

– The Grillparzer Prize –

For the awarding of the Grillparzer Prize of the Academy of Sciences in Vienna I had to buy a suit, as I had suddenly realized two hours before the presentation that I couldn't appear at this doubtless extraordinary ceremony in trousers and a pullover, and so I had actually made the decision on the so-called Graben to go to the Kohlmarkt and outfit myself with appropriate formality, to which end, based on previous shopping for socks on several occasions, I picked the best-known gentleman's outfitters with the descriptive name Sir Anthony, if I remember correctly it was nine forty-five when I went into Sir Anthony's salon, the award ceremony for the Grillparzer Prize was at eleven, so I had plenty of time. I intended to buy myself the best pure-wool suit in anthracite, even if it was off the peg, with matching socks, a tie, and an Arrow shirt in fine cloth, striped grey and blue. The difficulty of initially making oneself understood in the so-called finer emporiums is well known, even if the customer immediately says what he's looking for in the most concise terms, at first he'll be stared at incredulously until he repeats what he wants. But naturally the salesman he's talking

to hasn't taken it in yet. So it took longer than it need have that time in Sir Anthony to be led to the relevant racks. In fact the arrangement of this shop was already familiar to me from buying socks there and I myself knew better than the salesman where to find the suit I was looking for. I walked over to the rack with the suits in question and pointed to one particular example, which the salesman took down from the rod to hold up for my inspection. I checked the quality of the material and even tried it on in the dressing room. I bent forward several times and leaned back and found that the trousers fit. I put on the jacket, turned around several times in front of the mirror, raised my arms and lowered them again, the jacket fit like the trousers. I walked around the shop in the suit a little bit, and took the opportunity to find the shirt and the socks. Finally I said I would keep the suit on, and I also wanted to put on the shirt and the socks. I found a tie, put it on, tightened it as much as I could, inspected myself once more in the mirror, paid, and went out. They had packed my old trousers and pull-over in a bag with 'Sir Anthony' on it, so with this bag in my hand, I crossed the Kohlmarkt to meet my aunt, with whom I was going to rendezvous in the Gerstner Restaurant on the Kärntnerstrasse, up on the second floor. We wanted to eat a sandwich in order to forestall any malaise or even fainting episode during the proceedings. My aunt had already been to Gerstner's, she had already classified my sartorial transformation

as acceptable, and uttered her famous *well, all right*. Until this moment I hadn't worn a suit for years, yes until then I had always appeared in nothing but trousers and pullover, even to the theater if I went at all, I only went in trousers and pullover, mainly in grey wool trousers and a bright red, coarse-knit sheep's-wool pullover that a well-disposed American had given me right after the war. In this outfit, I remember, I had travelled to Venice several times and gone to the famous theatre at La Fenice, once to a production of Monteverdi's *Tancredi* directed by Vittorio Gui, and I had been with these trousers and pullover in Rome, in Palermo, in Taormina, and in Florence, and in almost all the other capitals of Europe, apart from the fact that I have almost always worn these articles of clothing at home, the shabbier the trousers and pullover, the more I loved them, for years people only saw me in these trousers and this pullover, I've worn these pieces of clothing for more than a quarter of a century. Suddenly, on the Graben as I said and two hours before the awarding of the Grillparzer Prize, I found these pieces of clothing, which had grown in these decades to be a second skin, to be unsuitable for an honour connected with the name Grillparzer which would take place in the Academy of Sciences. Sitting down in the Gerstner I suddenly had the feeling the trousers were too tight for me, I thought it's probably the way all new trousers feel, and the jacket suddenly felt too tight and also as

regards the jacket, I thought this is normal. I ordered a sandwich and drank a glass of beer with it. So who had won this so-called Grillparzer Prize before me, asked my aunt, and for the moment the only name that came to me was Gerhart Hauptmann, I'd read that once and that was the occasion I learned of the existence of the Grillparzer Prize for the first time. The prize is not awarded regularly, only on a *case-by-case* basis, I said, and I thought that it was now six or seven years between awards, maybe sometimes only five, I didn't know exactly, I still don't know today. Also this awarding of the prize was naturally making me nervous and I tried to distract myself and my aunt from the fact that there was only half an hour before the ceremony began, I described the outrageousness of my deciding on the Graben to buy a suit for the ceremony and that it had been self-evident that I would find the shop on the Kohlmarkt which stocks English suits by Chester Barry and Burberry. Why, I had asked myself again, shouldn't I buy a top-quality suit, even if it is off the peg, and now the suit I was wearing was a suit made by Barry. My aunt again only focused on the material and was happy with the English quality. Again she said her famous *well, all right*. About the cut, nothing. It was classic. She was very happy about the fact that the Academy of Sciences was awarding me that Grillparzer Prize today, she said, and proud, but more happy than proud, and she got to her feet and I followed her out of the Gerstner

and down onto the street. We had only a few steps to walk to the Academy of Sciences. The bag with 'Sir Anthony' on it had become deeply repellent to me, but I couldn't change things. I'll hand over the bag before going into the Academy of Sciences, I thought. Some friends who didn't want to miss me being honoured were also on their way, we met them in the entrance hall of the Academy. A lot of people were already gathered there and it looked as if the hall was already full. The friends left us in peace and we looked around the hall for some important person to greet us. I walked up and down the entrance hall of the Academy several times with my aunt, but nobody took even the slightest notice of us. So let's go in, I said, and thought, inside the hall some important person will greet me and lead me to the appropriate place with my aunt. Everything in the hall indicated tremendous festiveness and I literally had the sensation that my knees were trembling. My aunt, too, kept looking, as I did, for an important person to greet us. In vain. So we simply stood in the entrance to the hall and waited. But people were pushing past us and kept bumping into us and we had to recognize that we had chosen the least suitable place to wait. Well, is no one going to receive us? we thought. We looked around. The hall was already just about packed and all for the sole purpose of my being awarded the Grillparzer Prize of the Academy of Sciences, I thought. And no one is greeting me and my aunt. At