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## **STAGES OF AN ENCOUNTER**

### **A HOMAGE TO DR. DONALD A. PRATER**

Dear ladies and gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you here today and to have the opportunity to speak to you on this special occasion. At this point, I would like to thank the University of Maribor for dedicating this conference to the memory and appreciation of Dr. Donald A. Prater, and for offering me the chance to participate.

Please allow me to introduce myself first, especially since my professional background is so distinctly different from those of the other speakers at this conference.

My name is Peter Scheuenstuhl and I am from Sankt Augustin near Bonn, Germany. I was an officer with the German Federal Border Police before retiring 20 months ago. My last assignment involved cooperation among international border police, a job I found very interesting. In fact, it was one of the most rewarding assignments of my 40 years with the Border Police since it offered me numerous possibilities in my professional life to promote international cooperation and mutual understanding.

I think it will be necessary to help you better understand, I should also explain briefly how I am connected to Stefan Zweig. After all, it was my enthusiasm for the life and work of Stefan Zweig, which first led me to Donald Prater.

During my years in school – now more than 45 years ago - I was especially fascinated by “ Die Sternstunden der Menschheit“ ( Decisive Moments in History); the chapter “Die Weltminute von Waterloo“ (The Crucial Moment at Waterloo) particularly captivated me. After having read different psychological novellas, it became clear to me that my heart was devoted to this writer

and poet. Professional training and starting a family kept me from occupying myself with Stefan Zweig in the following years. However, his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday in 1981 marked a true renaissance of my devotion to his life and work. In 1982, when looking for a comprehensive biography, I came across "The European of Yesterday: A biography of Stefan Zweig" by Donald A. Prater. I cannot explain it, but I was so fascinated with this brilliant biography that I really wanted to get to know its author.

Another 10 years passed before this wish came true in 1992. I had the opportunity to meet him at the 1st International Stefan Zweig Conference at Castle Leopoldskron in Salzburg. I will never forget how he inquired after what I did for a living when I asked him to sign the biography he wrote. I did not realize until later that he was open to and interested in my professional background because of his own military past – he was an officer in the British Army during the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War – which had influenced him profoundly. At this point, I would note, that military topics were rarely part of our later conversations. In a letter he sent while vacationing in Tunisia, he mentioned in passing the attempts by British commando units to capture field marshal Rommel during the war in Africa. His time with the military influenced his life in yet another way, which should still be addressed.

Donald Prater's lectures and my conversations with him during the conference in Salzburg made a profound impression on me. Following the conference, we started corresponding with each other and exchanged literature and written materials. I admired his knowledge, his open-mindedness to life and the world, and his language skills. He also told me about another Stefan Zweig event at the public library in Munich. The topic was "Stefan Zweig – Die Zeit gibt die Bilder, ich spreche nur die Worte dazu." The opportunity to see Donald Prater again and his contributions to this event were an added bonus to a great experience.

In the meantime, Donald Prater started working on another biography: "Thomas Mann – A Life". Our cooperation intensified during this creative period. I sent him all the materials I could put my hands on: Books, articles, motion picture documentaries, etc. I forwarded everything to him. The way he expressed his gratitude was always another incentive for me to support him further. I gained a better understanding of his literary ambitions; he was meticulous, tireless, and inquisitive. They fulfilled his life.

In 1986, he published another biography: "Rainer Maria Rilke – A Ringing Glass". His biography of Thomas Mann, published in 1995 completed his trilogy as Donald told me with considerable pride. A vast number of other publications testify to his tirelessness and diligence. Here are a few: "Stefan Zweig – Leben und Werk im Bild", published together with his friend Volker Michels in 1981; "Stefan Zweig – Correspondence with Hermann Bahr, Sigmund Freud, Rainer Maria Rilke, and Arthur Schnitzler", published together with Jeffrey B. Berlin and Hans-Ulrich Lindken (1987); "Rainer Maria Rilke – Stefan Zweig: Letters and documents" (1987); and many other essays in books and writings. This reminds me of Stefan Zweig who – at the beginning of his creative work/career - also dedicated himself to promoting other writers and poets to make their work more accessible to a larger audience.

After Munich, I met Donald Prater again on February 27 and 28, 1993, at the Catholic Academy in Schwerte (North Rhine-Westphalia). There, two Stefan Zweig biographers came together in a remarkable meeting, which would not be repeated in this form. Both Donald Prater and Arnold Bauer, who had already published a short biography of Stefan Zweig in 1961, were speakers at the conference. Prater wrote later that the days in Schwerte were "pleasantly relaxed, that there was time to chat, which happened only rarely, at such events..." I am sure that Prof. Dr. Matjaz Birk, the organizer of today's conference, happily and thankfully remembers the conference in Schwerte and the meeting with Donald Prater.

