters* (Stuttgart, Reclam Universal-Bibliothek Nr. 8354, 1986). This very helpful pocketbook also contains two of Kringsteiner's brilliant adaptations of classic stories in a working-class Vienna setting (*Othello, der Mohr in Wien* and *Werthers Leiden*), and the most weird and wonderful of Hafner's plays, the "lustiges Trauerspiel" *Evakathel und Schnudi*.

The one that is not available in a modern edition is Kringsteiner's *Zwirnhändler*. The copy I have seen is an old one (Wien, Wallishäuser, 1807) in the Theater Collection of the Austrian National Library in Vienna.

For those interested in the prehistory of the subject, fourteen of Stranitzky's *Hanswurst* plays have survived in manuscript. These were published, with the original spellings preserved, in

two volumes as *Wiener Haupt- und Staatsaktionen* in the series *Schriften des Literarischen Vereins in Wien* (Vol. X, 1908, and Vol. XIII, 1910), edited by Rudolf Payer von Thurn.

Music was a major part of these shows. For piano scores of several examples of famous (and not so famous) musical numbers from the Volkstheater, see Blanka Glossy and Robert Haas (eds.), *Wiener Comödienlieder aus drei Jahrhunderten* (Wien, Anton Schroll, 1924).

There is scholarship in English on the works of Raimund and Nestroy, and, of course, there are many studies of *Die Zauberflöte*, but there is nothing helpful in English that discusses the content of the rest of the tradition. The great source-book in German is Otto Rommel, *Die Alt-Wiener Volkskomödie: Ihre Geschichte vom barocken Welt-Theater bis zum Tode Nestroys* (Wien, Anton Schroll, 1952), 1096 pages of useful information on the Volkstheater considered as literature. The music of the Volkstheater has not yet been studied in comparable depth, in any language.

The standard source for the facts about the Kaunitz case is Gustav Gugitz, *Die Ehetragedie Ferdinand Raimunds* (Wien, Wiener Bibliophilen-Gesellschaft, 1956).