Donald Prater was then hoping to finish his Thomas Mann manuscript fairly soon. During that time of our particularly intense cooperation, he continued to be amazed at what "literary outsiders" were able to uncover. While studying Stefan Zweig, I started to look more closely at his time, his contemporaries, and his writer colleagues. As a result, I was able to resort to written materials, books, and movies of various writers, poets, and composers, which had accumulated in my literary collection. When the Thomas Mann biography was finally published (1995), I noticed with great pride that Donald Prater considered my support valuable enough to thank me by name in his book.

In April 1995, an old wish of mine came true: After coordinating appointments multiple times, I finally had the chance to visit the revered biographer at his house. Donald did not leave my arrival to chance. I vividly recall the detailed sketch he sent me of directions to his house. An exemplary hospitality awaited me at his house in Gingins on Lake Geneva. The fact that Donald Prater had already passed the majority of his extensive Stefan Zweig collection to the University of Salzburg's "Salzburg Literary Archives Foundation" ("Stiftung Salzburger Literaturarchiv") did not make my visit less pleasurable. Talking to him in his studio, talking walks around Gingins, and our conversations in the evenings in front of the fireplace made this visit an unforgettable experience.

A look into the guest book illustrated how his house on Lake Geneva continually developed into a "European Villa" with his international guests and friends. Comparing Donald Prater's house to that of Stefan Zweig at Kapuzinerberg 5 in Salzburg was only natural.

In the fall, I could return the favor and welcome Donald Prater to my house in Sankt Augustin near Bonn. He was on the way back from a Thomas Mann colloquium in Lübeck and stopped to visit me. It was an honour and a great pleasure. He commended me for the extent of my Stefan Zweig collection.

I had always wanted to own a copy of the English edition of Donald Prater's Zweig biography "Stefan Zweig - European of Yesterday". Back then, there were many reasons why I could not get an original edition, so I settled for a copy of the book. At that time, bookbinding had become another hobby of mine. As a result, it was easy to turn my copy into a linen backed full-bound book. At first, I felt uncomfortable, but I finally made up my mind to show him this unauthorized copy of his work during his visit to my house. To this day, I recall the relief I felt when I saw how taken he was with my technical skills and the uniqueness of his biography. He spontaneously added a dedication and I considered the "matter" closed. Soon after he left, I received a note from

him in the mail that astonished me. While browsing through antique bookstores, he had found an old bookbinder's saying printed on the most beautiful hand made paper.

I quote:

Do not waste any leaf  
Of your life  
And sew it in straight  
And properly

And do not leave any page  
Incomplete and empty of  
Good deeds

And your heart  
Will tell you in quiet hours  
Praise the Lord  
My book was  
Well bound

Old bookbinder saying

My craftsmanship must have made a lasting impression on him, since he presented me with this special gift. I do not wish to overrate this gesture, but during the years that I had the good fortune to get to know Donald Prater better, I reached the conclusion that this saying must have meant something to him personally as well. It guided him not to waste any "sheet of paper" of his life, but to continue on his path with sincerity and determination, to be mediator – not just in the literary sense, which he saw as a challenge- but to contribute his abilities to promote understanding and communication across existing borders. As a young person, he experienced a Europe that almost destroyed itself by a disastrous war. Does this rather innocuous saying perhaps represent a form of legacy?

This saying still hangs on the wall of the hallway in my house as a special reminder and – as his legacy.

I saw Donald again during the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Stefan Zweig Congress in Salzburg in October 1998, when he was elected Honorary President of the International Stefan Zweig Association. The previous summer, I had visited Donald and his wife Patricia in Gingins. I will always be especially grateful to both of them for helping me overcome one of the biggest crises of my life with their understanding and empathy.

Little by little, I learned more details of his fascinating, admirable life. At this point, I would like to highlight some of the biographical data necessary to gain a deeper understanding of his life.

Donald Prater was born on January 6, 1918, in London. He studied literature and languages from 1936-1939. During the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War, he served in the British Army as intelligence officer in Africa, Italy, and in the Far East. During this time, he advanced from lieutenant to brigadier in 4 years. He received the highest British decorations for this remarkable career: 1943, Member of the British Empire (MBE); and in 1945, Officer of the British Empire (OBE). After the war, he joined the Secret Intelligence Office of the Foreign Service. His missions took him to Singapore (1946-1948), to the Federal Republic of Germany (1949-1952), to Beirut (1955-1957), to Vienna (1957-1959), and to Stockholm (1965-1968). Working all over the world resulted in important encounters and experiences, which shaped his life, formed his character, and contributed to his open-mindedness, his knowledge, and his human way of thinking and acting.

After retiring, he moved to New Zealand. From 1970-1973, he was Senior Lecturer in German at Canterbury University, New Zealand. It was there that he finished his Zweig biography. He then moved to Switzerland, where he used his outstanding language skills to work as translator at CERN, the European Nuclear Research Centre. At the same time, he continued his literary studies. In 1988, the University of Oxford conferred upon him a doctorate of literature in recognition and appreciation of his dedication to literature.

Donald Prater will always be remembered for his brilliant biography of Stefan Zweig, which advanced the study of the life and work of Zweig and became the standard biography in the field. But - what caused Donald Prater to get interested in Stefan Zweig?

During his stay in Singapore in 1947, he came across the English edition of Stefan Zweig's autobiography "The World of Yesterday". He was profoundly impressed by Zweig's life and worldliness. Maybe he felt a certain connection, which led to his decision in the 1960s to begin Zweig's biography. Stefan Zweig accompanied him until the end of his life. Whenever material on Stefan Zweig surfaced, he was almost worried that it would get lost if it was not documented and recorded by the great, tireless Stefan Zweig bibliographer Randolph Klawiter. He would always ask me: "Has Randy seen this?" or "Randy has to know this!" Stefan Zweig's life and work became his mission in life.

When asked about Stefan Zweig's relevance to today's world in an interview by the ORF during the 1992 Stefan Zweig conference in Salzburg, he gave the following answer. I would like to let an audio recording of Donald Prater explain this in his own words.

**(Note: Play tape recording, wording as per enclosed attachment)**

I visited Donald and his wife Patricia one last time in July 1999, in Gingsins: A last in a series of wonderful encounters for which I am profoundly grateful. At the time, he considered moving back to Cambridge. We discussed the pros and cons in detail. He loved Switzerland, because it was in the heart of Europe, the Europe he was so close to. He decided to spend his remaining years in England, because he loved his wife and his daughter and because he had stayed an Englishman at heart. He was not spared the disappointment of an England that was not as he remembered it. He did not complain; reproaches were foreign to his nature. He had served his country in times of

need and received the highest recognition for his services, but he never talked about sacrificing part of his health in the process. He never mentioned that the injuries he suffered as a result of a mine explosion during the war in Africa impaired his walk. One of his comrades from the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War also tells the story of how Donald prevented the destruction of the St. Apollinaris Church in Ravenna, Southern Italy, by Canadian artillery during the winter of 1944. His modesty and tact prevented him from ever mentioning it.

I am grateful to have had the good fortune to get to know Donald Prater, to have been connected with him over the years, and to have experienced years of mutual understanding with him. His interest in Stefan Zweig and the resulting Zweig biography were the key to our relationship and a special gift in my life.

Donald Prater impressed me with his knowledge, demeanor, open-mindedness, literary dedication, tirelessness, and his determination. He became my role model. I admired the fact that as an Englishman, he became an ambassador for his country through his work on German literature; and that his transnational work contributed to understanding and a European spirit. I also freely admit that he helped me personally in other respects, for example in seeking answers at a time when values were losing their importance and I faced a growing dissatisfaction, not merely with politics.

Donald Prater passed away on August 24, 2001, at the age of 83, as a result of a stroke. "Something is gone that cannot be replaced". Hans Jürgen Gerlach could not have put it any better in his contribution to the Theodor-Kramer-Gesellschaft's publication "Zwischenwelt" on the death of Donald Prater.

I saw him for a last time on September 6, 2001, in Coton/Cambridge. I rushed to England to escort him to his final rest.

I wish to close my remarks with a poem by Rainer Maria Rilke, which Donald's daughter Carolyn recited over her father's coffin during the obsequies at Saint Peters Church in Coton. I quote:

Rainer Maria Rilke: Sonnet to Orpheus ii 13

Be ahead of all parting, as though it already were  
Behind you, like the winter that has just gone by.  
For among these winters there is one so endlessly winter  
That only by wintering through it will your heart survive.

Be forever dead in Eurydice – more gladly arise  
Into the seamless life proclaimed in your song.  
Here in the realm of decline, among momentary days,  
Be a ringing glass that shattered even as it rang.

Be- and yet know the great void where all things begin,

The infinite source of your inmost vibration,  
So that, this once, you may give it your perfect assent.

To all that is used-up, and to all the muffled and the dumb  
Creatures in the world's full reserve, the unsayable sums,  
Joyfully add yourself, and cancel the count.

Thank you for your attention.

## **Attachment**

Words spoken by Donald Prater in the ORF-Interview 1992, given by audio recording

....soll es also keinen Platz mehr geben für die Wunschträume jener verschwundenen Gemeinde, für die Ideale Stefan Zweigs, die Gewaltlosigkeit, den Humanismus, nach Ernst Waldingers Wort, jene ausgeglichene Weltliebe und erasmische Konzilianz, die zum Wesen des großen Kulturvermittlers gehört. Die großartigen Schlussworte des Erasmus von Stefan Zweig dürfen wir getrost als unsere Lehre nehmen, die Menschheit wird nie und niemals Leben schaffen können unter dem tröstlichen Wahn eines Aufstiegs ins sittliche ohne den Traum einer letzten gütigen Verständigung. Immer werden die von Nöten sein, die auf das Bindende zwischen den Völkern jenseits des Trennenden hindeuten und im Herzen der Menschheit den Gedanken eines kommenden Zeitalters höherer Humanität gläubig erneuern...